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*An Artist for the World. The World for an Artist*

ABSTRACT

In my doctoral dissertation entitled *An Artist for the World. The World for an Artist* I explore the correlation between art and the psychological transformation, mainly in the context of human well-being. The preliminary research question can be summarized as such: *How having contact with art influences the artist's/recipient's well-being?* It was sparked by the general lack of knowledge on the subject. The thesis can be divided into two main areas of interest: the artist and the recipient.

In choosing the subject I was inspired by personal experience as well as an apparent gap in Polish arts and sciences – absence of a kind of research that would consider an artist in the role of both the subject and the researcher, in addition to comparing the experience of an artist with the one of the recipient. I noticed that in our country we very rarely examine the relationship between the human well-being and art, contrary to research facilities in France, Denmark or USA. Even there the dominant tendency is for the scientists to carry out the examinations themselves.

In this project I played the part of the researcher and the subject concurrently. I tackled the issue interdisciplinary, adding psychology as well as European philosophy to the mix.

We can differentiate two distinct phases. Firstly, trying to find an answer to the preliminary question, I treated myself and my creative process as the subjects of the study. Thusly I pondered *What the World Is for an Artist*. Next I shifted my attention towards the recipients, supplying data on *What an Artist Is for the World*. In order to define how useful art can be to people (artists/recipients) in terms of giving their lives meaning, allowing for deriving pleasure, satisfaction from it.

Phase I comprised of creating a series of paintings while documenting all the stages of the process, accompanying emotional states as well as new experiences resulting from it. For the purpose of registering all of the above psychological tools have been used (i.e. questionnaires). This part of my dissertation is explorative in nature and rooted in auto-ethnography. As an artist I challenged myself in the name of self-advancement to become better equipped for this role.

States I associate with well-being – such as dynamism, will to live, joy – were my primary points of interest. I intended to express them through the language of the brush, choosing British choreographer for the Royal Ballet, Wayne McGregor's interpretation of ballet as my field of research.

Phase I supports the hypothesis concerning the correlation between artist's state of being and the creative process as well as the psychological self-betterment's effect on the overall creativity. At the same time relevance of the paintings' subject to the creator's emotional states proved inconclusive. Additionally, self-observation had varied impact on the efficacy or the progress of the creative process itself.

In terms of the research question, during Phase I it could be observed that creative process influenced well-being positively, if interpreted as realizing one's potential (eudaimonic perspective) and negatively, if we view it as deriving pleasure from existence (hedonistic perspective).

Involved in this project, save for the dissertation itself, were the following pieces:

- series of paintings,
- failed works painted over with gray (as sort of a creative refuse, where shades of gray correspond to the number of layers as well as to how time-consuming was the search),
- video clip edited from the photographic documentation of the stages of the creative process (both successful and failed attempts), along with the material from the self-observation.

Essential for this part of the dissertation was an in-depth analysis of the creative process using methodology provided by the literary research in the field of the psychology of creativity, in addition to the empirical studies conducted with the help of visual artists abroad. The decision to root my project in psychology was dictated by considerable knowledge on the subject resulting from i.e. postgraduate studies in psychology. In the course of theoretical part of the analysis auctorial insight is provided, including the material gathered during self-observation.

Phase II is in turn devoted primarily to the recipients. Art piece becomes a tangent point where both the creator and the one perceiving his creation meet with an archetypal message influencing one's psyche. Again to broaden the scope of my knowledge and experience, intensify artistic growth, I try to practically apply concepts pertaining to the relationship between art piece and its recipient found in philosophy and depth psychology. Proper methodology is used, in cooperation with psychologists, in order to explore the relevance of art to the psychological transformation of a person who comes into contact with it. While describing my research, I embed it predominantly in the context of H.-G. Gadamer and C. G. Jung thoughts on the influence of an art piece, role of the recipient and an artist etc.

First of the studies was partially a happening, partially an exhibition of my paintings opened to a selected group of 23. During the event the participants were invited to have a deeper interaction with art by means of psychological tools (questionnaires, interview). Half of the study was conducted before while the other – after viewing of the paintings. It was qualitative-quantitative in nature.

I found that among people older than 36 anxiety level measured with the self-assessment questionnaire STAI X -1 decreased after looking at the paintings (anxiety being understood as an antithesis of well-being, states that in excess diminish happiness, cause greater stress and lower overall quality of life). It has been proven that negative sentiments: *I worry that something bad will happen; I experience anxiety; I am nervous* – became less prominent after viewing some paintings, analyzing them with the help of questionnaires as well as participating in a group discussion on the subject of art.

Based on the statements gathered during the group interview it can be safely assumed that there is a high chance of an actual correlation between experiencing art and human well-being. Therein I found some tangible proof supporting H.-G. Gadamer or C. G. Jung's thoughts on the influence of an art piece as well as the role of both the artist and the recipient.

I managed to also verify the hypothesis concerning *whether there is any correlation between what is felt by the recipient and an artist*. Drawing on the analysis of the questionnaires I discovered that the former understands art pieces individually so a complete overlap of the original intent and the evoked emotions is quite rare, which supports philosophical /psychological ideas cited within the dissertation.

Second study was predominantly quantitative and was conducted online with 76 people participating. Subjects have been divided into two groups: treatment and control. The former one was shown reproductions of my works while the latter was subjected to the neutral stimuli such as maps. In both the state of well-being was measured based on the

results of the psychological questionnaire conducted before and after making contact with art or the neutral stimulus.

Research has shown there were visible differences in well-being observed between the participants viewing the reproductions and the ones subjected to the neutral stimulus. In the treatment group the increase in the meaningfulness of life has been detected based on the second measurements – i.e. the one after viewing the paintings. Results confirmed that people in this group were feeling more peaceful, safer and experienced more pleasure. Thus we can ascertain that listed indicators point towards improved well-being due to having contact with art.

While the study confirmed the positive effect of art on human well-being, there are many additional factors, personal involvement among them. It would be advisable for an artist and the recipient both to be aware of the complex nature of their relationship. Artist's awareness, enriched by the psychological context, plays a vital role in his/hers self-improvement. Similarly, the recipient should be properly sensitized to the multi-faceted character of interacting with art. For this reason I consider this project to be of significant psychoeducational value.

Attached can be found a report from the conducted research, complete with a psychological overview. As an author as well as originator of this study I describe it and discuss from the point of view of an artist-researcher. The addendum on the other hand was prepared by a psychologist based on my directions and in strict cooperation.

The purpose of this dissertation was to present a new perspective on the preliminary question, with an intent for it to be beneficial for the continued artistic practice – not solely my own, but also other people in the field, especially graduates of the fine arts studies, researchers and scientists interested in creativity. It's a novel approach because so far data on the subject have been provided mainly by the psychologists.

The way art influences human emotions preoccupied not only artists themselves, but also psychologists, philosophers or academics for years. Yet all the studies up to now were mainly directed towards the recipients. Seldom was the artist considered a viable subject. That twin-track approach, together with the fact that the artist herself plays the part of both researcher and the subject adds certain value that seems improbable to achieve if the project were to be conducted solely by a scientist.

The main intent was to initiate further cooperation as well as invite others to conduct more interdisciplinary research integrating art with psychology. Although frequently flawed, endeavors like this can be beneficial for, among other things, the creative development of an artist, as proven herein.

Equally unique is the total exposure of the creative process, including all the inherent struggles or failed attempts. Rarely do artists show anything beside final result that fills them with pride. I find it adds to the psycho-educational quality of this dissertation.

Described study integrates the world of an artist with that of the recipient, starting a discussion on the subject of art itself. Finding a common ground through mutual interactions proves to transcend generational gaps or differences in experience.

This dissertation in itself is of an intersectional nature. Here art and artistic research meets humanities (philosophy) or social studies (psychology), while the empirical portion utilizes qualitative and quantitative methodology to match the preliminary aims of the study.

My main goal was to know myself better as an artist on the constant path to self-improvement, but also to learn more about the recipients of art. In my work I strived to gain broader perspective, but also to extend the scope of knowledge on the creative process in relation to people viewing the final result, filling a certain gap in the general research on the contemporary meaning of art.