The Challenges of Contemporary Art, Aesthetics, and Society within Pandemic 2020

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ABSTRACT

This article is dedicated to the specific questions of the global change of cultural paradigms and cultural movements. "The Challenges of Contemporary Art, Aesthetics, and Society within Pandemic 2020" is an opportunity to reflect upon the importance of contemporary aesthetics, arts, and social problems related not only to the digitalization and globalization aspects but also to the change of the understanding of the reality in the context of Pandemic 2020 and the global brand — new experience of lockdown.

The main challenges of contemporary aesthetics, culture, and society are relationships between the relation of reality and virtuality and between digitalization and the art world and aesthetics. These relationships raise a question upon popular mainstreams, their influence on contemporary arts, and the possibility to keep the classic notions of aesthetics. Additionally, this article helps to maintain the drastic change in the whole world's social structure. It gives a theoretical explanation and systematization for a clearer understanding of current aesthetic terms "beauty" and "sublime" as trends and correlations. As well as introduces a specific change in cultural paradigm because of the Pandemic and sharply developing integration of virtuality into the modern culture.

KEYWORDS
Contemporary aesthetics, digitalization, pandemic 2020, beauty, sublime

INTRODUCTION

The Global Pandemic 2020[1] is associated with mass depression.[2] It relates to the modern self-criticism, optimistic nihilism from Millenials, gen Z, Y, sarcastic virtual performances, and despite the brand-new 21st-century self-isolation or lockdown expe-

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1   The declaration of a global health emergency was on 30th January 2020, when the WHO announced the outbreak of COVID-19 as a Global Public Health Emergency and issued coordinations for Temporary Safety Recommendations.

2   Many types of research related to the COVID-19 and mental health signified that natural disasters, such as wars, pandemics, and other mass traumas, increase the population-wide psychological distress. The recent study published in JAMA Network Open describes how months of self-isolation and lockdown can cause anxiety, fear, sadness, depression, and

rience,[3] it is not as diverse as it seems. The thing is, our cultural-historical process's narrative has the same issues civilizations had back in Ancient Times, Medievals, Modern, and the current — Post-modern period. The only difference is that the 2000s boom of social media in 20 years has become the most significant and conflicting phenomena linked with globalization issues. That is why the question about what digital art and media in contemporary culture are challenging but essential for new mainstreams of aesthetics, especially within the Pandemic 2020.

RELATIONS & AESTHETICS

In the context of the 2000s digitalization boom, it is crucial to refer to the term "relational aesthetics" created by curator Nicolas Bourriaud, which means that relational aesthetics is understood as an experiment to describe the tendency of 90ties art and artists and the tendency to create art based or inspired mainly through human relations and social context.[4] In other words, it means that art transferred itself into the relation programs in different types and models that allow humans to interact with specific functionality and experiences. Therefore, the artwork since the 90ties is not just a form or media represented by the artist, but also is a functional model, which shows that the question about the dimension[5] is not as important as it was before the 90ties. Consequently, if we accept that the extent, size, or measurement is not essential within contemporary aesthetics, we can free aesthetics from the distinction between digital media and art and „real" (touchable) art. It signifies that technology's influence on contemporary (its age) art always follows setting up borders by technology and its borderlines with real and imaginary (virtual).[6]

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suicidal thoughts. Additionally, according to recent studies, 8,5% of adults experience vital signs of depression, including the feeling of hopelessness, loss of interest in things that generally bring joy, low energy, insomnia, and trouble concentrating. Thus, here is a stated general statement about the global experiences of new restrictions and control of humans freedom that affect the overall analysis of the situation.

3   Currently, referring to the situation in February 2021, the world has experienced around 2 to 3 lockdowns or shutdowns or stay-at-home orders. According to the Re-open European Union official resource of the health situation in European countries and is based on collected data from ECDC — European Center for Disease Prevention and Control — from 15th March 2020 to the end of May/ beginning of June 2020, about half of the world's population was under the strict lockdown, that caused "mass trauma" according to Ed Prideaux.

4   N.BOURRIOUD, *Relational Aesthetics,* transl. S.PLEASANCE & F. WOODS, Dijon: Les Presse Du Reel, 2002, pp.68–70.

5   Here is mentioned an idea that for contemporary art and aesthetics such formal discussions like the discussion about the dimension of artwork, size, extent, measurement, capacity, volume, and many other related to classic formalistic aesthetics questions is not as important as it was before 90ties due to the impetuous development of technologies and their assimilation into the everyday practices, both scientific and artistic.

6   N.BOURRIAUD, *Relational Aesthetics,* transl. S.Pleasance & F. Woods, Dijon: Les Presse Du Reel, 2002, pp.68–70.

First of all, *contemporary understanding* of art as a functional model can be defined as individual artists' unique ability to give formal expression to imaginative thought.[7] Digitalization as a tool, which on the one hand is used at the final stages — when the artwork is viewed on a digital platform or electronic apparatus or, on the other hand, is the prominent artists' instrument, e.q., specific art program or software. In the context of 2020 — the critical year for the celebration of digitalization (since only with the help of digital tools survived general communication, therefore, also, social and cultural experiences) — represents the lack of the difference between digitally created art and non-digitally created art because the only available tool for artwork representation was entirely digital.

Secondly, other global emotional experiences like "fear" and "angst," and the aesthetic experiences like "terrifying sublime" or "beauty of catastrophe," for instance, the "Beirut blast," that happened on 4th August, have triggered the art-world to create artworks that let us experience "terrifying sublime" and give us an understanding of absolute "beauty" in it. Historically, in the nearest past, we already had such experience with the help of street art. Let us pay particular attention to the famous British street artist Banksy (1973-now), whose artworks back in 2016 caused a discussion on whether street art is a crime, grime, or sublime?[8] Furthermore, the debate is not about the graffiti movement or discussion about painted tags and artworks from the property owner's viewpoints or the conservative perspective. The worth of attention is how he used digital tools to achieve his goal — to make, globally, society speaks on essential topics such as freedom, the war in Palestine, for instance, graffiti paintings such as "Er...Sorry" on West Bank Barrier or "Dove of peace," society classification, violence, and many other topics. Of course, without digitalization, he could not achieve this goal because, without these tools, his paintings would not give the same aesthetic perception. That is, without digitals, his paintings would not be experienced as the artworks. Moreover, his paintings would be experienced in the same way that simple vandalism collaborates in every urban space, suburb, or criminal district.

Before describing the correlation between social events and aesthetic concepts of "beautiful" and "sublime," one specific topic must be discussed — the relations between object, space, time, or locations. The struggle of space and time, how some of the digitalization processes ruin the artworks, despite accepting the movement against the "fitting" and categorizing artwork into real and virtual, digital and non-digital, and avoiding the dimension of the dimension possible only theoretically, is real. The fitting into the digital platforms', for example, for large-scale paintings, locks the possibility to experience the massiveness of the artwork due to the desktop's size or resolution. Meanwhile, a similar struggle can be related to the fully digital works and usually happens when fully digital works should be exhibited in museums or galleries. For example, printing the grid of Instagram does not make the same aesthetic pleasure, or by exhibiting the VR created game or movie, then showing it on the walls or large scale screens, erase the beauty of the HD elements, and so on.

7   L.TRESP, *Digital Art,* The Chicago School of Media Theory, 2020. Available online at https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/digital-art/ [Accessed: 13.12.2020]

8   B. BETHAN, *Street art: Crime, grime or sublime?* BBC News, 16th December 2016. Available online at https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-38316852 [Accessed: 13.12.2020]

Despite the drastic change of cultural and social life in 2020, the art world proved that art is a continual self-developing socio-cultural phenomenon that survives under any circumstances. The more valuable are becoming beginnings to shorten the borders between real and virtual. Therefore, creating more and more real virtuality and integrating virtuality features into the reality routine.

For example, some recent world-famous exhibitions like in the United States Nancy Baker Cahill's augmented-reality works were freeing public monuments from the ideology of control with AR and VR non-strictly-physical experiences artworks the name of "Liberty Bell" (2020),[9] or virtual reality art installation such as "Artificial Tears VR" by Evelyn Bencicova.[10] VR and AR art practices are becoming popular and maintain a high level of professionality in the United States and Europe.[11]

When the present is experiencing and discussing dozens of anxiety and fear-causing events, the question about the future and its visualization comes forward because the existential struggle and questioning of human beings' general existence and purpose is an infinite topic for philosophers, theologists, artists, and musicians, writers, and poets. Moreover, the questioning of "why" and "what for humans live" is coming almost from every child at school. In nowadays, when more critical than caused "state of threat" are issues with Global World pollution, and when the ecology is struggling, animals and human beings are dying; many flora and fauna species are extinct at every corner of the world; the fear of the void in the future is moving artists to reflect upon the possible future. In consequence, artists create augmented reality that expresses itself through the artworks and art practices that combine the virtual in real together, like the art project realized in Latvia called *#seminafuturi*, which was both exhibited in reality as a part of Sculpture Quadrennial Riga, and as well as available in virtual reality.[12]

As we can see, social situations do influence artists to move forward. The attendance of contemporary art to create relations between human beings and interreact with virtuality has been dramatically evaluated with the help of global changes in a daily routine and accessibility of entertainment. Additionally, to the relation between the progress of art, technology, and social circumstances, the relation between the social factors and the notions of "beautiful" and "sublime" can be represented with the help of five selected correlations of concepts "beautiful" and "sublime" that signify that despite dozens of discussions upon aesthetics and art-world related topics, can describe basic rules of aesthetic experience, and, therefore, of art.[13]

9   E.WILK, *Ghosts in the Machine,* Frieze No.214, October 2020, pp.80–85.
10   More about the Virtual Reality Art Installations are available online at https://www.ikono-space.com/blog/artificial-tears-vr [Accessed: 31.12.2020]
11   In Europe, the digitalization boom begins in 2020 with the help of VR platforms that provide online exhibition services, such as VR-All-Art, online exhibitions, and performances on different streams, 3HD Festivals, the Very First Virtual Art Prize (2020). With the adoption of technology in the same way as KAW's Companion (2020) — when mobile phone helps discover a series of new artworks from the artist in a real-life size while walking in the park. Alternatively, with the help of Instagram filters that allow adding 3D art elements to a person's room with the help of the smartphone.
12   L.BOĻŠAKOVA, *Semina Futuri*, 2020. Available online at https://seminafuturi.lv/en/ [Accessed: 20.12.2020]
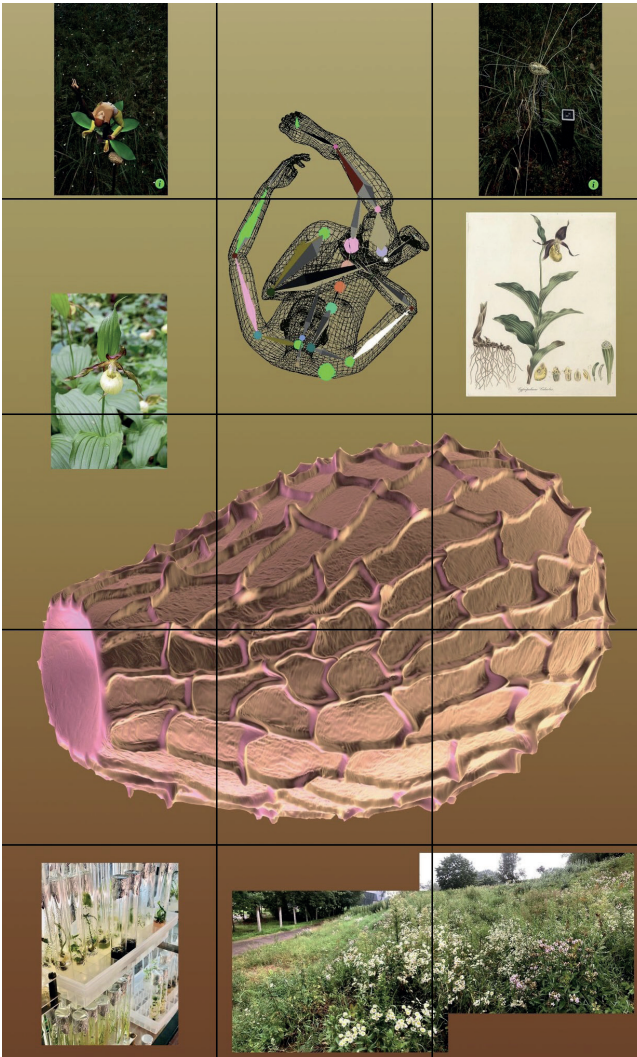13   P. BOURDIEU, *The Rules of Art*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019.

FIGURE 1: L.Boļšakova, *Semina futuri*, print-screen of artists Instagram blog, 2020[14]

RELATIONS OF BEAUTY AND SUBLIME

Regarding the correlations between aesthetic concepts, it is essential to mention that the concise description of assumption upon how aesthetic experience can be formulated. Shortly, aesthetic experience can be expressed in the formula: [aesthetic experience = x + y], where x is a concept of beauty, and y — the concept of sublime, can be applied within different contexts of cultural mainstreams, which further can help to understand the current socio-cultural paradigmatic change. Additionally, the added adjectives to "x" or "y" help maintain and analyze specific tendencies of art movements.

14   The print-screen captured from www.instagram.com/linda_bolsakova

Hereafter, the first correlation is between "easy beauty" and "natural sublime," which by its function is connected to the simple and common cultural aspects conducted and defined by contemporary society. This correlation explains means of terms that by "easy beauty," we understand something that pleases the senses and is accepted by society or has been set up by society, like the yearly choice of Pantone's color. Per Pantone's color choice sets the trends in architecture, paintings, magazine covers, fashion industry, and so on and on. So, when Pantone was "Living Coral 16–1546"[15] in 2019, almost all fashion and art magazines were full of photographs, commercials, illustrations in this color. The "Living Coral" pinkness" was overwhelming the content on blogging platforms, music videos, desktop savers, interior, home decor and clothing, and many other everyday aspects of daily routine. Thus the function of Pantone helps to formulate the understanding of the "easy beauty." Meanwhile, the "natural sublime" or "sublimity of nature" is connected to nature's magnitude and power. For instance, the artworks from the collaboration project "Timelines" (2019)[16] between Google Arts & Culture and Fabian Oefner created digitized landscapes in color for 2020 — "Classic Blue 19–4052"[17] — and became very popular and viral not only because of the responding and interpretation of the climate data but also because these artworks became popular as desktop wallpapers, social media posts.

Another correlation worth mentioning is common in contemporary arts — a correlation between "free beauty" and "dynamic sublime," which connects with the artist's free spirit to uninterrupted intention to create.[18] Whereas "free beauty" is understood in the freedom from formalistic characteristics of representation of beauty and the beautifulness of the artwork itself. While "dynamic sublimity" is referred to as the human experience of freedom from the object that is judged to be sublime and symbolically represents freedom, and functions as a compromise between the phenomenology of the natural sublime as a necessary condition for sublimity, thus being understood as a counterpoint for mental vibrations, and caused by them the experience of the freedom.[19] If we talk about examples, this correlation can be applied to understanding improvisations in visual, audial, performative, and other forms. For instance, the "dynamic sublime" and "free beauty" can be experienced in Morrocan

15 Pantone, *Color of the Year 2019: Living Coral 16–1546*. Available: https://www.pantone.com/articles/color-of-the-year/color-of-the-year-2019 [Accessed: 20.12.2020]

16 Studio Oefner, *Timlines*, 2019–2020. More information about this project and collaboration available online https://fabianoefner.com [Accessed 20.12.2020]; Additional reading related to this project D. Smyth, *Digitalised Landscapes: Heartbeat of the Earth*, Aesthetica, Issue 96, August/September 2020, pp 98–103.

17 Pantone, *Color of the Year 2020*. Available online https://www.pantone.com/articles/color-of-the-year/color-of-the-year-2020 [Accessed: 20.12.2020]

18 E.TILTA, *Function of Sublime and Beautiful in the Context of Contemporary Art Market,* abstract for VII International Forum for Doctoral Candidates in East European Art History organized by the Chair of East European Art History, Humbold-Universitaet uz Berlin, that was suspended due to COVID 19 crisis. Available online http://www.kunstgeschichte.hu-berlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Tilta-Evelina-paper-2020.pdf [Accessed: 22.12.2020]

19 U.ABACI, *Kant's Justified Dismissal of Artistic Sublimity*, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol.66, No.3 (Summer, 2008), pp.237–251

artist Ismail Zaidy's (known as L4artiste) "ʒaila" photography and video series, or Agnieszka Polska's computer-generated media work "The Demon's Brain," and many other works.[20]

One of the most important relating current article is the correlation between "dependent beauty" and "moral sublime," which can be adept within the social or political context when the artwork's function is to raise awareness or propaganda. The most remarkable example in the Eastern European area is Jozef Robakowski (born 1939) art, an originator of the Polish avant-garde, who analyzes the media's language and draws it from the tradition of Constructivism, as well as recording the absurdism of the communist reality. Also, his works are remarkable neo-avant-garde and neo-Dadaist approach. His famous work "Art is Power" (1985)[21] — the ritualistic transmission of military parades from Moscow's Red Square (on every anniversary of the October Revolution) on television as the primary material of his art, is used for deconstruction and reconstruction of totalitarian public spectacle. His approach of displaying totalitarian absurdity elevates the loftiness and drama of Communism and Fascism at the same time showing the strengths and weaknesses of the regimes.

Additional excellent example of "dependent beauty" and "moral sublime" is Katarzyna Kozyra's art projects, like "Looking for Jesus" (2014), which represents people with so-called Jerusalem syndrome. In contrast, beauty depends on the main symbol in the face of Jesus, and the moral sublimity comes out in the mental disorder, as well as many other artworks, including Goncharova's "Cyclist" and Tručilauskas "Adventure time — Finn meets his babe" discussed in text above.

The correlation between "formal beauty" and "mathematical sublime" nowadays is not related to the "formalistic" or "academic" aesthetics, but more to conceptualism and minimalism. A great example is the art project/ artwork titled "Activities with Dobromierz" (1972–1974/2008), by an artistic duo KwieKulik, which consists of Zofia Kulik Przemyslaw Kwiek, who tried to compare mathematical operations with operations on material forms in specific life situations. [22] In the context of lockdown and pandemic 2020 to this correlation between "formal beauty" and "mathematical sublime" can relate many aesthetically computerized art projects, starting with Markus Guschelbauers pastel-colored installations that represent humanity's desire to organize, define and control interaction with the environment; Alex Lysakowski's structural manipulations, and ending with the musical diagrams, and attendances not only compare but also combine musical (audial) artworks with visuals from the Matisse to Kandinsky, from Duchamp to Yves Klein.[23]

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20   The correlation between "free beauty" and "dynamic sublime" can be applied to almost all artworks. The mentioned examples are chosen to note because of their diversity in media and presentation.

21   Full information about artist and his works is available online http://video.wrocenter.pl/en/wideo/od-monumentu-do-marketu/sztuka-to-potega/ [Accessed: 19.12.2020]

22   T. ZALUSKI, *Z archiwum KwieKulik: Dzialnia z Dobromierzem i Stol z X-ami*, 2008. Available online: http://kulikzofia.pl/archiwum/tomasz-zaluski-z-archiwum-kwiekulik-dzialania-z-dobromierzem-i-stol-z-x-ami/ [Accessed: 23.12.2020]

23   And many other projects — the relation between audial and visual techniques are widespread in contemporary practice, beginning with visualizing musicians' live performanc-

The most challenging and exciting correlation is between "ugly beauty"[24] and "terrifying" or "tragic sublime"[25] because this connection is the most appropriate for reflections of contemporary artworks and the way the art is being represented nowadays. That is why, for instance, to understand "ugly beauty" and "terrifying sublime," particular attention should be paid to the triggering experiences of the terrifying sublimity and ugly or provoking beauty similar to the Notre Dame fire in April 2019 or the most recent tragic event — Beirut Blast on 4th August 2020.

According to these categorized five correlations between aesthetic concepts, understanding contemporary mainstream changes and aesthetics can be discussed.

MAINSTREAM CHANGES & AESTHETICS

One of the most specific aspects of digitalization processes and contemporary aesthetics is connected to the artwork understanding processes. The exact continuous change of trends and informational flows are creating such questions as is there any chance not only to get the aesthetic experience from the artwork but also understand the, for example, the experience of sublime? For the understanding of contemporary aesthetics, we can try to apply Bourdieu's model of "popular aesthetics" — the valuations that implicit in everyday practices of lower classes, are mostly the opposite of the so-named "pure" aesthetic judgment defined by Kant because they are based on immediate enjoyment, related to some established notions of perfection and practical interests, they are apparently non-autonomous and impure,[26] thus, for Kant — primitive.[27] For instance, if we pay particular attention to the Central and Eastern European culture in the past two years — the overwhelming informational flows, social and political dilemmas, tragic events and catastrophes, Global issues such as warming and pollution, and related to these questions, artworks, discussions, exhibitions are similar to modernist and post-modernist movement.[28] In other words, contemporary art continues the 20th century's practical and social interest in art.

es with the help of videography, for instance, at the rave parties, and ending with digitalized measurement of musical vibrations and representing them in computerized graphs.

24 U.ECO, *On Ugliness,* transl. A. McEwen, London: Maclehose Press, 2007, pp. 8–20.

25 E.BURKE, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful; with and Introductory Discourse Concerning Taste,* Project Gutenberg, Vol.1, Part I, pp. 101–122. Available online: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/15043/15043-h/15043-h.htm#APPENDIX [Accessed: 12.12.2020] as well as F.Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy or Hellenism and Pessimism,* Project Gutenberg, pp 102–113. Available online: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/51356/51356-h/51356-h.htm#FOREWORD_TO_RICHARD_WAGNER [Accessed: 15.12.2020]

26 R. SCHUSTERMAN, *Pierre Bourdieu, and Pragmatist Aesthetics: Between Practice and Experience,* New Literary History 46 (3), June 2015, pp. 435–457.

27 I.KANT, *Critique of Judgment,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp.24–26

28 A modernist and post-modernist art movement is related to the early 20th century until the beginning of the 21st century. It includes the assumption that more or fewer art styles and genres, even the abstract expressionism movement, kitsch, avant-garde, and

Despite this movement and relying on practical and social aspects, or, simply, util-itarian aspects of arts, it does not mean that aesthetics of Kantian purity can not be applied to contemporary artworks, both digital and non-digital. Kantian aesthetics or "pure aesthetics" lies in the conflict of interpretations and understandings within the historical background. We can not transfer any idea or theory from the past into current reality, but we can integrate it according to current social needs. Hence, on the one hand, yes — most contemporary artworks are based on practical interest and can be "barbarian" and "primitive" within the Kantian understanding. On the other hand, the contemporary culture has changed and, nowadays, being social and being in *socium* (both for individuals and artists, as well as for artworks and art itself) is as much important as the experience of romantic self-positioning towards majestic and grand tragic fate and circumstances (or contrasting own self with unfaithful destiny, the anger of gods, etc.). Moreover, the change of arts mainstream from imaginary to practical in the context of the ideology does not mean that we can not apply Kant's aesthetics, for instance, within the social art — art as a social system that consists of artistic expressions that aim at inspiring or provoking, or affecting social impact and change — which means that such "purely aesthetic" terms as "beauty" and "sublime" can be applied in the same sense.

Let's analyze contemporary social art within Kantian understanding, including, for example, such movements like "neo-primitivism," "abstract expressionism," "conceptualism," and other "isms" that are not barbarian from contemporaries per-ceiving. We can notice that it is more related to the Kantian understanding of art due to its' ethical and moral correlations that correlate with the term "sublime." The form of the artwork itself links to the notions of "beauty." That is, a lot of contemporary artworks by their purpose in Central and Eastern European countries are social. They are dedicated to the ceaseless amount of issues and problems connected to the past and present culture, beginning with the questions on post-colonialism, post-sovi-etism, changes in political regimes, human rights, women rights, LGBTQ rights, and ending with specific topics like war, genocide, natural disasters, industrial catastro-phes and terrorism, and so on and on. All these topics since modernity are being discussed through the art and represented in art and by the help of art the context of morality, which is represented within the understanding of "moral sublime," the eth-ical value of an artwork, and the representation of the idea/problem in combination

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conceptualism in audial and visual works, are connected and rely on practical, benefi-cial social interests of artists and viewers/listeners. Let us compare Rune Guneriussen's installations (born in 1977, in Norway, an artist related to the environmental art move-ment) and how they are exposed. We will see a similarity, for example, with the Dadaism movement, when the pretty obvious objects like, in Marcel Duchamp, readymade sculp-ture "Fountain." Alternatively, let us compare Benjamin Von Wong's (born in 1986, Cana-da, a photographer, artist, and activist related to environmental art movement) conceptu-al photography that raises awareness of environmental pollution with Roman Vishniac's (a Russian born American, 1897–1990) photography that represents the Jewish life in East-ern Europe between WWI and WWII. We will see that both photographers represent radi-cally diverse social dimensions. In contrast, the ones are experiencing their most produc-tive, successful business performance, rich lives, and the others are struggling of political regime and pollution that aggressively destroys lands.

with formalistic understating of beautifulness — which is based on important social trends and understandings of contemporary society.[29] For instance, the contemporary beautiful is ugly, but it is still beautiful because, since Modernism, an artwork's goal is not to please but rather provoke.[30] Consequently, even the ugly or disgusting could be regarded by artists and art lovers as equally or more important than beauty, meanwhile it still has its aesthetic principles.

For instance, let us compare Tadas Tručilauskas (Lithuania) painting "Adventure Time — Finn meets his babe" (2016, acrylic on tent-cloth, 130×97cm) with Natalia Goncharova's (Russia — USSR, 1881–1962) "Cyclist" (1913, oil on canvas, 79×105cm).[31] Both artists represent the fear of inevitability and experience hardship actual for society and represent the so-called "moral sublime" and understanding of "dependent beauty" by time.

The representation of inevitability and hardship in Natalia Goncharova's painting, the bicycle, and the cyclists' movement show how time and activity perceive men of environmental and social backgrounds. The painting "Cyclist" is not only one of the best examples of the Russian futurism movement but also has important symbolic meanings that were achieved through the repetitive elements and fragments, doubling of the contours, that creates the moving effect; the choice of the main character — cyclist — is ideally settled in the middle of the canvas, he is not having specific

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29 For instance, according to the social data analysis, the concept of beauty in 2020 is connected not only to the Beauty market & market analysis but also to the social problems, beginning with mental self-esteem problems, unfiltered beauty, and skin-activism, ending with the holistic experiences, that help people to feel empowered by their selves, which include such understanding as "mind beauty," "beautifulness of environment," "beautifulness of the soul," and so on and on. Popular became a trend towards "ugly being beautiful" as a protest for mass culture stereotypes on human bodies, social behaviors, gender roles, rape culture, etc. All these social understandings and interpretations of social concepts are currently represented in many digital, printed, and exhibited materials. For example, the BLM movement caused a resonance in Central Europe as well, exhibitions like "Paradise Edict" by Michel Armitage in the Haus der Kunst, Staedel Museum in Frankfurt exhibition "Back to Present," a retrospective of Frank Walter's works in MMK Frankfurt, and a lot of printed and digital articles dedicated not only to the BLM movement but also to the beautifulness and acceptance of the African roots — ongoing photography series by Akinbode Akinbiyi "African Quarter," Nana Yaw Oduro "Body as Performance" photo series published Aesthetica Issue 95, June/July 2020, Yannis Davy Guibinga "Vivid Depiction" series in Aeshtetica, Issue 96, August/September 2020, Maimouna Guerresi impressive presentation of a radical rethinking of humanity and the environment called "Symbols from Nature," and many other stunning works that were exhibited and published in 2020.

30 R.CLEWIS, *Greenberg, Kant, and Aesthetic Judgments of Modernist Art,* Canadian Aesthetics Journal, Vol. 4, Fall, 2008.

31 The choice of artworks is made upon personal experience at the Novaya Tretyakovskaya Gallery, the exhibition dedicated to the 100 years celebration of the Museum of Painting Gallery, back in January 2020, and attendance at the 10th Art Fair in Vilnius, where the paintings of Tadas Tručilauskas have been exposed. Both works provoked similar aesthetic experiences and were chosen to analyze "beauty" and "sublime" both from historical and aesthetic viewpoints.

FIGURE 2: N. Goncharova "Cyclist," oil on canvas, 79×105cm, 1913[32]

face characteristics, wears common dark-grey trousers, brown shirt and cap, he is the average that time town citizen, without individuality, just a cyclist from a mass. His body position is bent over the wheel; he frantically pedals the bicycle, like he is in a rush and does not catch the time. The background elements of painting like road paving stones are painted in the form of repeating round spheres; it makes feeling that thin wheels seem to get stuck in it, such symbols like beer, hat, windows, the names — silk, hat, t.402 (the tractor model), represent the informational flow — propaganda posters, commercials, store windows, etc., as well as the main idea of the futurism, which is the idea of the dynamics of the century.

Young Lithuanian artist Tadas Tručilauskas artwork represents the brainwashing by the culture industry since early childhood. The artist's attendance to catch when one of the famous cartoon characters — Finn, from Adventure Time, meets his babe at the time when a nuclear blast happens. They both are staring at it and enjoying the state of being called *dasein*.[33] The painting is inspired by the Stuckism movement and neo-pop art and is full of familiar symbols like logos: CN (cartoon network), obey, some graffiti type words; movement symbols: wheels, bullets, shadows of animals and strangers, moving streets and walls. The main character — a young girl with a wise and depressed

32 Третьковская галерея, *Авангард. Список Но.1 к 100 летию Музея живописной культуры*, Новая Третьяковка, Москва: Государственная Третьяковская галерея, 2019, стр.99
33 Details of painting and the idea were described by artist.

FIGURE 3: T. Tručilauskas "Adventure time — Finn meets his babe," acrylic on tent-cloth, 130×97cm, 2016[34]

facial expression, is standing and staring directly into the viewers' eyes; meanwhile, cartoon character Finn stares at her with the face of blessing and divinity. Both characters are the only objects that are not in the movement. They are at this space and time for the first and the last time, like they are experiencing calmness from the uninterrupted running world and its problems for the very first and the last time.

Both artworks were chosen due to their similarity and diversity at the same time. Artistic techniques in both works provoke the art lovers with a pretty darkish choice of colors — all shades of blue, grey, brown, black. The brushes' movement is chaotic and repetitive in both paintings, and the background represents the fear of time with a slight difference. We can suppose that Goncahrova's painting represents fear of not catching the time and being on time, rather than in Tručilauskas work. In Tručilauskas case, it represents the tiredness of catching the time since childhood and the final state of fatal pleasure experience of the final being in the moment. Videlicet,

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34   T. TRAUČILAUSKAS, *Adventure time — Finn meets his babe,* 2016. Private archive, painting received via e-mail in jpg. format

both artworks represent the Kantian notion of moral "sublime," moreover, in both artworks, we clearly can see the ethical value, the representation of the idea/problem (in this case, trepidation of certainty and affliction of time) in combination with formalistic understating of beautifulness — which is based on critical social trends and understandings of contemporary society.

Which means that further, different essential topics, ideas, problems, and fears that can be understood as social trends have further understanding and appreciation of beauty both in the context of the ideology or in the aspects of art expressions and experiences. However, despite it still, the basic structure of beauty and sublime notions in contemporary art is the same.

The art as a thing itself still has its function that, in general, is not entirely changing; it has the same structural background but with different expressions and experiences. Also, it is important to mention that art function has a different purpose within the discussion about mainstream changes — if "pure" aesthetic artworks were supposed to evoke the experience of beauty, since Modernism's purpose of beauty. Sublime is to invite humans to reflect upon life, present reality from new and unexpected angles, touch the human being, and move it towards the action. That is why we clearly can see that art, same as people, is a structured and complicated system, constructed for communication, that correlates with the real environment and can not exist without or outside it. The great example of this correlation we can see within the current 2020 situation, that created a reality that relates to many fictions works like Orwell's 1984, Huxley's Brave New World, movies like Wall-e (2008) or Twelve Monkeys (1995) and many other representations of current culture and civilization apocalypses.[35]

It is essential to mention that the representations of such topics like "end of the world," "end of the freedom," "catastrophic death of civilization" have been maintained in the mainstream since the early 1990s to early 2000s when the mass culture was fully filled with catastrophic Hollywood movies, BBC documentaries, the informational "junk" from History Chanel. Everyone knows that, in post-USSR countries, television, books, movies, music videos, and popular music was also into the trend of speculation about the "end of the world," "zombie apocalypse," and fictional hopes for a happy ending. The 2000s digital boom represented the basic ideology of "Big Brother" and reflection on life like on a theatre. This 2000s boom can be connected with the hysterical mass observation addiction and so-called "spectacle" society.

THE "NEW" SCREEN ERA

Back in 1967, Guy Debord already critiqued the global social praxis split up into reality and image.[36] Nowadays, the split up between reality and pictures is shorter, and, as life in 2020–2021 signified, the gap is even smaller. An individual can not follow

35 E. SACKS, *Creators of dystopian sci-fi are as shocked by the events of 2020 a you are*, NBC News, 13st October 2020. Available: https://www.nbcnews.com/pop-culture/movies/creators-dystopian-sci-fi-are-shocked-events-2020-you-are-n1245213 [Accessed: 29.12.2020]

36 G. DEBORD, *Society of the Spectacle,* Detroit: Black & Red, 1983, 212–221.

the line of all the imaginary and real social affections and trends, which means he/she, for example, can completely remember and experience happenings in the United States, and not experience anything at all in real space, for instance, a small village in Poland. In consequence, 2020 showed us that despite being locked in one household, the effects of BLM protests, Middle East protests, CEE protests on LGBTQ and women rights in Poland, president elections in Belorussia, protests against Covid-19 restrictions. Ignorance of human rights in Germany, the Czech Republic, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Serbia, Latvia, and many other countries, signify that globalization, with the help of manipulation through digitalization, transferred culture irrevocably. Furthermore, contemporary art is showing this change.

The art within the globalization and with help from digitalization reflects the trend changes of informational chaos mainstreams. It is developing faster than expected, despite the unpleasant financial situation in the art market. After the spring 2020 lockdown, most art studios, museums, exhibitions, concerts, festivals, and other related to the "real life" contemporary art social constructs and facilities remained closed for real visiting but opened in virtuality. Which showed that despite the mass financial loss of up to 70% of the yearly budget or even bankruptcy for important for contemporary art facilities and organizations,[37] the adjustment to the new social life — distancing, isolation, loss of freedom in movements and gatherings — signified that in the sum art market (that includes sales and costs of performance) hardly can survive, but survives.[38] According to the Art market report in autumn 2020 had a fall in total auction sales within all art market categories — postwar & contemporary art –85%, impressionist & modern -88%, Asian modern & contemporary –50%, and for old masters, –87%, which means that the overall sell-through rate is on 58% in comparison with 2019, and YOY[39] change fall is 24%.[40] This data signifies that it is not as useful in praxis for the art market and art world despite the mainstream of mass digitalization as it is for entertainment for individuals. Accordingly, we can accept that in 2020 it is not developed for an outstanding performance of artworks both for aesthetic experiencing and market.[41]

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37   A. SAVITCH-LEW — E. DVORKIN — L. GALLAGHER, *Art in the time of Coronavirus: NYC's Small Arts Organizations Fighting for Survival,* Center for an Urban Future, April 2020. Available online: https://nycfuture.org/research/art-in-the-time-of-coronavirus [Accessed: 13.12.2020]

38   A. BRADY, *"One of the most shocking, tumultuous years on record": art market figures reflect on 2020 — and guess at what 2021 might hold*, The Art Newspaper, 25th Novemebr 2020. Available online: https://www.theartnewspaper.com/analysis/what-they-said-the-art-market-in-2020-and-2021 [Acessed: 20.12.2020]

39   Regarding the art market, YOY or Year-Over-Year is a habitually used financial tool/comparison when two or more quantifiable events are juxtaposed on an annual basis. With the help of YOY performance, the company's financial performance or overall market sector can be seen. For example, whether it is financially improving, keeps static, or is aggravating.

40   Mutual Art, *Art Market Data — Last 12 Months,* fine art & decorative art, updated 19th December 2020. Available online: https://www.mutualart.com/Analysis [Accessed: 19.12.2020]

41   Here is mentioned the low quality of online exhibitions and virtual tours in museums and galleries, which are distracting for aesthetic experience and, thus, for artwork evaluation.

Still, on the contrary to the numbers mentioned above, the aesthetic experiences were available, even though they probably could not be understood at that moment. In other words, sill, despite all the formalistic and theoretical complaints on the relation between digital and art, the categorization conflicts between documentary art and fine art (yes, this discussion still exists) proved that humans could experience the beautiful and sublime of a concrete artwork, despite disregard whether it is pleasing or provoking, what medium was used, whether it is virtual or real. This finding implies that humans still can feel the tremble from Aivazovsky's paintings of the Black Sea without going to the Tretyakovskaya Gallery. Because art is imagination, it causes the aesthetic experiences in the individual if it catches the interest.

For visuals similarly as to music, it does not make any sense whether it is a real-time live performance of Mahler's symphony or vinyl recording, or YouTube video, because the idea and the instruments used to achieve it, like dramatism, causing fear amplitudes of the sound frequencies, tragical dissonances, and the overall message of the artwork is sent to the auditory and received by the audience. Therefore, the most critical question is contemporary art and its necessity of contemporary abstract aesthetics that do not struggle with classification and categorization issues like the "classic" aesthetics do. Because for both digital and non-digital artworks the same as with ancient artworks and contemporaries, fictional or documentary artwork, functions of beauty and sublime correlate in the same way. For instance, currently, beauty can be both — provoking and pleasing. Meanwhile, sublime is giving the feelings and experiences that cause thinking processes and reflection upon fundamental problems.

In a generally reflected conclusion, a philosophical inquiry on the concept of contemporary culture is needed. Regarding the famous words by Friedrich Nietzsche:

> *"Our modern culture is not a living thing… it is not an authentic culture at all but only a kind of knowledge of culture… we moderns have nothing of our own; only by replenishing and cramming ourselves with the ages, customs, arts, philosophies, religions, discoveries of others do we become anything worthy of notice."*[42]

In the current situation, digital tools technologies and digital or digitalized content became the only possible communication between individuals, the superior available cultural, social, and aesthetic experience. In other words, the Pandemic fastened the integration of digitalization into the everyday routine, even in those spheres where integration was delayed for years. Digitalization, as the primary tool that manages the flow of the mainstream and inside changes, created a new reality. The integrations' main goal is not to integrate virtual into existence, but *vice versa* — to integrate reality

The only good quality aesthetic experience is possible with fully digital artwork like photography (not the photography of painting or sculpture because it changes the relation between artwork and space).

42 F. NIETZSCHE, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,* Untimely Meditations, ed. D. Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 11th printing, 2007, pp. 78–79.

into virtual.[43] This phenomenal global change in the digitalization processes — that not only maintain, create, and control the informational trend changes but also recreates an exceptional chance to experience sublimity and absolute beauty mentioned in aesthetics from the romanticism period. Currently, humanity is experiencing global anxiety, fear, and angst towards a destiny, additionally, social groups are split.[44] The distances between towns and countries became large again, and the borders are set up even within the European Union. And all these one-year changes help us understand and bring us back to the romanticism and Kantian vision of the "pure" aesthetics. In contrast, it is important to keep in mind, that the taste is not the main problem: the feelings expressed in poetry, grand-scale paintings and sculptures with natural or tragic motifs, pathetic understanding of human weakness towards the gods. Because both, romanticists and contemporaries, are experiencing through the art the un-descriptional global screaming silence and knowledge of human weakness, the understanding of coincidence power to ruin the whole civilization less than in one minute by taking away not only human life but also the entire historical artifacts.

In consequence, we can share the direct aesthetic experiences of happenings globally at the same time and space. Nevertheless, the perceiver is in another part of the world and reflect on historical events right now. Of course, such events as Beirut Blast entered the list of tragic events for the world like the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the Chernobyl disaster (that was very dreadful for CEE and CIS countries) in 1986, the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1991, or 9/11 in 2001 for the United States. The difference is that only nowadays since the "live stream" function was integrated into the most popular social platforms, the experience of the connection to tragic happenings or, on the contrary, happy events — like saving a child after the storm, are affecting not only specific nations and countries or privileged classes, but affect each human being, change the world and inspire art. This drastic mainstream change in digital evolution and integration into everyday lives allows humanity to experience and create the great symbols of human history that globally change the culture and development. This, actually, proves that art is constantly evolving, and by its changing processes, it helps humanity heal and survive. Art is the healer of society, that helps to get through the traumatizing events and accept reality, no matter whether it is digital or virtual.

Can we still relate to our contemporary culture's understanding as not a living thing, as not an authentic culture, and just a kind of knowledge of culture? Do we have nothing of our own? Do we still replenish and cram ourselves with ages, religions, philosophies, arts, and discoveries of others? Or maybe now, with the help of the specific change of cultural paradigm — the paradigm of integration of reality into virtuality rather than virtuality into reality — we become worthy of notice?

43 V. GUBTA, *Op-ed: The "Experience Economy" is dead driving a boom in virtual reality,* CNBC News, 27th August 2020, Available online: https://www.cnbc.com/2020/08/27/op-ed-death-of-the-experience-economy-gives-rise-to-virtual-reality.html [Accessed: 16.12.2020]

44 I.BREMMER, *Welcome to the First Global Economic Depression of Our Lifetimes,* Time, 16th May 2020, Available online: https://time.com/5837442/first-global-depression-our-lifetimes/ [Accessed: 01.12.2020]