



P r e f a c e

This book is a compilation of reactions to my text and this text is only thing which belongs to me, all the rest, design, cover, etc... are comments on it. It includes twenty two texts (reactions) - a good number to begin with.

I originally wrote the text 'to slip in' to accompany one of my videos which was projected in the school auditorium. The video and the text made up an interactive performance, as I read the text after the video was being shown. My intention was to arouse a debate around the themes highlighted in my text. Unfortunately, the desired debate did not materialize, and the only feedback I received was a formal critique of my work. As my fellow students explained later my voice wasn't loud enough and they had difficulty understanding my English (it is also true that I was nervous and found it hard to lead the discussion). As a result, I decided to send my text out to a number of my acquaintances as well as to people I didn't know personally, and asked them to comment on my text. This time the video was not essential to the text and easily made sense on its own. I received a lot of thought-provoking replies which I believe will be of interest to others, hence my decision to publish them.

You will also find that some of the texts are in French. This is because their authors felt more comfortable expressing their opinion in French.

Special thanks to Zoe Eleni Smart and Manu for Helping

TO SLIP IN
it means:
You made a mistake but didn't realize

The text below may read more as research than an explanation of my work. It is important for me, however, to attempt to put into words my position and theories about life, otherwise, I feel, my work will be based on a lie. Taking this approach will help me become an artist rather than just being a part of the mechanism of art production and the art market.

The system within which we all live and work is problematic in many ways. My personal experience of it is linked to the art scene – I will start by analyzing the problems found within the specific sphere of art before applying them to the system in general.

Let us start by trying to define where art is now. Artists are desperately looking for ways to create something 'new'. There are no new streams in art or new groups as there were in the '70s – art seems to be stagnating. It is the belief of many that something needs to change.

Opinions abound as to why art has ceased to touch people. Many believe that everything has been done in art, every form has been discovered and utilized and new forms of expression will be hard to find. Others see the solution as returning to older art forms such as painting...going back to the 'beginning' in order to find a solution. But many seem to overlook the main reason for the kind of indifference that most people show towards contemporary art

My belief is that the problem stems from the way of thinking that most artists seem to have adopted – that is, an insistence on trying to create new forms. Thinking in this way leads artists to focus so much on form that they forget to question why they do things in a particular way. It should not be surprising therefore that others fail to react to the works or show an interest in them.

I have asked various artists why they are producing so much formal art work. "One" of them answered that one needs money to live. Art offers many opportunities to make money – there are

many government-funded projects and galleries that depend on state money. This is the opportunity to take advantage of it...so why not. Artists seem to be producing as much art as they can, not to defend any position or idea, but in order to make as much money as possible. Producing art becomes the equivalent of running a business. The problem in this lays in the fact that money becomes more important than the idea (to change the world into a better place). Even if the idea is there, the artist spends so much energy thinking about making money that the idea and its principles are lost, as he/she becomes an integral part of the system. Once the artist has been integrated within the system it becomes difficult to identify its faults and the artist becomes another billboard on which to advertise the government and celebrate its perceived successes.

This was the case in the post-Soviet Union era. Artists painted a lot of canvases, in the free studios provided by the various governments. People were keen to buy their canvases believing that by doing so they were acquiring an understanding of life. The belief was that painters, as artists, should have the ability to find new forms and go against the system but that was not true. We know now that the artists, as much as anyone, were victims of the system within which they lived and created. The system understood, only too well, that art in the hands of the people could turn into a dangerous weapon against it. What the system did was to neutralize this power by providing artists with everything they needed. And this system worked for more than 80 years...

Today we find ourselves in the same situation even though it might not be as evident. Maybe it's done in a more subtle way, but artists are still advertising the system. Governments today finance a huge amount of social projects. But their real aim isn't to solve problems for example: in developing countries. While convincing people that they are doing something to help, these governments are in reality destroying the economic systems in these countries. Their populations become so desperate as a result that they are prepared to work for ridiculous amounts of money. We, as artists, 'react' to the situation and our governments fund our projects – the governments that create these situations in the first place! Who are we trying to convince that our works are a reaction against a corrupt system?

Hey

Melano,

thanks for the text! I understand what you are saying, BUT:

- I don't think it is the one or the other, it is both. Why not saying important things in a brilliant way, with a good form. That is the way to bring it over (rethoric, bu in a good way).

- I don't see the market as an ugly thing, and I don't see any alternative either. I don't think that there is a perfect system anyway and I am glad that there is no perfect system. Otherwise, we have no reason to live.

- I think that if you want to change the world on a political level, you should not do art. I don't belief that art is an efficient way to change the world. However it can change thoughts that may change the world a bit.

- I dont think that one should belief that art is something else than sport, cooking, music, playing, discussing with friends, analyzing, formulate, find pictures to say something. For my, art is a normal thing, no religion, no ideology, that is what is great about it. It is something that makes life better and sometimes not. All this does not exclude that one is concerned by politics, the life here and there.

- Like you, I think that things got out of control, that people are concerned with boring or stupid stuff. But it always was like this, it always will be like this.

- Contemporary art got only popular in then 1980s. Before, nobody cared and I am not sure if more people really care today.

I have the impression that you expect too much from art. It is a luxury business, it can produce meaning, it can change thoughts, it can open up new worlds and it brings great people together and make a difference and it can make happy. That is not much, but it is a lot!

All
Daniel

the

best,
baumann.

Reaction on text
(comment)

The text in mind bares a lot of truth but it is in some arias a bit quick to jump to conclusions. I do not mean to contradict the conclusions but rather to add to them. I try not to conclude concepts such as capitalism or what is called as formalism with judgmental and extreme remarks such as good or bad but to appoint them a critically objective position. I will attempt to explain my point through the statements within the given text.

The text starts by discussing artists searching for a way to breach the dead lock in art for which a Slovenian art theoretician Tomaz Brejc offers an interesting view. He derives from what contemporary left orientated philosophy suggests as a wise solution to their problem in making a proper new stand next to the right.

There was a recent Marxist seminar in New York on which the renowned Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek was asked to speak and he suggested returning back to the teachings of Hegel as a predecessor of contemporary left philosophy.

Brejc has a similar reply to the problem within art - to return back in a way to Cezanne as the father of modernism and of today's way of looking at art. He claims that returning to this turning point and the diverting our attention to new ways of formulating images will also pave the way for new, now not even considered, ways of perceiving art. I believe the trouble with the statement lies in the following.

The problem of searching for a new form in art and artists orientated around this single quest and indeed a "dead end" in a way. The blind obsession with finding a new image and the bourgeois capitalist support of it is as repulsive as described in the mentioned text. There is no discussion here.

There is however a second side to the story which I believe should be properly placed in context. Now as we understand artists use the artistic language to express ideas, views... And if in a way there is a thought which escapes conventional mediums I agree that a new medium or form should be discovered in support of its expression. If the forms of art find their principle in the idea which they manifest, this, on the contrary, is truly the idea only when it is realised in its appropriate forms. Hence, imperfection of the artistic form betrays itself also as imperfection of idea.

There is also a different approach to understanding and bettering the world, as you put it, other than addressing the problems within it in an "illustrative" way. This is where I myself am not clear yet as well yet I feel it can also be done in cooperation with the form - that is to explore the concept together with the medium and not before it in a way. If we conceive the work before its realization we end up with an illustration. I believe art should be beyond words and in a way abstract in its essence. To give a brut example: If we think with words should we not express our thoughts threw them as well? I am myself here in discourse so I cannot offer a straight answer but do believe art should be what is further than conventional (verbal) description.

To continue another position mentioned, there is no doubt that the System has a very firm grasp on the situation and has many tools to deal with approaching problems and Boltansky is absolutely right. As we live in capitalism we, together with everything else are products. We are assets by our productivity how much money are we able to earn. Everything beyond this (what our lives are like, do we cry,...) is in reality unimportant. If it is emphasized it is only done so because there is a demand for it in the market.

The same applies to art – the moment it became an object of monetary value it lost all its spiritual (true) value. These concepts cannot coexist. This is also supported by the fact that the when an artwork is recognized by society it loses all its value as such and becomes a part of culture having its value weight against other products.

Then I hope that I understood the words correctly when I say that the statement that it is not difficult to celebrate the good within society is also to one-sided and so, unjust. This can quickly become a “formalistic” mistake. To speak of art in such terms is in paradox with the anti-formalistic view also featured in the text.

To further defend what you call the god in the world, I once heard my mentor in Slovenia say that the hardest thing is to paint a beautiful painting. If you think about it these words hold an important criticism on the statement. I think that art should only be in the objective service of the truth and should be very careful in placing judgment on the world.

The truth can be found everywhere of course, in the simplest of forms. And whether there are also deeper thoughts within us which we, I believe, owe to our selves to try to convey to others or obvious criticism on the problems of society they may all very in shapes and sizes - form. In every new medium (form) there are new ways of transmitting the truth so searching for it I do not believe is a problem.

Taking under consideration the realisation of the idea of the beautiful as constituting the ideal in art, however numerous may be the different phases under which the conception of the ideal is presented to our view, all these determinations are only related to the work of art considered in a general way.

Lectures	on	Aesthetics
by	G.W.F.	Hegel
Written	by	Andrej Skufca

Réponse à Melano et à Daniel
6 avril 2009
Si Daniel avait raison, l'art serait tellement vain!

Peut-être est-ce symptomatique de notre époque post-idéologique. Quand Daniel dit qu'il n'y a pas de système parfait, comment lui donner tort, mais peut-être n'est-ce pas là le réel problème. question à mon avis est: voulons-nous complaire dans ce système imparfait, ou alors rêver d'en créer un meilleur? Se complaire ou rêver?

D'autres le diront mieux que moi, mais:

* Si l'art est un moyen d'expression, il faut avoir quelque chose à dire. Quelque chose de construit, de pertinent.

* L'art est une activité dans la société, elle a donc un rôle politique (même quand elle n'en est pas consciente). Mais il est d'autant plus grand que l'art est souvent liée à la production d'objets, d'images, ce qui précisément caractérise notre société spectaculaire de consommation.

Je me demande également la valeur ontologique de la Beauté. Vraisemblablement, il ne doit pas en exister une. Les critères esthétiques sont probablement principalement sociales. Le but de l'art doit donc se trouver ailleurs.

Quant à faire de l'art politique, c'est également délicat. Il ne faut pas prendre un rôle de professeur; c'est ce point que traite Jacques Rancière dans son dernier ouvrage.

La direction reste donc à rechercher. Mais peut-être n'y a-t-il pas un but à l'art: la raison de l'art serait alors contenue dans l'oeuvre elle-même, qui porterait en elle sa propre justification? Qu'en penses-tu?

Voilà ce que je peux dire pour l'instant, à chaud, à la lecture de tes textes. Mais sont-ce vraiment mes idées? Quel recul ai-je sur elles?

Merouan

Ammor

Beyond of two dangers
(That's how I call this text which has a form of a letter to the young artist)

Dear Melano,

Thank you for your text. It is so sincere, heartfelt, full of pain and responsibility and that's why full of beauty of soul. What is to me also very important that it is clearly expressed, transparent and essential in language and even the "hidden mission" is set in a very delicate way.

Your analyses are precise – governmental structures manipulating cultural processes and cultural production (as you may remember from my Munich lecture I never call art this kind of production). All subsidies, grants, sponsorships, stipends have one goal – to rule and control cultural processes. This governmental politics are brought to the world via curators – they stay in a position of the bridge between the state money and artists. Having this power in hands a curator became a crucially important figure within the cultural scene of last two decades. To orientate creativity towards the market is not only a strategy of the state policy, the art institutions began intense and full scale corporation with the corpus of collectors (usually these people don't have any art education and it is easy to manipulate them and to use their financial strength). Also establishing artist in a role of celebrities is a part of this state activity. But among all these trickery the most dangerous, which fully can destroy the spirit of the contemporary art is an attempt of state to establish the art inside of communal consciousness as a substitute for human need for something holy and sacred. The over scaled shows, prosperous celebrations of openings, flamboyant art fairs, giant exhibitions of classic artists (making out of them idols), all these serve to establish the contemporary art product as a holy, economical and exchange value and to take away the it's very mission – being a razor which is able to cut the common sight (I guess you remember "Andalusian Dog").

The state tries to digest and absorb every move and attempt in contemporary art which tries to transgress "consciousness of culture" towards "post cultural" condition. Here state uses very refine means - it makes these efforts widely public and also pays well, it tries to trivialise and cheapen them with a extensive publicity. Some artists becoming vic-

tims of this situation, others (prostitutes) are happy to profit from it, becoming entertainers (likewise Jonathan Messer).

But analysing and criticizing all this we have to be extremely careful. First of all not to disgrace the time where we live! This just can bring us nowhere; can easily make us blind, self centred and also ego centred. We have to search a consciousness which is expressed in the words: “what is inhaled never bears sin; the sin can be only in what is exhaled”. We must succeed to avoid fast and superficial conclusions coming mostly from our preconceptions (that what Freud always was warning his pupils). The rule is – critical power must grow in the direction of openness (to accept the world) and not opposite. It may sound strange – but that’s what every religion, philosophy and psychoanalyses claim. We must see – there are many truth orientated artists among them who are well established on the market. Their works are definitely beyond of trivia (from the painters of the young generation I want to mention two female names, the artists which I admire: Laura Owens and Karen Kilimnik; they and many others create extremely important proposals to the world).

Only the discourses and reflective practises which art piece bears as a potency are able to point where (“on which side” – using your expression) the creative product and artist is located. Use of the form of media or any representative practices never determine the art piece – to say simply one can paint, make objects, make gestures or even keep silence, or being absolutely inactive – all this doesn’t matter, the only thing which matters is how and in which direction works artist’s mind. But to understand the true message of the art piece, to enter it, needs very high level of sensitivity, extreme awareness of consciousness (which must be free from preconceptions and preconditions) and also a great deal of a knowledge. We have to be always very careful and first of all full of trust and goodwill towards artistics surrounding; otherwise we will miss the encoded messages – suggestions to the world. If we neglect this care we can be in danger to trivialise the world and meanwhile ourselves.

The subversive power of the art piece never depends on the form of media it uses.

Now about something more insightful. Struggle with the monster is not a struggle within outer world for the “better future” (about this I wrote in particular in the article for our catalogue “Born in Georgia” – did you already have a time to read it?) but in fact it is a struggle with the very form of consciousness within us (human beings) – the consciousness of the poles and their manifestation inside of the world as a “good” and “bad”. To use more fundamental term we can call our consciousness which must be oppressed the consciousness of “presence” – which is a main creator of the troubles (they honestly and deeply pain you, as I felt from your text). It’s the pole “good” which right away creates another one – the “bad”. What is beyond of both of them? *Myth and spectacle?* – where poles are just conventions like Thea Gvetadze tries to convince us in her paintings; Performative jam of both of the poles?

– structured as a ritual – as Maia Naveriani depicts it; Post-gender liberated space? – as Tamara K.E. and Anna K.E. trying to convince us. Just I am bringing here examples from our show and from the artists with whom I work near for a long time. But examples of true messages are plenty and we must succeed not to miss any of them. This is also our (artist’s) responsibility to be attentive and good willed towards creativity of others and to be able to read their attempts. What I described are examples where “speech” (using Heidegger’s terminology) gets its clarity and suggestion begins to be manifested. There is an art of reactions (that’s how the art student begins his first authentic art activity but from this point the “speech” is still far away) and there is the art of suggestions – “clear speech” and in this moment Artist is born. Even Martin Kippenberger’s hysterics is an example of “clear speech”. Between *reactions* and *suggestions* is a long way – that’s what I try always to make clear to my students.

The ultimate and highest goal of creativity within *contemporary art* is to struggle with *clearly define notions* and value systems within our own consciousness and then to bring this struggle out – to blur inside of our mind all the notions, definitions, diagrams, structures, one dimensionally “clear” orientations; good/bad, value/profane, war/piece, right/wrong, kind/evil and so on. Sometime we have to even turn round the value orientations just by purpose (for instance, to declare that war is good and piece is dreadful – like the message which brings the film

“Apocalypses Now” – it tells us that this is the only way how to begin to feel real which stays far beyond of reality. The artist must resist the “clear and healthy order” of things inside of his (her) consciousness, because – “the ways of Lord are not penetrable” (orientations are just a human affair). Since already long time ago the God convinced us that he is not a kind and wise old man with good intentions but he is a drastic player, mad, crazy performer who stays beyond of fears of death and that’s why is so madly free in his games (if God would not be mad he would never sent Olivier Messiaen to the Nazi camp, where astonishingly Olivier wrote his major piece “Turanga Lila” which means “The Games of Time”. Don’t you think this whole story is extremely symbolic?

If we catch that our consciousness becomes “sincerely” involved with one of the poles (left or right, radical or conservative, good or evil and so on) we are in trap – trap of history, which with it’s long effort succeeded to deceive us, made us believe that unreal notions “good” and “bad” are real and which also succeeded (for our misfortune) to structure our consciousness as a hierarchical and subordinated. Staying beyond of history (and its values) one can bring together in one blessed and unlimited context Tina Turner and the chest hairs of Jesus, Mother Theresa and large size of man’s shoe (the you know from my paintings in Amsterdam) and so on and so on. To criticise social environment with the purpose to restructure the world in a new “progressive” or “better” order is not any more the goal in which the contemporary art believes, it faced enough failures of these utopias and became clever (we were born within such kind of utopia and Soviet utopia was one of the most courageous and beautiful attempt within the history) – but the ultimate goal contemporary art finely got to know is *to find an intuition which can sense what can be the condition of a psyche where existence is not associate any more with “presence”*. The contemporary art brings out the intuitive hints about the condition of awareness which is so fluent that escapes form any firm articulation and can be expressed and sensed only in randomly appearing suggestions. The body of this intuition is a *beautiful void*. That is exactly towards what the “wet circle” directs (that’s why I love it) – it doesn’t claims anything, it just pushes beyond and transgresses, directs towards the space where there is no “presence”, no polarity, where love and hate are one, where Tina Turner and the hair on the Jesus

chest have the same value – undeniable value of a pure *Obviousness*.
The new consciousness is where everything can substitute anything.
Every talented soul in its depth silently searches for this condition.

The best is when an art piece is much ahead of artist that shows the outstanding intuitive quality of the creative act. But this kind of successful piece puts in front of the artists giant responsibility – to chase after his own achievement (but never imitating it). “Wet circle” is a right standard to chase after.

I hope I succeeded to react on some invisible dangers and hidden doubts within your text, perhaps even your confusion. Doubts are absolutely necessary and surely useful, but even more beneficial for artist (and generally for human being) is a trust and a goodwill; and the very best is to open and to follow the intuitive feeling where, behind whom and behind what stays the truth (Erich Fromm called this rare and purely intuitive spiritual capacity the “Mind” and he was appreciating it the most in human nature).

G i a

I hope this text can be a little help for the young artists to avoid the two major dangers within the art scene (here on the west); to become a product of the culture or to enter the pseudo pathetic rebellion ego trip.

Hi

Mel,

Here is my text. I have to apologize for making you wait – it took rather a long time partly because of the translation of one boring book, and mainly – because of my, to say easily, very problematic English. I hope main ideas of the letter will be understandable.

At first, thank you for your letter, main point of which confirmed me that you are on the way. I mean, your own way – now, remembering our work together, it appears just the preparation for this. Of course, it's beginning. But I just appreciate such start – with suspicion, mistrust in existing system of values, with pain about life we live. Each way offers us questions and challenges - on every way we can have doubts, even desperations, lose motivation, we can get tired, disappointed... But you know - the golden rule of this game is very, very simple – just Keep On!

Thanks for getting involved interesting people in discussion. Daniel's response is a chance to speak about some important issues in view what he says is not only, maybe not at first, his personal opinions, but expression of the philosophy of what we have agreed to call a *symbolic order*.

Mr. Gia's answer was moving and stimulating. Pathos and most arguments of it I share completely. However, I have different attitudes regarding some subjects of his texts as well, which I will try to form below.

I reckon it would be fine if you ask your friends – students – to participate in the discussion as well. It's very interesting to know their opinions about important issues.

I've decid to make a short list of topics, interesting for me from all the texts, and, in a way to articulate my outlooks concerning them, constitute the letter. I'd like to ask you, (and everyone who will read it) in spite of how my opinions are shaped formally, to take them as queries.

Market – Of course, there is no alternative for market, if we take

it in general. Like, there is no alternative of politics, or art, or science, or relationships. They are, in general, not good or bad, they just are, and they are inevitable. BUT: there are alternatives for DOMINATING forms of market - *laissez-faire*, or *free*, or *liberal* - economy, as well as there are alternatives for politics of *Washington consensus* or modern western politics, with one hand exploiting the rest world, and with the other one - self-protecting from it. Paradoxically and ironically, this politics is based on the ideology of *human rights* and *'freedom'*.

It is naivety to think, that the fact that such alternatives are not realized yet, is just because of their utopism. We just shouldn't underestimate the powerfulness of modern capitalism, which tries to ensure us that every deviation from 'main street' is utopia, and so it is trying to cover the fact, that modern capitalism itself, or, correctly, metaphysical and religious faith in capitalism (granted us by big corporations and bribed governments, based on *free market* and well-defended by NATO, etc.) – as only possible, thus - divine order of things – is the biggest and the most dangerous illusion of our time. Of course, there is no perfect system – no system could ever be perfect – but I believe, it is possible to change existing shameful system into more a human, democratic, and fair one, which would be able to answer and satisfy more people's interests and needs. Otherwise, we have no reason to live.

Maybe I went too far... especially, taking into account that, as I understood, you were questioning not about the necessity of the market in general, but – about reasonability of artists' preferable orientation towards it. If market is neither bad nor good itself, and if artist's orientation has to be directed to truth, then setting of market as a goal looks just suicidal stupid for an artist. Though it seems normal in present set of things, where money is on top of the hierarchy of values.

Orientation on truth can produce art of very wide diversity, great number of kinds of artworks. Of course, it can produce what one calls a *beautiful* art as well as dramatic, or ironic, or ugly or absurd or any other kind of art. However, if it gets into the market, it's always by-side effect or secondary purpose and if an artist can stay independent there

is nothing bad in it. Nevertheless, it does not justify existing system, and I think change of these very fundamentals of economics and politics can affect artist's (as everyone's) role and place in society, including market, change into a more deserving condition of existence.

Politics - I read years ago, (as I remember, once we talked about this) – in soviet times there were secret branches in KGB, called *ideological laboratories*. Their goal was to elaborate common views, necessary for authority to maintain control on people, making them dumb, stupid and happy. There were so called *agents of influence* – ordinary people – artists among them, who should pass some kind of trainings and spread out this ideology in people. One of such ideological formula was – ‘what the fucking artists’ business is politics? Go make paintings! Work! Politic is dirty business...’ and so on... Hence, you should be happy, not being such a dirty one, and having big market, where you could sale paintings of flowers, portraits of happy workers, peerless heroes... Ideology works everywhere, even in a modern ‘postideological (?) society’, and works in the same way. Knowing some of its tricks, you can easily recognize its agents – hired or voluntary ones. The goal of the ideology (publicity) is not to make us believe in any progressive promise - in communism, capitalism, democracy or anything else. It is made for only purpose – to produce a ‘society’ of people who don’t think, happy stupid ones. Such situation is the best ground for the power for maintaining and increasing itself.

I don’t think that artists certainly have to deal with questions of politics or economics. However, of course, they can do so – analyze, criticize, imagine alternatives - if they wish (as many artists – Beuys, Warhol, Hammons, Haacke, etc – did). But I am sure – **there is no apolitical art!** Every art has some political weight. Consider for instance, ‘art’ done by Zurab Tsereteli – when he started to work, he was doing very sweet, absolutely meaningless, formal, beautiful mosaics, representing animals, plants, or just decorations. Now, because of he was not doing Marx’s and Lenin’s portraits then, he is declaring himself almost a dissident. However, if we examine it in a proper context, we might see: after Khrushchev declared Stalin’s rule being evil, and started fight against *cult of person*, there aroused the need of new sotsart. If

'art' of Stalin's era was mainly for inside propaganda of a closed country – to ensure soviet people in the powerfulness of communist government – now they, fathers of, maybe not so brutal, but still horrible power, needed art, directed to the other world – to show 'human face' of soviet union (for the need of attracting money, guaranteeing communications in the circumstances of upcoming economic crisis). So his (Tsereteli's) 'apoliticism' was (and still is) just the execution of government's order. His art is just make-up on the face of catastrophic power. That's why I call such 'artists' 'Visagistes' - same is with Luc Tuymans and many bosses of contemporary art – because the only thing they do is decorating the face of symbolic order. For understanding similarities of such phenomena, the key is not the covering of ideology – communist, democratic or other – but its essence – that it is made to ensure *present symbolic order*, and interests of holders of its bridles – political and economical power. At the beginning of the 20th century, significant role in success of modernism played the fact that such kind of art – formal, abstract, etc. – was just at hands for newly established corporative capitalism. To increase efficiency of labor work, they needed to avoid possible conflicts on ethnic, religious, cultural, racial basis among new big groups of workers, and they saw this potential of indifference in new art. That's why we should be careful about political potential of what we do, not just when we think we have a political position – also when we declare we are apolitical. Political indifference is a very easy outlet and an attracting pose, but, alas, it doesn't work! (Or works on the contrary) If one believes her/his art has nothing to do with politics, for me she/he is just, to quote Lenin, a toy in devil's hands. As for me, I don't think it is worse to be a toy in politburo's hands, rather than in a corporative capitalism's.

Bad or good? - I believe about some issues we have to be as clear as we can. Let's examine a situation which we call WAR. Of course, wars happen, and always they become the field of events, which puts, or renews important ethical questions, amongst them – *Can the war, in certain circumstances, be good?* I accept that such questions have the right to exist, although I also feel, that they need firm answers. If we are oriented on truth, and accept, that in one situation the truth can be one for everyone, if we don't think, that we are somewhere in the midway

to it, confessing that we haven't enough knowledge yet to consider the matter properly, then such answers can be just **Yes** or **No**. (if the answer is – *it depends on* – we admit that we have at least two situations, and we need different names and clear definitions what war could be good, what – bad.) I think, regarding situation called WAR, we, I mean, humankind, have knowledge to give some important answers. I'll try make one thing clear – for me if Olivier Messiaen's example has something relevant to this question, (perhaps it has, I just haven't read this book) just in a reverse course: in the situation of war it is not QUESTION about it, and of course, it does not justify war in any way, especially, it doesn't make evidence for any divine intention, but right the opposite – it is the ANSWER. (Definitely, I can't accept the concept of **god**, in any modification, as a tool, applying of which we can 'explain' and justify anything. To me this situation is not metaphoric, and says **nothing** about *god*, but **everything** about *Human*.) That answer says, *that Human is immortal* and can survive any disaster, not just still staying Human, but, remembering Nietzsche, becoming even stronger. Right because such examples, considering concern dynamically, we are strong enough today to say, that if even wars were inevitable in the history and even if majority of people think it will stay such forever, this very experience of war, core experience, I suppose – of *immortality of Human* - gives us not just hope and trust, but also responsibility to overcome wars. War is bad, holocaust is much more than enough, and we don't need some more examples to be sure in it and to act adequately!

New consciousness – I agree and thank to Mr. Gia trying to warn and prevent us from one-sided reflection of the world we live in. However, it seems to me, that adherence to post-modern and new consciousness contains some dangerous potential as well. Some postmodernist authors' effort to put taboo on social or political criticism, cultivation the doxa that to be concerned with such issues is just not cool, can bring us at the second entrance of nowhere – art can become academic (as post-modern became itself), esoteric, narcissistic, not oriented on people's real problems, but completely self-closed, and artists can become caste, or sect, pathosless entertaining with self elitism. Something like situation described in Herman Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game* - settlement, where just well-educated, self-confident,

brilliant elite lives, endlessly delighting with deeply esoteric, sophisticated, though absolutely useless games. And the best decision of an honest man in this feeble world, the final chance of immortality can be one made by Knecht meeting a *real life* – to die!

In the book about Buddhism I lent you last year there was story saying that Buddha, reached the door of nirvana, stopped right there. He refused to enter, until every living being wouldn't be able to enter nirvana as well. Legend says he's still waiting there... I think that being in, or trying to achieve this condition of positive uncertainty, or nihilism, or what on earth we call it, we also should not forget some certain, evident, and simple truths.

We just shouldn't tune our heads on the waves we need, ignoring other frequencies. Listening Jean Baudrillard broadcasting that images no more represent, but consist reality, we have to be aware of that it is so only in some privileged parts of the world, where a real life of 'third world' is truly just set of images – violating etc. - on TV. But here, in Georgia, as well as in Africa, Asia, Latin America - in the biggest part of the world, including ordinary people in developed countries, reality of people's majority consists of very actual and suppressing pain, starvation, humiliation.... Living in a world, where everything can be substituted by anything else, we must not forget that there is a world, where one child dies in every 15 seconds, because there is nothing what you can substitute polluted water with.

Please don't get it wrong - I don't disgrace time we live in. I accept and appreciate it totally. Not because I see it perfect or ideal... right on the contrary – I see its imperfectness as exciting challenge for working and acting.

Utopia – It is obvious we all are involved in a process of making another world – we just can't stay on one place. Though, what it will be? Yes, I feel it can be a better place to live. Or it could become even worse. One thing is apparent - nothing can help it from changing. Any process left as it goes, goes to the degeneracy. Any process based on conscious effort of human and aimed on changes – requires two attitudes – conserve or change. We need both. And we have to differ what to save, and what to change. And this choice defends on which direction

(I prefer this word to *side*) we stay. I don't think it is about polarity – social evolution, history in general, is of course very complicated and sometimes controversial, sometimes we feel like we are moving on circle or spiral, but in general, it's linear process, where there are just forward and back. It is not about pluses and minuses.

If we admit, that set of things in modern society, world order, is better than, for instance, in feudal ages or in first half of the 20th century, then we admit that progress is possible. So, what are the considerations for judgment that we already reached at the final point and we must stop here? (I'm glad that disgraceful exaltation provoked by concept of *end of history* is over now). Why should we deny the possibility of another world and label all imaginations, plans, projects and alternatives as *utopias*? Why should we ram one place doing nothing because of fear not to repeat holocaust, act as if every project of development in past finished with genocide, see in every warrior for better future potential Hitler or Stalin... what about Thomas Jefferson, Iliia Chavchavadze, Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther king, Susan B. Anthony, Vaclav Havel, Lech Valensa, Andrei Sakharov...? I am afraid, founding our visions of future only on fear, we are just promoting realisation of even more danger, possibility of realisation of *dystopia*. Experience of past calls us to double carefulness, be extremely sceptical when choosing means, and, epecially, concerning people who has 'plans', but not towards possibility of another world itself.

Painting – Here I completely agree with other responses. Painting is just form, or, to say more properly, just a tool. And as samurai's code says, fighter must be able to turn every thing into a weapon. I reckon that there are not contemporary and old, but just fitting and not fitting instruments. And usefulness of them depends not on historical background, but on the challenge and needs of concrete situation. The only thing justifying the use of any tool – is an intention of an artist, what she/he is fighting for. Shortly saying, *the ends justifies the means*. Only when goal achieved – it retroactively justifies, or not, means.

Is everything done in art? - I believe we are just

entering in art's age, however, we should revise our attitudes regarding art, get rid of ideology, superstitions, stereotypes, delusions... and equip with new knowledge...

Goals are not just new forms. Probably, they are no goals at all.

There are things never done until now – lives, never lived before – our own lives. There are people for who to be an artist is a better choice to go by this way. If you think you are among these people, again – just Keep On!

How art changes? - Present symbolic order is always most powerful phenomenon. It is based on the most unshakable - materialistic, biological ground – on the needs and interests of the stomach of holders of power. That's why formation of another world is very hard and slow. In this process we need many faculties, knowledge, skills, proper attitudes... I think, not just criticizing existing order, but mostly by trying to obtain power by developing these abilities, we'll get chance to get closer to art which changes, (or helps the process of changing, because this aspiration is not just of artists' – of politicians', scientists'... as well) In this process, we need:

Riskiness – In our attempt we have to be ready to fall. Quoting Mr. Gia, 'jumping into the void' we have no guaranties to survive. Therefore, we need to be riskiness. Art, which cultivates risk – physical, or ethical, or other kind - contributes to changes.

Carefulness – the risk not to be reckless, and to try not to repeat past mistakes – our or others' – we need to be careful. So art, or artistic gesture, which teaches us not to be impatient, not to make quick decisions, think twice choosing goals or means of achieving them - contributes to changes.

Openness – we need not to be rigid, to be able be critical towards our feelings, trust, knowledge, to be tactic, not fanatic about our values. Opening as process of in/exteriorisation of reality for me is aimed to erasing demarcation line between in and out, between personal and social problems – so art, which challenges us to open and extend our minds – contributes to

c h a n g e s .

Endurance – because this process is long, slow, sometimes exhausting... every artist, who proves by his work and life that human is a being who can survive – contributes to c h a n g e s .

Devotion – every artist, who, despite all problems, can refresh, accumulate power again – keeps on a way, chooses to be devoted not to market, or government, or ideology, but her/ his immanent calling – contributes to c h a n g e s .

Spontaneity – to avoid suppression of system, its rules, propaganda, we need to be spontaneous. So, every art, gesture or artistic life what promotes spontaneity – contributes to c h a n g e s .

Creativity – to change, we need to see. Totally different way of seeing, as you say. We need to find out extraordinary decisions... so art, which helps to develop our seeing, serendipity and imagination, contributes to c h a n g e s .

Solidarity – we know that Noting is guaranteed. But we have to be ready for outcomes of our choice. Sometimes the system will try to ignore you, it will invent new labels for what you are doing, or will try to ensure that what you are doing is just not art. System can act more sharply, if you go deeply. For example, you cannot find work, lose some 'friends'... in such times each of us needs support. We need to know that there are people who can say 'don't give up, you still have friends'... every attempt, promoting solidarity, (I consider this very correspondence in some meaning of this kind) contributes to c h a n g e s .

But maybe you will not always be able to find support. I'm sure, most productive attitude is to accept that you are alone. Just when you stay alone, you can discover that you have only thing, which is most important on the way, which gives life to anything else, and which can always be with

you – your heart. I heard echo of your loneliness and your heart in your letter. That's why I felt not just fine, but also proud having read it. But what to do, when you can't hear even the voice of your heart? At such times, times I am slipping (i.e. almost always) I remember two crutches – two commandments of the warrior. You know them, and you know I love to repeat them *again, again*.

I Commandment – Remember – your fight will never bear any result!

II Commandment – Forget first commandment!

G

K

First of all, subject you opened, turned in a very interesting discussion. probably you got lot of interesting answers with different positions. Basically you know my position about it, but on the last skype meeting we were talking about perspective from where my friend sees us. that was after I was trying to talk about some questions you are putting in your text. attachment is a poster with that perspective on our questions and positions. I guess mostly your thoughts can be seen in a same way. It tells a lot I think.

Let's keep fighting ;)
never give up

YOU

ARE LIKE

JUST FROM

A PRISON,

FRESH

AND NAIVE

Hi

dear

Melano

Thank you for your letter in which main problems are not new for aware individuals but these problems are still invincible and masked in society.

Representatives of 'real art world' had always been in resistance with established order, formal art and other unhealthy matters. The question is-why is art today so much uncritical. What base and reason may it have?! In 20th century Artists put a questions that are still actual: Purge the world of bourgeois sickness, 'intellectual', professional and commercialized culture, purge the world of dead art, imitation of art, abstract art, illusionistic art, mathematical art – PURGE THE WORLD OF 'EUROPANISM!' (Fluxus manifesto); No more confirmation of the established order of things (Antonin Artould) Art is not business! (Cheap Art Manifesto) and so on. As you see current symbolic order is very deep-rooted in every sphere and very heavily in Art.

According to it's function art is a 'need' (as a healthy criticism) - not luxury or fashion, but by the way there is no need or inevitability of stuffed, formal, pseudo, 'Artificial Art'. Art is not duty, job and undoubtedly not another 'fanny game' developed for entertaining. I see your text as a challenge for everyone and as one of chances not to miss the opportunity of reacting on reality, not to be coward and weak again. Yes, Melano, It's so sorrowful, embarrassing that truth is and always had been Achilles' heel for human beings, in spite of if it's reasons: self defense instinct, sincere blindness, atrophy or death within a life,. I more like see this as a suicide than as a death. This is a fact that human beings consciously refuse to see objective reality. Now it's more about 'will' that about 'ability'. It is pulsating false, pulsating death because out there is a truth you can't earn a 'life' without. Big responsibility is now on artists (and on society in general) conscientiousness, honesty and braveness.

What western cultural and social politic is trying is to change reason and aim of art with substituting everything with money. They're trying to discharge art and human being in

general by turning everything to cultural norm, by devaluation of meaning, sense and all the essential and unavoidable values. In these days I met culture attaché of one of European countries who was also very happy that artists abandoned 'conceptual research' and returned to hackwork.

System builds the mechanical society which will find satisfaction surface appearances of reality they breed prognosis able flock which they would easily keep under control and manipulate. 'They' want to create 'satisfied society' 'satisfied artists' which has no reasons to criticize system and politics, but in current global social-political injustice artists have more than a lot to criticize and fight for. But where are they?

This system threw a drug in the pack to seem like paradise - comfort, money, material pleasures directed to exhaust society, subordinate and have in under own command.

But there still is unavoidable vital truth and all the matters which couldn't be sold on money. Day by day you see thousands of art pieces and nothing comes close and nothing seems important, coz they are not reflecting reality, they are not frank and present. Artists today are in total vagueness (even if they don't mention it). Continuation this path in art sphere means its functional death. We undoubtedly have to look for ways to express what we already see and keep on walking on the path of reality. Well as one said 'man of knowledge lives by acting, not by speaking about acting We have to act. We have to speak and speak also must be an action. The acting life as you know is one constant struggle. Don't give up.

All the Best.

K e t i

After having read your text, I would like to say that I'm totally agree with it and in the same time not.

For the general meaning, I understand totally your position, and I think or maybe only I hope that some artists know this mechanical system in the art sphere and they express their opinion about or against it.

I think you can make some nuances with the words you used for example art or contemporary art: You talk about this art which is only based on economic system and physical production; This artist who said that he makes art for money is so lucky because it's so difficult to win or have money with your own art production, look at around us so many artists have part time job in cultural sphere, or not only in order to pay their flat, food and artistic production. Some are bored about this and decide to change their way of life and other continue and multiply the artistic experience in many situation as social exchange, being teacher or making atelier with children or adult, or meeting and discussion or writing some texts. I think in contemporary art some non artistic forms appears, are used by artists and give the possibility to express our opinion about this stagnating official art contemporary mainstream. Many ways are possible with the new media or the tactical media.

In addition I would like to come back on this concept of new, for me I read it as a contradiction, because if you make something totally new it's more difficult to use it for express an opinion about our context. It's important on my point of view to develop an easier exchange between artist and the people who are not anytime interested by art, it's a question of communication.

I would like to write more but my English are so rusty that I prefer to meet us in order to exchange on it

and continue to express your "against" care
take

B e n o î t

Art (is) as an excuse for all...

You've made, you've mistaken and you did realize, that meant that it wasn't a mistake any longer. Mistakes are made out of something else then you out of my power control or self awareness.

Mistakes belongs to humanity. Humanity is powerful.

Mistakes are pure artistic/aesthetic actions.

My personal experience in the process of making is, as well, quite problematic, in the sense that I've always trying to analyze the 'why' I do what I do, always finishing with realizing only one thing: I 'move' and therefore I am, taking art as an merely 'excuse' in order for everything to be.

Those questions, as a possible format, are not to find answers to, but to brainstorm on the following words plus question marks:

Is art enough?

Is art enough to express something?

Is art generating knowledge after all or is art a poetical/metaphoric or methodical expression of ourselves?

Is making art about being conscious?

Is making art a political activity?

Is art always something to judge?

Where is art?

Can we find art everywhere we want to or is it something always connected to particular environments?

Is art to make or to find?

Why art nowadays?

Where does art position herself in a society?

Is art a contamination?

Is art a way of living or/and a philosophy of being?

Is art personal or impersonal?

Can art become a need?

Is art always equivalent of personal living experience and ways of looking at things?

Can art be seen and interesting for non artists?

Is art to experience or to analyze?

Is art totalitarian or liberal?

Is art about being lucky?

Is art to find?

Is art to demonstrate?

Is art about constructing a networking?

Is art about the capability of expressing concepts in words and the ability to analyze the work?

Is art about self awareness?

Is art sellable?

Is art shareable?

How long a work of art can last?

Where art does it start and when does it finishes?

Is art a physical (so therefore mental)

activity or something else than that? What else?

Is art about action or reaction? To what?

Violetta

Perra

“Let us start by trying to define where art is now...”

Art is invention, who is in desperation?
The artist must surpass or work with this desperation.
There are still many art forms and processes
to be understood. It is not stagnant, it is waiting to
be discovered.
The “star” system and the star system - Who do
you make art for? Yourself? For “them”? You must
position yourself in this vast area of complex
constellations precisely, without doubt.

Do research. Work autonomously. Let any constriction or
structured bureaucracy “*slip*” away so you do not
“***make a mistake without realizing it.***” Obviously this is
easier said than done considering that “*they*” want to
colonize our minds with such barbarism.
Hopefully the creation and the processes of art will
help emancipate the artist regardless of dualistic structures.
for me this is the true art regardless of what form it will take.

“So where are we in this situation?”

Well, yes there are many conspiracies happening in
the government, politics, media . . . this is all true.
The question remaining is how will artists and people
stay strong and not become consumed? We face these
obstacles to much, everyday. . . .
Its true, I myself struggle with this everyday
I propose more discussion and talk about it, create groups
which reflect on these issues and begin action to change it.
I also propose to work in multi disciplinary teams, to get a
wider understanding.
and also, I feel importantly -
Who is talking about the art? Who is buying the art?
Are these the people we want for representatives, we
as artists must learn how to write and speak about
our art so that we may have authority over ourselves
and our creations. Artists are just not people with
paintbrushes. We are thinking, feeling and dynamic

people, we can further express this by articulating ourselves and sharing our processes through writings or through a further visual language or appoint our representatives who understand us the most.

Reply from Urduja Manaoag

Dear

Melano,

I'm sorry to be writing so late. I got your letter over a month ago and am only replying to it now. It is partly because I was distracted by work, but also because, once I started writing, I found I had more to say than I expected.

First, I hope you'll forgive a personal observation: your view of life here seems to have changed considerably since we met in Georgia last year. I can remember you then talking about how you wanted to gain "experience of European culture", because the art teaching in Georgia was "not adequate to the contemporary situation". Now, after only six months or so of experiencing "European culture" first hand, you are already speaking of a "system" into which artists are becoming "integrated" as "billboards... to advertise the government". I get the impression that you feel you've passed from one kind of unfreedom to another, perhaps from the unfreedom of being excluded, shut out from the world of contemporary art, to the unfreedom of having to engage directly with its institutions and modes of operating. If I'm right, then that's quite a big change in a short space of time, and I think it's probably one for the better.

I guess it won't surprise you to hear that I agree that many artists are becoming integrated into a "**system**", or that I agree that art, as you put it, seems to be "**stagnating**" at the moment, or indeed that the two are obviously linked. But I feel that your analysis of how and why this is happening, like your analysis of the "**system**" itself, needs a bit of development. Both the process of integration, and the system itself, are things that one might sense quite clearly and vividly, but they are more difficult to define. So here, for what it's worth, are a few ideas.

First, I think you are mistaken to identify the source of the stagnation as "**an insistence**" among artists "**on trying to create new forms**". Certainly historically this hasn't been the case: formal innovation, far from being a source of stagnation, was behind many of the most important artistic breakthroughs of the last century or so. "**Desperately looking for ways to create something new**" was pretty much how modernist aesthetics developed, and in so doing created some of the most radical and emancipatory works of the last hundred years (of course, it created some terrible stuff as well). For the artists of this period, "**focussing on form**" was not opposed to, but precisely the

same as *“questioning why they do things in a certain way”*.

1-So how did the situation arise where these two things could turn, or at least appear to turn, into their opposites?

One answer might be this: that in the past this desperation behind the search for the new was often driven by a need to resist, oppose or win some kind of freedom from the *“system”* of the day, whereas today it is more often driven by a need to conform to or be accepted by it. In other words, we are talking about two quite different kinds of desperation here. And perhaps the transformation from one to the other has happened so gradually, and so insidiously, that not everyone, including artists, has noticed it. Another way of describing this change might be: the category of the *“new”*, which the avant-garde made art’s crucial weapon in an aesthetics of resistance, was, over a number of decades, progressively appropriated by the very system it opposed. This would account for why several of the the methods of the classical avant-garde are now to be found in the *“official”* art of our own day.

2-Its strategies have been taken over, so that they, or more accurately, imitations of them, can be used for very different purposes.

I’m afraid there isn’t space here to go into exactly how I think this has been done, or what those purposes are. All I want to say is that we needn’t regard this as a reason to reject the strategies themselves, or the kind of position out of which they arose. The formal innovation of this period developed out of a critical engagement with the world through art: preoccupation with form was thus a preoccupation with the preconditions to making art, a way of asking, what is necessary in order for art to be possible? When this question was asked seriously, I think it was central to finding a *“totally different way of seeing”*.

Of course, since the middle of the last century if not before, it has been the fate of this kind of art to be recuperated by the culture it arose in opposition to. *No one*, as far as I know, has been able to produce a work that is immune from recuperation, and recuperation shouldn’t be seen as a reason for dismissing the work today. Part of understanding a work means, I think, trying to see what kind of effect it would have had

at the time it was made, which requires a certain historical imagination. This is why I feel that your opposition and emphasis on form may be misplaced. But I also think it is the case that what passes for such an emphasis today is often something else entirely. If it is this kind of superficial formalism you have in mind, then you may well be right.

I generally think of the formal innovations of modernism as developing as a series of critiques of existing ways of seeing. Like a critique, they had a certain consistency and rigor to their development – sometimes even, perhaps, a logic. I guess Cubism is the classic example, but there are plenty of others. There was, though, another element also to this critique: we might say it implied a form of engagement with or commitment to the world. In this sense, the artists of modernism tended to inhabit their form.

By contrast, the end of modernism involved a generalised estrangement from form. We're all weirdly alienated from it now, and as a result we use it at one remove: we operate it as we might operate a machine. Inventing forms no longer has the character of rigorous development out of a series of preceding stages. It is more like a manipulation, a splicing together or combining of several different existing styles, and their application in a variety of different contexts. In this instance, form is used not so much as a way of engaging with the world, but as a way for the artwork to comment on itself, or signal to a potential audience. It is used, in other words, in the manner of a sign, or a system of signs.

I'm not suggesting that this is necessarily a bad thing, and I'm certainly not suggesting that artists try to go back to the *"old"* way of using form. But I do think that the manipulation of form that goes on these days needs to be carefully distinguished from the formal innovation of the past: they are two quite different things. And if you criticize a work for a preoccupation with form, it's important to be clear about what you mean, otherwise you may be in danger of rejecting an entire tradition of work that is still useful and relevant.

The second point you make is that there are important similarities between the situation for artists today and the one that existed under the Soviet Union. Again, I agree; but I also feel that if this observation is to be useful it needs to be much more precise. For example, you seem to identify government funding for the arts as one of the principal means whereby artists are *"integrated into the system"*.

State funding for the arts varies a great deal among western countries, with some governments spending a lot more on it than others. But I am pretty sure that in all of them, most funding for art, in the form of commissions and sales, comes out of an (often international) network of private institutions and individuals – galleries, museums, curators, dealers, collectors – who are largely or wholly independent of the state.

3 By contrast, in the Soviet Union and other countries like it, virtually all commissions came from the state, and virtually all sales were made either to or through it. Like everyone else, artists were effectively employees of the state; it provided them with studios and a living wage, and they in return were obliged to work by its directives. By the early thirties, there was also an official aesthetic that all artists had to adopt if they wanted to go on working. Artists who refused to conform were (depending on the prevailing political climate, and how lucky or unlucky they happened to be) either marginalised, silenced, persecuted, arrested or shot.

So if we think of the control and manipulation of art in terms of support and funding alone, then western capitalist countries come out as being indisputably freer than their former Soviet counterparts. And, on the face of it, this is certainly how things appear: next to official Soviet art, a great deal of contemporary western art appears to be immeasurably more diverse – not to mention more critical, oppositional or subversive. It certainly doesn't seem to be about ***“making beautiful things and blinding people by reassuring them that everything is OK”***. And yet we agree that very often that is precisely what it is. So what is really behind this, if it isn't government funding?

I think what is mainly responsible for turning works into ***“advertising”*** is not the actions of the government or the state, but rather an institution far bigger, more powerful and diffuse, which generally goes by the name of the ***“market”*** – though there are better terms for it than that.

4 When you think of art as propaganda or ideology, you tend to think of an art of the state. But it is worth remembering the market, or rather

the system of which the market is a part, has an ideology of its own. It might be reflected in the ideology of the state, if that state has a market economy, but it emerges in quite a different way. For while the state tends to disseminate its ideology through its institutions, either its own, or those associated with it (like the church), market ideology appears spontaneously and apparently naturally, out of the fabric of lived experience itself.

Marx had a name for it: he called it commodity fetishism. This doesn't so much mean the worship of consumer goods, but rather the back-to-front, upside-down conception of the world that the production and circulation of commodities produces in people's minds, one which makes it appear to them that the things they produce and consume (including money) are governing and controlling their lives, rather than the other way round.

Like the system that generates it, this ideology proved in the long run far more effective and enduring than the "*state-centered*" top-down one of the Soviet-style countries. Everyday Soviet experience was all about the gulf between real and official reality, between how the state claimed things were (and, sometimes, tried to make them be), and how they really were "*on the ground*". By contrast, "*on the ground*" is precisely the point where the market substitutes appearance for reality, generating a fundamentally distorted social reality. And because it arises so spontaneously, it is generally unthreatened by criticism. The Soviet system obsessively censored its artists, because its legitimacy rested on a text, a version of events, which all other texts had to conform to; any "text" that didn't was a threat. By contrast, contemporary capitalist societies don't worry about censoring their artists, because it has no "*text*" to defend. "*Competing ideologies*" – including those proposed by artworks – can all be turned safely into commodities in a "*marketplace of the ideas*".

Here, then, is one reason why art that is made independently of government funding or control can still end up as "*advertising... for the government*": both it and the government are products of the same system. No conspiracy by state officials or anyone else is needed to bring this propagandising about: it arises quite naturally and spontaneously, and usually without the artist in question being in the least aware of it (until, perhaps, it is too late).

If I'm right about this, then I suppose the next question is what,

if anything, can be done about it. I suspect there are few easy or satisfactory answers, but what follows are a few suggestions.

The first is that art needs to be concerned with, or at least cannot ignore, its own conditions of production. It can still address other things as well – but if it does, it must somehow take these conditions into account, and relate the two. It must somehow situate itself. This implies understanding not only art itself as a product of a “*system*”, but also the very category or concept of art itself as such a product. The fact that there are a certain set of activities and objects that we engage in that we call “*art*”, which distinguish themselves from what we do the rest of the time may be taken to be a condition determined by the system. The “*freedom*” to be found in the realm of art appears as such in distinction to the unfreedom of most people’s everyday life, and can in certain circumstances be used as a way of legitimating that unfreedom. All the most radical movements of the avant-garde have understood this, and all of them have, accordingly, made the abolition of art their aim.

5 Since this abolition has always, in the end, implied the transformation of society – a transformation lying outside the realm of art – the movements have always failed. With each failure, art fell back into being essentially what it had been before – only perhaps a little more aware of how intolerable its position really was. Over the long term, this is an inherently corrupting situation to be in. It may well go some way towards explaining why so much art has just given up and become trivial, boring and pointless – why, in other words, it is stagnating. But whether it likes it or not, art goes on, and in a sense has to.

6 It may not be about to abolish itself, but neither is it about to be abolished – at least, not in the foreseeable future. Given this, we can I think agree it is far better if it takes stock of how bad things are, rather than ignore them. If it doesn’t do this, it will inevitably wind up being recuperated – if not actively manipulated. If it does, it may at least learn to expect little or nothing of the system in which it operates, and treat with suspicion (though not necessarily refuse) any support, help or rewards that system may seem to offer. It may also realise that the

contradictions and inconsistencies of its own position require it to be unpalatable, undigestible, unfashionable, sometimes unusable.

7 This implies an almost permanent discontent, restlessness, and suspicion – not least of itself and what it is doing. It sounds, I know, like a deeply unattractive prospect. But the truth is unattractive, and the proper concern of art has always been the truth.

Y o u r s ,

Than

Dans tout ce que tu nous dis, il y a de la raison. Cependant, il me semble que la généralité du ton et la faiblesse d'un contenu, me font penser à un cri, lui-même comprimé par un relèvement idéologique, qui me semble dangereuse. Je maintiens cependant que ce que tu dis est vrai, jusque dans une certaine mesure. Je me demande si réellement l'art entier est soumis au système. N'y a-t-il pas des artistes qui résistent au système? A ce sujet, il faudrait être plus précis et plus historique. (Tu pourrais aller jeter un coup d'oeil du côté du CCC, car ils travaillent pas mal sur cette question, qui est elle-même une question du système, si j'ose dire.)

Sinon: Oui, je suis d'accord qu'il faut bien dépenser son énergie à la dénonciation, mais qu'il faut dans le même temps chercher des failles, des lieux, des lignes à tisser pour un paysage différent.

Tout n'est pas politique. Tout n'est pas artistique. Et le "tout" appartient au système.

Le brut, le singulier, l'atypique, le minoritaire, le cri, la main, l'autre sont des travailleurs qui opèrent contre le système. Mais pas le sacrifice.

Articuler la notion de clandestinité dans le champ artistique.

Séparer l'art et la vie. Penser une vie d'artiste demande à mon avis pas mal de précaution envers ses idéaux.

Ne pas être dupe de la fusion entre la question politique et celle artistique.

Il m'est difficile de ne pas définir l'art comme une forme de représentation du monde dans lequel nous tentons de vivre.

Pour que la critique soit efficace est doit tendre vers l'inaudible

sans toutefois sombrer dans le silence. La critique est
un art de dentelière.

L'artiste plus qu'il pense, crée. Créer : se
jeter dans la matière. Quasi à l'aveuglette.

L'artiste est seul.

L'artiste fabrique une langue étrangère.

Bref, voici des pistes pour une discussion.

Allez, à bientôt

J u l i e n

Dear

Melano,

I've read your text and I'll try to make feel constructive critics... or just questions that we can think together...

About the hole text, I think it goes to a question that is deep – the role of an artist – it's clear for you that an artist is an engaged human being who can make the world a better place to, but I think that you should go further to see and analyze cases where artist had really changed something, it will make the text more clear and stronger, and I think it will make you stronger and will help you to find a way to do your art...

About the system that we are living in, I agree that art is becoming more and more a product to be sold, galleries are spreading as shops, art markets are becoming more famous them biennales, and we can see a lot of "tendencies", just like in fashion, for the contemporary art. But we can't forget that an artist also needs money to produce, and to live, he can't be totally against the system. For me, the best way, is how to use the system to do what you believe in.

For instant, that's it! Sorry for my English, and I hope that if we can't make the world a better place to live, we can make at least a few people living better, or thinking more.

And, how about a brunch this weekend if it's sunny?

Kisses

☺

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Friday
Rudiard

12

November

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2004.
Kipling.

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;
If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with triumph and disaster
And treat those two imposters just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with wornout tools;
If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breath a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on";
If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings - nor lose the common touch;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run -
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man my son!

Antagonism unfolds: it can't help it. Form becomes content, and the content of form is discontent. The emerging state of crisis is the crisis of the state of emergency. When the spectacle paints its pink on pink, will the owl of Minerva join the party? Will bankers make the leap to freedom, will bureaucrats set free the non-identical? Will the practices of free creation become a real material force, will the arms of critique be artful enough to seize us in our senses? Will the movements move, will the networks organize? Can art still matter, can materialist cameras give birth to autonomy? Will workers find Marx on youtube, will the struggle continue? Will hackers become situationists; will situationists become militants? Will artists become... dialecticians?

and this from Chto delat: "Our urgent task is to reconnect political action, engaged thought, and artistic innovation."

<http://chtodelat.wordpress.com/about/>

Gene

Ray

Dear friend,
I see this text you share with us as the very ambitious project to analyse and understand, in a few intuitive words, vast phenomenon such as capitalist system or art market. And I think it « slipped through your fingers ».. We stay in such a general and caricatural approach that for me, it doesn't reach its aim of denunciation and critic analyse. At least, the interesting result of it could be to make a possible dialogue on, starting with all that confused assertions.

I don't have the pretention to be capable to make it more clear with one few words of mine, but I will try to answer back to ones of the many aspects that are really problematic for me in your dissertation.

Artists are desperately looking for ways to create something 'new'.

You know how problematic is for me that notion of « new » that we use as a miracle falling from the sky, as it is clear for me that creation is the result of the very work of assimilation-interpretation-selection-redistribution from all what is already existing and makes part of our culture and life. So I agree this heroic research for the myth of the unseen and for the progress is a naïve religion that characterized modernist ideology.

Every form has been discovered and utilized and new forms of expression will be hard to find. Others see the solution as returning to older art forms such as painting...

But you participate to that myth with that other one ! Which reminds me the yet very old premonition of « the death of Painting ».. that did not prevent artists to continue working through that medium with an approach that belongs to their contemporaneity, and with the weight and consciousness of all our History. To be an « old form » seems here to mean « being irrelevant ». Why do you perceive it as « returning to » and not as « continuing towards » ? I think Nicolas Bourriaud is much more relevant when he describes in Postproduction that we don't consider anymore the artistic field as a museum containing works that must be cited or "surpassed", but as many storehouses filed with tools-data that should be used, manipulated and replayed. Or

better, as Marcel Duchamp was already saying at the beginning of the past century, that to give another idea to an existing form is a creation yet!

Art has ceased to touch people.

When was that perfect time when we were all living in a general great interest towards experimental arts, when all were inclined to the avant-garde researches ? About art in all his different expressions (music, theatre, cinema, literature..) ; I am sure that each one of us has, in one or another way, a personal link with one of that expression. Arts are useless (it is its very nature that makes it different from artisanal), but essential at the same time. It makes part of each human beings life.

(...) an insistence on trying to create new forms. Thinking in this way leads artists to focus so much on form that they forget to question why they do things in a particular way.

Visual artists activity is to make sense through form, to think with and through a specific form. As both are so linked (« the medium is the message » McLuhan), and form is our language, I don't understand how you can separate one from the other.

I guess you think about the « show » artists, using all the spectacle's tricks to make maximum sensational impact, and minimum place for the viewer's reflection. Indeed, I don't think it is the most interesting experience as a viewer, but I think these artists know very well what they want and what they are doing.

Art offers many opportunities to make money – there are many government-funded projects and galleries that depend on state money. This is the opportunity to take advantage of it...so why not.

I think consecrating ones life to art practice is not the very easiest nor direct way to become rich ! Neither with the help of project's grants !! It is yet quite hard for the great majority of artists to provide for his needs and his art projects. I am glad it exists some governmental and private financing to support art, and I think it is also one of their responsibility to make ongoing creation possible as art is not only a luxury market but also the humanity patrimony.

Artists seem to be producing as much art as they can, not to defend any position or idea, but in order to make as much money as possible.

It is obvious that today our lives don't have the same cadence as 50 years ago. All is accelerated : communications, exchanges, trips... and every active person have to handle it. Even artists (in great demand ones) are pushed to surf on that frenetic rythm, though I personally think that it is quite opposite to the time that creating needs. It is such a precious step of a project the one of the maturing, of the reflexion, and it must last as long as it has to ! I finally think it is the responsibility of each one to know his needs and his limits concerning his activity capacity.

About the bad ugly artists that only work to make money..I bet they are far to be the majority, and, as it will remain hard to ever really know about ones honesty or lack of authenticity, and as it is much more easy to only have prejudice, I prefer not to judge an art work from that moral point of view, but better on a personal one based on my esthetic experience : does this piece strikes me ?

My belief is that it's not the role of the artist to highlight the 'good things' that take place in the world – that is not hard to do – but rather to discover and uncover the 'ugly' side of the system.

What about to highlight where the tiniest beauty lies in the middle of the absurdity that characterizes life ? Is it « easy », is it « irrelevant » ? I definitely don't share your definition of art as always « against something ». I think it is so reductive. Art is not always good against bad (or bad against good), life is not made of simple oppositions : we are made of paradoxes, nuances, permanent fluctuations, that can be revealed through art. The deepest experience art can provide us is the one of complexity.

Thousands of civilians die all over the world and we don't even react, we do nothing. (...) Why are we so indifferent ? (...)They were human beings.

Through that final « prise de conscience » (« awakening ») in your text , we understand that you are expecting from art not only to reveal all the bad aspects of the system, but also to change it. I am quite sure that, to propose some real concrete changes to the ongoing system, the political career would be more efficient. Otherwise, you would

prefer to stay in some general « bien pensant » (primitive good sense)

assertations that doesn't open up to real new social solutions. Politic is about strategy, dealing with a big social historical knowledge. It is also about collective organisation and massive persuasion : does artist share the same aim and tools? For me, art is giving the possibility of an experience, an intimate one through which each one can, by himself, discover what he personally feels as wrong, beautiful, true... « Why are we so indifferent » in front of TV informations , as you ask? Maybe because it only reveals to us numbers of horrible abstractions.

Nothing human. As Boltansky is maybe underlining in your own quotation ; art can humanize these stories, personify these individuals. It is maybe its biggest power and biggest responsibility : to talk to us not as mass, but as human beings, about humanity.

Marion

Tampon-Lajarriette

Hi

Melano,

it's quite late to give an answer to your paper (-> text evaluations)... anyway, what you do does question me, that is why it is hard for me to give you any answer, or even to say something about it.. I think I already tried to tell you that your question is mine as well, and for me the answer is not really in the words we could give in return to this question ("what can we do?"), but in the fact of asking the question to people and gather the answers, for example (as you do) ; in gathering people around this question. Last time I was speaking with Jeanne, and she said "[...], I think my work is very political". I think what I research has nothing else to do than with politic as well, and that we are quite a lot to think so about our own practices. In different ways, which is what interests me. So finally, my "answer" would be a question : what does it mean for you to "have a political practice" (or something like that) ?

of course, you can wait 4 monthes before giving me an answer, this would be fair-play ;) ...

M a r g u e r i t e

Thanks Melano for addressing me - it is a good text in intentions but i am afraid it is a bit naive... in a nice way hat shows you as a man of a good heart and all but there is a heaps of very good critique of the state of art under capitalism and you can hardly pretend that you thinking form a skratch ... - Adorno, Benjamin, Brecht and recent development of critical and political turn in art is about it - read Gene - he is brilliant...

and we artists should not just criticize the system (that is important too) but offer new ideas, visions and visuals how things can run differently - i would like to see your art - and still believe that art has its power to change things and to radically change the consiosness of people - have a look at our recent newspaper "What's the use of art?" - hope it will be inspiring...

my

very

best

d

We need to take our time so to escape the implacable logic of speed Authority tries hard to establish as the dominant structure -structuring our general living conditions.

It is broad, it goes beyond art. It can be applied to every aspect of our life.

The Authority: political authority, economical authority, technological authority, communication authority, information authority, cultural authority (and every sub-divisions)...

It is one Authority that groups major, minor and micro structuring structures.

Authority is discipline (d).

I want to be undisciplined, as a man and as an animal. If I am undisciplined, I escape authority.

Maybe then I'll be free, at least I would have tried, but there'll always be eyes looking at me, and me trying to escape them, by walking, running, diverting.

Sometimes my entire body enters my head.

Satellites gone
Up to the skies
Thing like that drive me
Out of my mind
I watched it for a little while
I like to watch things on tv
Satellite of love
Satellite of love
Satellite of love
Satellite of
Satellites gone
Way up to mars

