



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Arts

EXQUISITE CORPSE: ART AS A REFLECTION OF THE SOCIETY AND ITS TIMES

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ABSTRACT

Art has always been a part of human life as an expression of the relation between his inner self and the external world. Expression of art is a function of labour, artistic aptitude and material depending on the medium of expression, the first two, labour and aptitude are what make an artist, the third i.e. material is contingent to the request or desire of the patron, which has traditionally been the factor that decides what the art will represent or depict. With the appearance of the bourgeoisie: the new economic class in the society, a new type of patron was emerging who was a product of the humanist period. The humanist period dictated that the 'Ego' be the centre of the world. This shifts the control of the artistic expressions from the hands of the hitherto powerful patrons; monarchy and religion, to an art for the individual.

INTRODUCTION:

This article tries to present what happens when the artist is not under the obligation of a patron anymore, and he progresses from the different periods of history to the one where he experiences destruction all around i.e. the period between the 2 world wars. how the artist enters the recesses of his own self, trying to find answers through his creation and produces art collectively in collaboration with other artists to express the anxiety generated by the destruction and fragmentation of the old concept of reality.

"Art is the mirror of its times", Deigo Rivera

Traditionally art has been associated with creating and expressing something beautiful and what we are going to talk about in this text is something that has a strange and a macabre name, which was used as a technique of art creation and then there were various fields into which this technique made a foray. There were games, literature creation based on the technique of 'Exquisite Corpse'.

When I read about the name and the technique it piqued my interest in, why any artistic expression would bear that name, and I learned that the way this art was conceived and created is unique. I asked myself, how and why would such a technique be born. Usually, we all associate art with beauty and purpose. The beauty may be expressed in whatever way the artist perceives it, and this lends singularity and peculiarity to his expression and creation.

On exploring further, I could not find many reasons that could answer my queries which further fuelled my interest and curiosity. I needed to find if it had a reason or objective and what was being communicated and expressed through this type of macabre sounding creation.

Upon searching for the reasons responsible for this grisly expression, I understood that this came up during the period between the 2 world wars, that is between 1918 and 1939, and the artists create this collective art and hold exhibitions even today. Hopkins (2004) situates the emergence of Dadaism and Surrealism in the context of profound cultural and social transformations as a result of the first world war and its consequences.

The twenties of the last century were post war years when the world had still not recovered from the nightmare of the First World War and the general atmosphere was still of disorder and upheaval. The shattered world was fracturing the human, the philosophy, the spiritual, the society and all the established norms of life. Ben Elton (1996), "Artists don't create society, they reflect it"

It is in the year 1925 when the French writer Andre Breton and his friends conceived an unusual procedure to be able to

explore the subconscious minds of those turbulent times. The surrealist authors sought to find a procedure to create something collectively with the aim of finding new ways of understanding and approaching the violent world that they were living in and to try to understand, with a portentous dread, what the future might hold for the world.

This activity involving a collective creation is based on a game, Kocchar Lindgren et al. (2009) describe it as a parlour game, called "Consequences", in which the participants or artists collectively create or weave a chance story based on intuition. E.g. to create this story one of the participants would decide the names of the characters of the story, another participant would decide the adjectives to be used to describe and define them, another participant would contribute with the place where they would meet, or the story will develop further. In this way they would take turns and continue to create and develop the story. The final product would be something completely unexpected and a creation of the intuition, the subconscious and something that is impossible to create alone. It was like finding a collective response or resolution to the problems that they were experiencing in those times of conflict and instability.

Notably, it is in the year 1925 the Surrealists: Yves Tanguy, André Bretón, Marcel Duchamp, Jaques Prévert invented the term "The Exquisite Corpse". The name was derived from the sentence that came up when they used the idea for a creation for the first time. The first experiment turned out to be the sentence: "the exquisite cadaver will drink the new wine". The words "exquisite cadaver" stuck as a name for this thought and the uniquely creative technique.

In order to create a piece of art with this new technique, Exquisite Cadaver, a piece of paper is taken and is folded twice which offers three different surfaces for the 3 painters to paint or draw on. Figuratively the first part would be the head, the second the body and third the legs or the feet. In this process the first artist creates the supposed head folds the paper and hides the created part leaving some markings as cues on the edges from where the second artist can make connections and begin with the next part, this continues till the legs or feet are drawn. Upon having drawn all the parts of the figure or painting the paper or the canvas is unfolded (). Till that moment nobody knows what type of art they have created and thus end up creating a collective art with the help of the subconscious of the participant artists. It wasn't meant only to be an inventive artistic technique because it began as an experiment to move away from the conventional art forms.

I discovered that there are radio channels, magazines, music, stories, with the same name. It is also used as a fun pedagogical tool for teaching a new language, where the learners can think of a noun, adjective, verbs, subject and object and

come up with a combination of funny sentences to learn the sentence structures of language or it is also used to create stories where one writes the beginning of a story and others may keep adding till it comes to its end. Let's see what is; the purpose, the reason or meaning of this art, Exquisite Corpse.

Up until those times the artistic sensitivity of the humans was accustomed to conceiving the art as a representation of something beautiful, something pleasing and of course something that was from the real and recognizable world. The art had to adhere to these norms to be considered a piece of art. Then, can Exquisite Cadaver, which does not conform to this idea of art, and does not fall into the ambit of neither beautiful, nor real nor understandable, be considered art?

To answer the question that we have asked ourselves above, we will need to reflect retrospectively. The humanity of those times was tired of the reason and logic of the previous century, 'Enlightenment', to answer every aspect of life, particularly because it had brought the world at the crossroads where the humanity was witnessing destruction everywhere. Humanity, tired of the difficult experiences turbulations and trials of the life wanted a different world view as the old one had been incapable of answering the new reality, it was the hour for cogitation, reflection: as not everything about the world or life can be explained or justified and that the reality of life cannot be based or answered solely on the logic and reason. Despite all the progress in all the fields there were wars and destruction all around, mankind wasn't kind to the other anymore.

According to the Theory of Chaos, within the randomness of the chaos lies the answer to the new self-organisation and that chaos has its role and utility. A system that is too organised, too perfect loses its ability to grow and it could result in stagnation. Humans by nature can weather huge storms but it is difficult for them to live a stagnated life. It is said that the only constant in life is change.

The new form of art had demolished all the limits to which the art or artistic expression was tied to or permitted. According to Aristotle's Poetics, art serves a mimetic function, meaning art is essentially an imitation of life and human action and the function of art is to reproduce the reality of the exterior world expressed in different but recognisable forms. But the different avatars or versions of the art of the modern world were unrecognisable under the tenets of Aristotelian logic. The 'Why' of this transformation did not have any easy or clear explanation, nor could it be attributed to a logical reason; which was supposedly capable of providing all the answers.

Are the art and reason comparable or compatible? At first sight the reason isn't detectible but upon closer examination we realise that art and reason are distinct, yet they are interconnected and, through both, the humans understand and shape their reality.

Now, let us deal with the question: what could be the reason behind this type of unconscionable expression in art forms.

It does not matter how much ever the art and reason may be interconnected but, the Art can never be attributed with or to pure reason, it has a gnostic element to it lent by its creator. Even in a representation of reality the exactitude is debatable. It may be close to reality but can never be exact representation. In comparison a photograph can be a more exact representation of a reality, yet even a photo is subject to the mood, attitude and interest of the artist or photographer in this case.

The artist even when he creates an imitation of reality in his or her work it's not a mere reproduction and there is a bit of artist that is added to the creation, there is something that changes. Art is a meeting place, of something tactile, some technique, some science of nature's proportion and above all a bit of character of the artist, of his life, of his experience, of his pains

and pleasures, of the defeats and triumphs that enters this meeting place of his creation called Art and it is a culmination of his personal world, his culture, the history of his life and of the period that he is part of. The creator becomes a part of his own art.

As we know that the interbellum period were the years of the Great Depression, political upheaval, conflict everywhere, anxiety, penury lived by humanity along with the loss of traditional security and equilibrium. These years demanded a lot of difficult reconciliation and experimentation with the new reality, with the aim to adjust to the changed reality. There was search for the solutions to cure the pains and find solution to deal with the adversities.

In those difficult times, with the material and spiritual impoverishment, the man felt intellectually defeated. To face this collective disgrace, to alleviate the devastation of war, the artist who had been disenchanted with the traditional beauty and its representation, he began to annihilate everything that was considered sacred or canonised and start all over again, as if to completely get rid of anything and everything problematic, with the cathartic and purgative objective.

It is the artist himself who can break the barriers of the established canons. Through art, the artist can express all that he needs to communicate, safely, without directly hurting other's sentiments. The art can conceal a multitude of things and at the same time reveal without critiquing explicitly, without implicating, avoid a controversial issue, dodge the politics: which is not the privilege a writer has. A writer will have to own up the responsibility of his craft, he cannot escape, hide behind his medium of expression, which is in black and white, he has no place to hide. Language or words can hurt, can invoke an immediate reaction. But, art isn't merely an artistic expression of the artist, it is a third space, a gnostic space, where the artist undergoes effacement of self upon entering the artistic space. The observer too will have to shed any excess baggage that he carries from his experience, for becoming capable of entering this third space which serves as a common medium between himself, the artist and the art. It is only then, that the both the worlds meet and understand, through interaction and interpretation; what the artist and his art are intending to communicate.

In olden times art was an objective expression, as it expressed the reality, it was a faithful expression of the subject. Pure objectivity in art may be appealing but it is not captivating, it is not intriguing, it doesn't arouse interest as it merely, faithfully represents the ubiquitous. It is the subjectivity of the author or the artist that imparts peculiarity to any work and piques the interest of the observer.

The objective lies in the function of art which is what it is expected to be, to be gratifying and pleasing. In the ancient times the art and the literature were meant for indoctrination, in the Renaissance the art was at the service of the religion or the powerful i.e. religion, nobility and monarchy. Art was later converted into a type of employment patronised and was produced based on what and how the patrons desired. During the later period, around Enlightenment, the artist had begun to step out of the controls of the influential sections of the society. The artist now had begun to experiment with his own artistic expression. If we review the cultural progression through the past few centuries: Renaissance gave way Enlightenment which then led to Romanticism and Realism and eventually to Modernism. Modernism is the period when the wars are on the horizon. The art of those turbulent times is when the artist tries to break free of all the shackles and begins to create and express candidly with his own interpretation, a personal expression of the artist as opposed to the philosophy of rationalism. The artists were effectuating the profanation of senses, desensitization of the values system that held the society together and they subverted by blurring their creations with hazy outlines.

At the same time the advent of photography had already usurped the responsibility of representing reality. The artists felt the need to add a personal touch to the work to express and stay relevant in times of the technology that could perfectly reproduce the reality. The need was for the artist to close the window that opened to the outside world and dive into the depths of the inner world to access the self that had been buried under the restrictions of the society, religion and the demands of the patrons. This caused the artist to present the reality intermingled with the fantastic, the mysterious, the oneiric in a impiously verisimilitude manner. Artists expressed it with Expressionism, Dadaism, Surrealism and the writers did it with magic realism

Stephen Forcer (University of Bermingham) specialist in Surrealism and Dadaism says, that for many artists the First World War was a deeply traumatic experience, which, paradoxically speaking, drove them to develop their work with traits that would not have been realizable otherwise.

WEB REFERENCES

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