

Bronze

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Topic III

**Must a work of art be beautiful in order to be a work of art, or may a work of art be ugly as well? If the latter is possible, why should we take interest in it?**

Art...is a thin peel that isolates us from the horrors and wildness and why shouldn't it be beautiful?

*O. Spengler, The setting of Europe.*

I love the ugly pictures,  
I do appreciate  
That awful illustrations  
The things which collocate...  
The truth.

*G.G. Byron*

We have gone too far from the gorgeous ideals of Renaissance, from the chic of ampere, from the motto of Oscar Wilde – “Art for art’s sake”, but do you feel like, even after so many years and so many changes in our conscious, we are still asking each other the questions of “antithesic” words “the ugly art”? And are we sure this words are truly “antithesic”? The thing is that the question we are referring to again is eternal, due to the humanity will hardly ever find the answer to it. That comes from every person will still have his own opinion, even if there would be any cultural dominant, as Hegel used to call it. The topic of “ugly art” has become actual nowadays as never else – the society tends to create a new cultural revolution, to collapse the old system of ideals and principles on the edge of the new historical epoch – on the verge of globalised society. That is why it is essentially important to turn to that question again in order not to lose the wisdom of the past or not to conserve our ideas, not being able to adopt them to contemporary conditions, not being able to create our own.

The problem, which is raised in the question, the problem of coherence of beauty and art seems difficult to be discussed even more, thanks to it was being tried to solve not only by the philosophers (as “the philosophy is a theoretical explanation of culture”, according to Spengler), but by the people of art (“as every work of art is a new theoretical basement of itself”, according to Hugo), and somehow or other – by most of us. Thus, the ocean of already accumulated ideas, conceptions and theories is so enormous that the only thing left to do is to look at them one more time and try to solve it by yourself...

**The art doesn't know what it is**

I'm sure that Voltaire was true, saying that “all the explanations are coming from the notions”. And I can hardly try to give my version of answering the question, if I don't give the definition of the art itself. Only when the notion becomes clear, we are to judge about the content of the notion, as there are immediately connected. The thing I'd like to mention that the views on the problems of art of philosophers and masters of art should not be opposed, but should be

organically connected and should be considered in synthesis.

Thus famous culturologers were creating schemes of understanding art as one of the most important parts of culture. (The question of correlation of culture and art is a bit different one that is why we should not digress on it.) Thus American philosopher-sociologist Toynbee and Russian religious philosopher Berdyaev used to explain that art is the expression of free immanent God's spirit that is why it cannot be ugly by the definition. That is why it is not human's concern to evaluate the art's works, because they were created under the influence of God. These theories, which are quite close to each other do not concretize – which work of art is worth to be called the work of art. That is why the explanation comes idem per idem, even obscures per obscurum. Ancient eastern civilization used to define art as a gift of Gods. The theoretic of art – Moliere had his own opinion of that art should not be defined somehow, it should just be understood by every individuality, but should be created according some laws. Another point of view comes from Spengler, but it also admits that every art, which is created in the time of “culture” but not at the time of “civilization”, is beautiful – it simply cannot be ugly. Hegel in his work “Esthetics” explains that the Absolute spirit realizes itself as he wishes threw our work, and the items that may seem to us ugly is above our understanding now, that is how he comes to the conclusion – culture is the realization of Absolute spirit and can be understood differently. Here we come to the point I share partially – Ung in his book “Archetypes and Symbols” muses on culture as the reflection of personal symbols, but one phrase is worth being mentioned here – “The art comes from the free creating person as the subjective reflection of archetypical symbols and the reality around him”. Thus let me now try to give my own definition, based on the experience of the past generations. As far as I am concerned, the art is a deeply individual reflection of the immanent and transcendent world of the creator, understood exclusively subjectively according to the emotional and intellectual impressionability. Because the creator does not speak to the army of audience as the orator, but he tries to speak to everyone personally, so to keep invisible “eye to eye contact”. Thus the art is so much universal and even eternal that the creators sometimes cannot give the definition of it, and that is correct – the wider the notion is, the weaker is its content. Here I also would like to quote Aristotle, who said that “you should be very subjective, discussing the art, but not individual, cause you cannot be simply objective, thanks to the subject of the discussion”.

As far as I have tried to give the definition, let me now try to share my point of view about the paradox or the normal fact of “ugly art”, based on the very notion.

### **To create or not to create?**

As the art has two so called “components” – objective (let's say the technical – the way the picture was drawn, the play was performed, the way the song was sang etc.), and subjective (what is depicted on the picture, what is written in the book, what the play is about). So, as I have already said if the art can and should be created and understood in the most individual manner, not even talking about the subjective side, even the objective can be treated differently, often polarilly different. The manner of drawing of impressionists and then fovists was estimated by the society in the most negative way – they said Mone and Dega didn't know how to draw well. The same thing then happened to abstractionists and primitivists. The modern dancers are accused of not knowing the classical theory of dance. But as Beethoven has said “The new and genius things and trends are born as heresy, and appreciated only by the descendants”. Now the picture of Wan Gog “The sunflowers” is the most expensive picture in the world. That is why what is considered to be ugly even technically, even in the way it is presented can be a true art, because it can simply bring new vision of the world, it can go ahead its time.

Then comes the ugly content. I believe the thing you call ugly can be absolutely beautiful for me. It again and again repeats the ancient thought that the beauty is relative.

First let's define "ugly" in art. The most correct in my mind will be the thing that does not collocate our ideals. The modern standards of beautiful woman would be considered unbelievable to the people of Renaissance. Moreover, ugly is something that is subjectively not pleasant or calls for emotions, not satisfying you. The works of Goya ("The Mars eating his son"), Bosch ("The garden of earth satisfaction"), Rembrandt ("The Western front has no changes") and thousands of other classical and respected works possess some extracts, expressing horrors, death, sins, ugly bodies and so on. However, it doesn't mean they are not worth being called the art works. Furthermore, they are widely appreciated, even though they depict unpleasant for most of human beings symbols and descriptions. Thus, I can undoubtedly conclude – ugly content doesn't prevent people from calling their works "true art", and I'm sure they are right. But what do we have to do with the art works, which are not considered to be beautiful by everyone? The composer Beethoven didn't hear any of his works played during the whole life. The authors, who presumably guess they would not be understood as their works will be considered ugly, usually have to ask themselves the Hamlet question, I have put as the title of the paragraph. And in my opinion the answer is – to create. The work of art must not be beautiful, this is not the imperative, even if the ideals of time insist on it. For example, the early Christian works were totally against the ideals the ideals of Roman beauty. The medieval works of the religious themes are full of blood and horror, following the motto "Memento mori", but aren't they the real art works, spiritually beautiful?

The functions of art are not only entertaining and bringing peace into person's soul – they are polyhedral as the art itself. One of the functions is to tell the truth, to reflect the inner and outer world, as I have already mentioned, to fix the reality. Art, purified from the moments, which cannot be excepted without closed eyes and pain in heart loses the very nature of art – it stops being different! It becomes limited and turns into one-sided embodiment of culture.

### **For what the bell tolls?**

The ugly art is a subject of fierce argue not only because "ugly" is different for everybody, but moreover, because it is that force, by the way very powerful, that creates a great variety of clashes in cultural world, in our minds and souls. The discussed question asks "why should we take interest in it". Let me disagree with such a word used as "should". That is true. Nobody is obliged. But we can. Omar Hayyam used to say that – "stop thinking of the art if you want to stop thinking at all". As far as I feel the ugly art tolls for thinking. Beautiful story impresses us, it raises our mood and purifies our heart may be from aggression and envy. But the beautifully written books of Kafka, Dickens, and Dreiser, which contain the description of evil and ugly truth make us oppose, think and fight mentally. I can't but mention – art without beauty is not an art, it loses its origins, it turns into a science of morality. However Konfuziy in his "Thoughts of the state" mentioned an unforgettable wisdom – "the power is in the balance". Thus the balance of two opposing and at the same time correlating universes can help us develop.

Leo Tolstoy used to write that the real author describes real things. So imagine, the awful, truly ugly things happen in the some state, in the culture, in the nature. Should the writers keep silence? So the ugly art tolls for the truth.

The art of H.G. Wells and Ray Bradbury imagine new worlds, numerous science fiction authors try to analyze the existing facts and predict the future. Their aim is to warn future generations about the reality they can face if continue to follow this or that trends. Such creators follow the Socrates method "from against" – show the ugly thing in order people to be afraid to behave badly. Thus the ugly art tolls for the future.

### **The secret to define**

The thing that is really important to touch upon is the greatest problem – the problem of defining the ugly art. Except the subjective emotions and appreciation art as ugly I must admit – there is almostly no ugly art. All the examples, mentioned above, all the works of art, contending ugly episodes follow the noble aims. They can even reveal the inner world of the creator, still teaching us something, showing the real or imaginary situation – the philosophers are not afraid of this, J.P. Sartre and his work “Nausea” is one the brightest examples. Thus the answer on the topic question is dualistic – yes, there may and should be ugly art, if it is created ugly or contents unpleasant ideas and fiction symbols. But at the same time, no, down to such kind of art is not ugly; it is sometimes even more beautiful then sweet images, if to take beauty as a philosophical category.

The thing, worth mentioning here – finding truly ugly art is practically pretty difficult. I keep the criteria of “opened idea”, but I believe – art, created under pressure, or by somebody’s order is ugly. It remains art, however, because it is still individual, but it loses freedom. Not in the existential meaning of this category, but in the understanding of such philosophers as P. Sorokin. The unique finding has recently been made in Egypt – on the back of the statue the sculptures wrote “I am sorry for this statue, because I was made to do it like this by my master”. The frightening lines about such kind of art are in sonnet 66 of William Shakespeare:

...

And art, made tongue-tighted by authorities,  
And folly doctor-like controlling skills

...

The very delicate question, whether such things as drawing with the blood of killed animals or creating sculptures from rubbish is worth being called art, even if it is ugly. The matter here is in the very thin boundary that distinguishes true art from the insanity or the desire to seem eccentric or to make money. This problem has to be solved individually by everybody, but I’m sure, Toffler was true, saying that “Time has a power to define true from false”. The thing, left to us, is to create this time by our deeds.

### **Will the ugly art save the world?**

The famous phrase of Russian writer Dostoevsky – “The beauty will save the world” is a wonderful wisdom to follow, but let me be brave or insolent enough to change it and affirm that today’s world is not so ugly as someone thinks and the dialectical law of “unify and struggle of oppositions” should really work. I’m sure ugly art, revealing the truth, opening eyes, predicting and warning is the thing we need now to sober ourselves from the art, turning into entertaining industry. May be then we are to understand the gorgeous ideals of Renaissance, the chic of ampere, the motto of Oscar Wild in another way and find the authentic world of art as a heritage, time has carefully saved for us.