



What is Art?

Luca Guzzetti

When I entered *Rubbishmuseum* (2005) by Won Suk Han, I recognised the smell of tobacco, I touched some works of art made out of smoked cigarette butts, I appreciated the general atmosphere, probably because I'm a smoker even if it's almost four years since I stopped smoking (I used to smoke 50 cigarettes and 10 cigars a day).

Then I saw the cigarette butts pool: it was ready for welcoming the visitor, and I dived into it. I dived without any doubt that that was the right thing to do.

Often when you go to a contemporary art exhibition you have the problem to find out whether the piece of art in front of you is supposed to be touched and used, or just watched. It happens that being uncertain, you stand watching something with which you should bodily interact or, seldom, that you touch something which should just be looked at. In that studio in Factory 798, I was sure about the use of the cigarette pool, and I jumped into it.

Bracha and Akseli were as sure as me that that was the way to enjoy the work of art, and so they asked me to dive again, to record the action. We – Bracha, Akseli and me – enacted a performance, and Steffen filmed it and intervened, asking questions and commenting on it.

The immediate public of the performance was the rest of the Moving Mind group. Many of them had strong negative reactions against the performance. In my opinion, this happened because in their eyes we had perpetrated a double violation. The first, very serious violation was against art: With our performance we had physically and thus intellectually violated the sacred sphere of Art (and, possibly, also another sacred sphere, that of Private Property). But there was probably also a second, minor violation: With the jump, the body (of the group) was once again – after a long journey on the Trans-Siberian train – thrown, quite literally, into the rubbish: the dirt, the ashtray.

In a sense, I think that the discussion that followed the performance was pointless, if the question was whether I had the right to dive into the cigarettes pool: Won Suk Han, the Korean artist, who had created the *Rubbishmuseum* said – and showed – to be very happy of what had happend. And that, I think, should be enough.

But the discussion on our performance that continued all night long probably served as a sort of collective auto-conscience reflection, about art and about what we had been doing in the precedent week travelling across Europe and Asia.

Although a lot of good art is of course driven by different sentiments and experiences like despair, loneliness, depression, trauma etc., I think that joy, fun, laughter and especially enthusiasm, in its etymological sense of being possessed by a God, are crucial elements in art.

Although the question ‘What is art’ is fundamental for the contemporary conception of art, in my opinion, nor the artists nor the public need necessarily to answer such a question. I think that in the end art has to be practised, loved, lived and enjoyed, not just talked about. “It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental. (Ethics and Aesthetics are one and the same)... What we cannot speak about we must consign to silence” (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*).

the author

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