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**Chosen Topic:**

4 - "Art is not a copy of the real world. One of the damn things is enough."

Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (1976)

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**Introduction**

Let us first embrace the spirit of the ancient: Socrates, who would not accept the traditionally accepted without a full, rational argumentation, and ask ourselves: "What is art?" We can get caught up in various definitions philosophers have put out in the history: "an imitation of nature", "just a shadow of a shadow", "something divine", and so on. In the matter we are dealing with in this essay we need *not* go further than to say art is something created by a human. If it weren't so we could include an object in the nature or the nature as a whole into the definition of art and thus conclude everything which is a result of the natural processes governed by the natural patterns, or as we may call them, laws of nature, can be a piece of art. This conclusion, though logically correct if deduced from the mentioned propositions, is to this essay: meaningless. So we shall restrain ourselves and our discussion to the pieces of art (material and non-material) made by humans.

A piece of art may seem an evident imitation of a real life object: such were the works of Impressionists (who claimed to have as their guiding force –the will to capture a moment) or Renaissance artists (who, though seemingly creating pieces themed in ancient or early Christian time, actually used real-life people and places as the basis of their paintings, in addition to depicting their contemporaries). There are those, however, which are very much unlike the natural things: the works of perhaps Atonalists in music, or the Cubists in visual arts. These, as different as we may experience them, in fact do have a lot in common.

**On the origin of ideas**

How do we, fundamentally, get ideas? How do we get to know? We need not even think of whether the form of cognition is valid or not, as would Rene Descartes and his rationalists and John Locke and his empiricists do, we need only see where all our ideas come from. We can agree that, though someone may argue it is just an "illusion" created in ourselves or elsewhere, we do get affected through our senses. These sensations come from the outer world, outside us. If we decide to discuss the illusion argument, it may even be that the "illusions" come from ourselves. If we decide to consider the proposition that senses are "illusions" we receive from elsewhere, rather than created inside ourselves, then we can again conclude it comes from the outside, the outer world.

Now, we may also consider if there are ideas in us created independently of senses: there may or may not be such ideas. If there are, they come from somewhere inside us, they are intrinsic, they were not created in the process of experiencing. If there aren't such intrinsic ideas, we can, again, accept those gained by affection of the senses.

Having said that, we can now deal with the statement: There are either ideas we have strictly independent of the experience, or ideas we have due to having our senses affected (or having

experienced something) combined with those we have intrinsically, or those we have strictly due to the experience.

### **What may we say about the possible origins of our ideas in relation to the real world?**

A human being is a part of the real world. That it really is so we may deduce from the fact that if we weren't a part of the real world we would either not be or be a part of imaginary world. If we were not, then either us not being would be in the relation to being the same as being is to not being and we could say that we are, unlike that which is not; or the sentence "I am not" would be a *reductio ad absurdum* since even the ability for me to only think of that sentence is fundamentally in the fact that I am. Consider the imaginary world: a world we cannot make any correlations with which would then be potentially realistically expressible. If we were a part of an imaginary world, as beings inseparable from the way of being by which we are—even if it was imaginary—we would not be able to feel or experience the real world, and so it would be as imaginary to us as we are to it. Relative as it is, we may say that the world we live in is real and all the other, uncorrelated, are imaginary.

As we are a part of the real world and if there are ideas coming from the inside of ourselves, we can say those ideas come from the real world. The ideas coming from the outside are a part of the real world as well. We can try to argument that not all ideas from the outside come from the real world. Then the trap we would fall into would be that those ideas are either non-existent or unreal (or imaginary). If they were non-existent (or: if they weren't) they would certainly not be a part of our set of ideas, which are, and if they were imaginary they would have no correlations with the real world and as such would not be appropriate to be communicable to other human beings. In other words: imaginary ideas are potentially possible, however, they, as such, cannot be correlated with the real world and thus *formed*: a necessity by which we, as outside observers, can say that something *is*, before we can even start a discussion on whether it is a piece of art or not.

It is now clear that we can, clearly and distinctly, say: All ideas, including those responsible for creating a piece of art, are a part of the real world.

### **The true nature of art**

Rather than concluding that art is just a copy of the real world, we have to come to a conclusion in the spirit of Aristotle: an imitation. However, rather than being an obvious and relatively simple imitation such as every car coming off an industrial track in a factory is, it is a more thought of and complex imitation of various parts of the real world. A combination of a number of ideas (all descending from the real world) put together to form a single piece of art. That is why, for example, the imitation is more noticeable in Honore de Balzac's "Father Goriot" than in Tristan Tzara's poems. The difference is only in the complexity of the structure of the ideas behind the pieces of art. While Balzac is a Realist and admittedly shows the world as it is, Tzara's works are under the strong influence of the ideas to be: different and different in a new way.

### **Game theory: a winning strategy**

One may reject the thought of art being as such. It may be so due to the fact that we are used to defining art very differently or that we do not agree with the deduction which the thought is a product of. Let us then create a game: in game theory, a winning strategy is a strategy one of the players can (but needs not necessarily have) which will allow for him to win every single time the

game is played. This would mean for example, if one has a dice with all six sides marked with six points, the first player to roll the dice has the winning strategy if the goal of the game is to roll a six.

The game which is to be shown here is a rather different one. There are two players: first one proposes a piece of art and the second one analyzes it, trying to reduce it to its basic ideas. The goal of the first player is to come up with a piece of art which the other one cannot completely analyze and the goal of the other player is to analyze every single piece he is given. Now, if it is known for the second player that every piece of art can be cut down to simple ideas, he will have no problems in doing so: it would start with, perhaps, the pieces of art from Realism. The second player would be able to do what he is meant to and so the first player would have to choose more and more complex pieces. Let us say that the second player is doing well and managing to analyze the pieces: even those created by Expressionists, Dadaists, Surrealists, and so on. The question we may come to now is: is there ever going to be a piece of art the second player could not be able to analyze?

The answer lies within the statement that such a piece would either have to consist of an infinite number of ideas or of an infinitely complicated idea. If there were an infinite number of ideas, the second player would need an infinite amount of time to communicate them to the first player, thus needing an infinite amount of time to win, thus never winning. If an idea was infinitely complicated, the second player would need to analyze it to simpler ideas, which there would then be an infinite amount of: this being the before mentioned problem.

That the second player truly does have a winning strategy we can conclude in this: If an artist was to create a piece of art consisting of an infinite number of ideas, it would take an infinite time for the piece to be made and so it would never even exist as a piece of art and could not be included in the game of the two players.

### **Consequences of such a conclusion**

What one may now see from everything concluded so far is that art can be reduced to only show us, once again, different parts of the real world. There is a potential in this to make a lot of people desperate: if only we thought of Arthur Schopenhauer, a miserable pessimist who named art the only thing worth living for!

If we find ourselves asking the same question Schopenhauer once ought to have: what is worth living for? We may find ourselves disappointed, much like young Arthur when his parents found him, coming home from an evening walk, sitting in despair at only six years of age. If one is unable to find a meaning of his or her life, then there is nothing that individual can live for. He or she can accept meaningless things as worth living for and thus live meaninglessly in relation to the outside observers: other human beings, or, as a result of a primitive instinct, one can only live for living itself. If only the individual could see a meaning in art: there would be a comfort after all.

If the individual is now lost, living a meaningless life, having lost his only pleasure and a matter worth living for: art, he can still, if he is intelligent enough, spend the rest of his life not being pessimistic. It is clear that one can, though, needs not accept artistic doings as being simply complex imitations of different aspect of the real world. If he does not, his life remains the same and meaningful. However, if he does, he can spend the rest of his life analyzing pieces of art created throughout the history of mankind and those which are yet to be made. By doing so, he is distracted from the thoughts of meaninglessness and can find the pleasure in rationally reducing piece by piece and discovering the

complexity (or simplicity) of the psychologies of the artists. Art will then not have a romantically comprehended function as being that which distinguishes a talented individual and giving their life a sense, as well as being something divine or incomprehensible: it would become, rather, a distraction from the thoughts of meaninglessness and thus provide practically the same use in a life of an individual: something which would lead us off of pessimism and give us something worth living for.

### **Conclusion**

Having stated all of the above, a conclusion on the matter is to be made:

“Art is a nothing but a complex of copies of the different parts of the real world; one of those is at the same time, fundamentally, the other: however, neither is enough to a human. Real world is there to provide us misery in meaninglessness; art is there to provide us a distraction from the misery.”