

KEEP YOUR HEART

Vappu Vabar

In spite of some ambiguity, the surrealists have proved that the subconscious experience can be revealed in visible forms. Expression of the subconscious can be either the ultimate objective of an artwork or it can intensify the uttered statement. In the latter case, to express the message of the artwork more efficiently, the author's identifying approximation to the personality of the viewer is manifested in the work.

It seems that the indirect influences of surrealism on the development of the further elaboration of pun, context, laughter, destruction, chance, freedom, instinct, magic, aggression, paranoia, hallucination, pain, religion, biomorphism, spontaneity etc. have not been inquired into and interpreted exhaustively yet. Surrealism has played its part in the development of the 20th century art, where the narrative has been gradually withdrawn before the exploration of realms of fantasy, unconscious and introspection in many different forms, both realistic and non-objective, in different media and genres. Surrealism has admittedly stimulated the birth of abstract expressionism, conceptualism, super-realism, performance art, new expressionism etc. Return of the surrealism has been mentioned in the graphic arts of Western Europe in the 1960s, which has had an influence on the Estonian graphic arts of the late sixties and seventies. The artist's emotional reflections of social, environmental and other experiences in the form of surprised or critical comments, complaints or exclamations, including plea for the viewer's sympathy, have taken the place of a traditionally "surrealist" approach, bold and precise materialization of the images of concrete irrationality. But such, often emotional, reflections assume, like surrealism does, "that the world of imagination and irrationality may be as objectively evident ... as that of the exterior world of phenomenal reality" (Rubin 1968: 111). The evidence is of a different kind though, perhaps like the evidence of feelings. We know, that we have them, but we cannot describe them exactly, only some of their manifesta-

tions. Either because of the similarity to feelings, or for some other reason, this kind of art is openly emotional or its irrationality is veiled.

It is characteristic that a downcast rather than optimistic mood dominates these pensive artworks, which are mostly done in graphic techniques. Carl Gustav Jung explains that "our art is inspired by the dump of our culture" and that the world is in decay because of its imperfection and the missing of a vital factor that would prevent the invasion of chaos (Jung 1995: 115–116). When we go back to the study of individual artworks, it is perhaps sufficient to point at the dominating self-centered motives as the cause of sad or melancholy results as the source of inspiration.

Jung sees the expression of subconscious in art as "compensation of the loss of beauty and meaning" (Jung 1995: 140). This is an interesting statement in spite of the arguable "loss of beauty and meaning concerning art in general." (Stated in his *Contemporary Myth*, published in 1958.) Perhaps we could cautiously substitute "beauty and meaning" by "realism and wholeness of the aesthetic concept." In the latter, details are usually not detached from the context for the purpose of a specific, unusual, incl., e.g. psychoanalytic interpretation. This kind of "alienation" of a detail (motif, thing) from the visual and aesthetic whole originates in surrealism, where it had the purpose of outraging the public, which is easily done by bringing up an alternative view of a specific detail. Sigmund Freud, who was the first to emphasize the subconscious fetishist and archetypal aspect of the things that surround us, obviously stimulated the emergence of such "alienated" representation in art.

Jung writes: "When interest rebounds because of the incomprehensibility of an object, it turns inside and meets the subconscious. The modern art under discussion has the same effect. It can be assumed that, consciously or unconsciously, it wants to turn the viewer's eye away from the comprehensible world of senses and make him open up the subconscious." (Jung 1995: 138.) Writing about retailing rumors on visual hallucinations, Jung is perhaps of the opinion that the single aim of most artists is, like that of Marcel Duchamp, to pull the viewer's leg. As a matter of fact, it seems that a number of artists are much more humane, giving way to their inmost personal weakness. Today a large amount of surrealist images and methods is in circulation and at hand for every artist who is inclined to introspection. They make use of them easily, developing more or less

intuitively, opening up one's innate experiences, naked truths; reflecting personal viewpoints of the reality.

In Modernism personal freedom is associated with the freedom of vision. E. H. Gombrich writes in *Art and Illusion* about the split between the psychological aspects of style and perception. John Ruskin conceived the idea of an "innocent eye" in the 19th century, justified by artist's purely visual approach to the nature. Perhaps, the 19th century concept of "artist as an eye" could, when considering art of the late 20th century, be paraphrased by "artist as a nerve." Our contemporary artists tend to express what they sense and experience both physically and visually, as well as by the "collective-subconscious images." They reflect on their places in the physical and social reality and on the collective subconscious and archetypes. Painters and drawers of natural objects, who cannot ignore their physical reality, seem to identify matter with the social reality to some extent. The Estonian art critic Hanno Kompus wrote: "It is ironic but inevitable that an artist's commitment to expressing his most thrilling, gentle, noble feelings and imaginations of his life depends on his struggle with an inert, tough and soulless matter" (Kompus 1976: 137). Actually it is the matter that makes art, and working with it turns artist into a most sensitive person to the spiritual substance that radiates from the matter. For this reason an artist perceives reality in the way described by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. He practically claims that an artist apprehends reality as immediately as his own body. As Arnold Berleant points out, speaking of body as a charged field, Merleau-Ponty suggests that its energy radiates beyond itself to incorporate the world. The body is perceived, it is made of the same flesh as the world and, moreover, this flesh of body is shared by the world. "If my body is continuous with the world, it doesn't extend out into the world; it is the world, one of its focal points, which all bodies, in some way, are" (Berleant 1997: 73). "The body is a concentration of forces that is part of a larger field. I am not a *body* but a *self*: I am a charged field" (Berleant 1997: 74).

In a metaphysics of culture, we begin to grasp the body as fully continuous with the various domains of the human world: the cultural landscape, the predominant modes of technology etc. (Berleant 1997: 76). Seen in this way, can artist tell a difference between his creation and existence?

At the beginning of the 20th century the French philosopher Henri Bergson discussed the continuity of perception, by which man creates himself continually. The intellect analyzes the world, considering it as composed of isolated objects. "Duration" is the changing reality, experience of change and source of intuitive perception (Bergson 1998: 7). In the philosophy and literature influenced by Bergson, "duration" has become one of the central concepts. About 20 years after the publication of *Matter and Memory* the surrealists formulated the idea of an abrupt discontinuance of a normally continuous flow (of existence, thought) by creating an unexpected, shocking event, to stimulate action and evoke revelation or understanding of an otherwise inconspicuous aspect in art. Here the idea of breaking a flow; not repeatedly, but once has to do with the meaning of the flow. The surrealists worked to find psychological situations of "breakthrough": trance, hypnosis, etc. In the *Surrealist Manifesto* surrealism is introduced as being a state of mind or mentality, as not being written or painted, but lived. (Compare: Merleau-Ponty "flesh of the world.") The theme of emptiness, favoured by surrealists, has later been widely developed as well.

Another innovation of the early 20th century, Vassili Kandinsky's abstract painting, initiated the idea of an artwork as an abstract sign. Its universal power can overcome emptiness – the absolute, endless; both distressing and fortunate situation, a precondition for creative work. Roland Barthes writes: "This situation is the very one in which a certain disturbance of the person occurs, a subversion of earlier readings, a shock of meaning lacerated, extenuated to the point of its irreplaceable void, without the object's ever ceasing to be significant, desirable. Writing is after all, in its way, a *satori*: *satori* (the Zen occurrence) is a more or less powerful (though in no way formal) seism which causes knowledge, or the subject to vacillate: it creates an *emptiness of language*." (Barthes 1982: 4.)

Emptiness, or blank indicating at the brake of continuity is one of the central notions of psychoanalysis and existentialism. Merleau-Ponty's "zero point" of the body that needs activation is connected with it too. Of course, emptiness of meaning, an allusion to something by leaving it unsaid, does not concern only Modernism. A classical example of this is Mona Lisa's unelucidated smile. So are Duchamp's ready-mades – the artist's missing creativity, clearly formulating a message; as well as Yves Klein's works and the exhibitions of empty galleries in the 1960s. The objective: to shock the viewers, fuses with one of the numerous

possibilities to break off the normality and continuity, to create an emptiness and fill it with something unprecedented.

Jean-Paul Sartre's "empty look that watches unbearably" expresses a psychological aspect of the distress born out of emptiness. He who is "watched by nothing," feels like being placed on the scales of Anubis, experiencing mortal fear before the merciless power evaluating his quality. In the context of psychology, emptiness is identified with the absolute and death. Speaking of emptiness and alluding to deprivation may also serve as an excuse for lacking creativity in art (the myth of "unrecognized talent") and express a subconscious request for extension of one's time for a heroic justification of the "emptiness of existence."

How to express (paint, describe) flow of the subconscious, its impulses, messages or even the fact of its existence and importance? Is it better to start from the Freudian, or Jungian symbols? Of course, these result in purely surrealist pictures, surprising and perhaps even frightening the author as well as the viewer. But an immediate self-absorbed expression of one's feelings connected with a relaxed attitude towards the "prescribed" features of any style would probably bring one to a sincere result. Interpretation of one's innermost aspects can, but need not be understood with the help of dream-images. Penetration into one's reveries, relaxation by doing something habitual for a break and for giving one's innate images a chance to emerge – this is a possible way of doing sincerely personal art. Of course, while carried away by inspiration, one would not be able to tell the commonplace images from the "brilliant" ones. The latter are recognized later, when re-reading the text. None of this is new for professional artists, each of whom has a private customary habit of working. But most of the artists are not conscious about the creative mechanisms at work. Perhaps, otherwise, there would be fewer crises?

Artists, sensitive to the spirit radiating from the matter, feel themselves, as expressed by Merleau-Ponty, as part of the flesh of the world. They are this flesh, because their mind and body actively keep transiting to this flesh. Their creation is both real and novel, both spiritual and physical. Artists have an advantage before everybody else: the Other of their inmost dialogue is the viewer separated by the insignificant period from the creation of the work to the exhibition's opening. Artists always perform their inner dialogues and are alert to their ethical responsibility. Creative work is a choice between fear and purification.

I would like to believe that each artist, painting a picture, creates a harmonious image of his soul. Is it possible to become a censor of sincerity? I prefer to look at an artwork as an adventure. An artist sets off at it, hand in hand with his Other (the ideal, hopefully a would-be viewer), they are like a couple of lovers. In love one dares to express certain things. Inspiration is a coalescence of different conditions: personal and impersonal; more or less easily explained. Some of them are clearly reflected in an artwork, some can be guessed, some will never be noticed. The subconscious experiences are somewhere, in the substrata, perhaps flashing forth unexpectedly. This unexpected character gives the adventurous dimension and one can set off at it if one wants to, either as an artist or a viewer.

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