

On *The Lemon Emigrant*

The Lemon Emigrant appeared in debates around the politics of difference, the cultural diversity, the trans-national curating, as an instance of resolute thought – the thought of what it is that is human in art. *The Lemon Emigrant* appeared from under a sway of apocalyptic discoveries revealing the absence of art's autonomy and its identity crisis, as an instance of thought of what is it that is art *within* human. The book is an offer of trust in human form of life that opposes Okwui Enwezor's appropriation of the "forms-of-life" whereby artistic practice is framed as "political participation within which notions of community and citizenship are constituted". In the book the answer is inscribed to the often sounded question - "From what is art autonomous?"¹

The definition of art conveyed in the book is enacting the relationship between the artwork and the spectator - enacting understanding as interpretation. The book is generating the thought that art thinks coming to an end as abruptly as it starts. As in love one is able to perceive only while being in love. "[...] it is thus for them alone that the one truth produced by their love is an indiscernible part of their existence."² As soon as love exhausts itself it becomes an empty description devoid of real signification. A photograph of oneself in love is equally melancholic as art object still present after the aesthetic moment had vanished. A photograph depicting other than oneself in love is not an empty description, but a general explanation of what love might be. Such explanation stands for the ultimate futility of the art critical project of interpretation, and it testifies for the kind of value of art archiving and reproduction practices. The definition of art materializes within its temporal inscription in the mind of the perceiver. To modify Badiou's love truth towards art, would be seeing the trace of work of art and the spectator as composing an artistic subject that, through immanent difference between its constituting parts, infinitely formalizes something previously unknown about the universe. The moment of love declaration is similar to the declaration of spectator about existence of art. An individual subject remains a subject insofar as it continues drawing consequences from the original declaration. Hence, the only art criticism possible is whether the individual affirmation of art really took place and if it is still there.

The thought of art is enacted by performance of an actress situating thus the constrains of what is art back to physical human being. She is you - your thought thinking art and your metaphysics. She is the embodiment, the caricature, the idea of imperfect thinking and the impossibility of the thought as a whole. She is not you - she is performing for you

¹ Okwui Enwezor. "The Black Box". *Documenta 11, Platform 5 Exhibition Catalogue*. 2002.

² Alain Badiou. *L'Etre et l'évenement*, p. 374.

your performative act of understanding. She is a pure description rather than explanation, perception rather than recognition, an embodiment of the *first literal meaning* of the work. I propose to think of this notion in a narrow terms Davidson devised for his truth-theoretical project. The interpreter for Davidson is “someone who understand the utterances of another”³. In art world the interpreter is often someone engaged in the “legitimate function of paraphrase. [...] The critic tries to make his own art easier or more transparent in some respect than the original, but at the same time he tries to reproduce in others some of the effects the original had on him.”⁴ These are the literal first interpretation as understanding, and the secondary interpretation. In critical literature on art, it is often spoken in a manner of the secondary interpretations; however, it is the primary understanding that is salient. Following the analogy of interpretation, there are different sorts of meanings one could talk about in respect to art. The literal meaning would refer to what the work actually *does* mean, and not to “whatever force or significance the speaker may want the interpreter to phantom”.⁵ In aesthetics today there is no consensus on whether such literal meaning of the work exists, and the notion of interpretation is thought about in a single sway. *The Lemon Emigrant* is not illustrating the need for more specific study of meaning and interpretation in art, but is presenting it as its own body. “While we cannot deny that works can bear *meanings*, it does not follow that there is such a thing as *the meaning* of the work,”⁶ whereas *The Lemon Emigrant* is literally inscribed with the first meaning. The similar argument could be drawn for the artist’s intensions (against traditional ‘fallacies’). The confusion is due to a failure to notice that artist’s *first* intension is still the literal meaning even if they are meant ironically, metaphorically and so forth. What artist intends the interpreter to perceive first of all is literally ‘given’ in a work. The rest of the possible intentions are build upon it and are not conceptually related to the first one:

I conclude that it is not an accidental feature of language that the ulterior purpose of an utterance and its literal meaning are independent, in the case that the latter can not be derived from the former: it is of the essence of language.⁷

Davidson calls this feature *the autonomy of meaning*.⁸ *The Lemon Emigrant* is performing the autonomy of the first meaning, demarcating thus the boundaries of art. It exposes the

³ Donald Davidson. “Communication and Convention.” *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 157.

⁴ Donald Davidson. “What metaphors mean.” In: LePore, Ernest, ed., *Truth and Interpretation. Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, 1987, p. 264.

⁵ Donald Davidson. *Truth and Predication*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2005, p. 53.

⁶ Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005, p. 328.

⁷ Donald Davidson. “Communication and Convention.” *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 274.

literal meaning for perception, which is still lacking any possibility of recognition. When the meaning 'lifts a hat' as an old friend - that is when the book is closing up and the existence of the work of art is a phantom of the past, but from now on of your past. It seems as interesting notion for understanding art, since it gives an indication of the possible nature of autonomy and its restrictions.

The emphasis that *The Lemon Emigrant* places on hybridity of the fractioned traveling knowledge within totalizing course of understanding is a model for assimilation of the (cultural) diversity in its totality within art. The immediate data of consciousness that Henri Bergson thought of as the *duration*, is not understood in familiar terms of temporality based on causality. Whereas time is homogeneous unity that can be divided and counted, the duration is heterogeneous and undividable, it is a time as experienced by our consciousness. Our experience of the multiplicity of the world is not dividable, but is rather essentially continuous and total. In *The Lemon Emigrant* the endless flow of hybrid fragments is already totalized within actress's mind and is preformed as unfolding of the single thought-course. As an enactment of artistic perception she is flouting in the space searching for a contact and eventually erupting 'the meanings'.

Symbols and points of view, therefore, place me outside him [any object of inquiry, here a person]; they give me only what he has in common with others, and not what belongs to him and to him alone. But that which is properly himself, that which constitutes his essence, cannot be perceived from without, being internal by definition, nor be expressed by symbols, being incommensurable with everything else. Description, history and analysis leave me here in the relative. Coincidence with the person himself would alone give me the absolute.⁹

The method of intuition for Bergson - a manner of entering *into* a thing - gives a possibility absolute knowledge. Only by establishing the intuitive contact with the actress will she reveal fragments of the duration, which could be then be tied together. Thus the common analytical approach, which is practical, does not lead to the understanding of the essence of neither life nor art. Here is the concept of autonomy that goes beyond the literal meaning and is claiming the realm of absolute.

Installation is a condition of contemporary art, according to Peter Osborne, that secures autonomy of the artwork. Miwon Kwon conceptualizes the contemporary notion of the "site" of the artwork as discursive formation or cultural space¹⁰ For Osborne, such dissipated conception of site-specify requires a "staged presentations of its material markers - installations - in order to achieve actuality as art. Such installations restore physical constrains of the literal cite (place), however temporally [...]".¹¹ Installation is thus a form in which art is

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Henri Bergson. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 4.

¹⁰ Miwon Kwon. "One Place after another: notes of the Site Specificity". *October* Vol.80. Spring, 1997, 85-110.

¹¹ Peter Osborne. "Installation, Performance, or What?". *Oxford Art Journal: On Installation*. Vol.24/2, 2001, 153.

offered to the spectator *as* art; installation here secures art's autonomy and the specific understanding. The autonomy is necessarily performed as such. The actress has collected around herself the "place qua non-place" of the contemporary art, where she enacts the instantiation of the art-idea. Although *The Lemon Emigrant* is staged in the white cube, it is not the 'hysterical' cube that is conceptualized by the discourse on globalization, whereby the objects of art are necessarily idolized, but in the white cube which is one with the work. The book has dissolved in the space of the exhibition into one singular *situation*. Unjustly forgotten John Dewey held that artistic understanding, or any other form of thinking, is proceeding from the situation that has qualitative unity underlying it. The unifying quality of the work of art demarcates itself from the rest of the world and present the situation as such for the thought. The white cube is insignificant, it exists in art's absence and not in a place near to it.

Concluding I will refer to Roger Buergel in *Beyond Identity and Difference*. Buergel tells how his attention in curating shifted from the work of art towards the audience. He became less interested in forms of discourse in artistic practices, and more in a way how people actually perceive the exhibition. Buergel recalls Heidegger's metaphor on pottery. Potter is giving void a shape, thus initiating the process of subjectification. Buergel introduces void as metaphorical alternative for the failed identity of the middle-class. "At one point we have to stop to theorize and try to experiment with models. To provide the alternative for people who still think that identity is something they need".¹² What is important in his approach is that although depending solely on theory it shifts the accent to the perception of art, granting autonomy not to the artwork, or the spectator, but to the certain relation *to* art. I am not convinced that we really need a new theory to do that, perhaps the pointing out of a problem as *The Lemon Emigrant* does, and insisting on certain artistic literacy is what indeed is needed.

¹² Roger Buergel. *Beyond Identity and Difference*. Lecture at the "Eindhoven Caucus" 11.11.07 at the *Van Abbe Museum*, Eindhoven, The Netherlands.

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