

**International Congress of Aesthetics 2007
“Aesthetics Bridging Cultures”**

**ART TOWARDS GLOBALISATION
PROCESSES**

*Piotr Jan Przybysz, University of Gdansk,
Poland*

All those who are engaged in the theme of globalisation assume that such process does exist and develops. The number of research works and publications on this subject matter has been larger and larger. Consequently, passing over the problem of globalisation in silence or chanting incantations, which would make it disappear, will not change anything in this respect. Since globalisation processes have become a threat for many and have been associated with anxiety and doubts, it is better, I think, to live with and in this process in an active way. Certainly, globalisation does not bring exclusively negative changes. A positive aspect is, for example, integration and unification of more advanced organisational and technological solutions disseminating among many nations and societies. This may lead to the improvement of the living standards and the quality of life.

1. Globalisation – origin of the notion

There are three basic approaches to the origins of globalisation. Representatives of the first approach say that globalisation is not anything new; its beginnings go back to the appearance of man. Today we have only to do with its acceleration and intensification (M. Waters and M. F. Guillén.¹ Those who associate globalisation with the expansion of European capitalism represent the second approach. Its distinctive features are common ordering of time according to the Gregorian calendar and seven-day week. This resulted in a universal way of organising time and space, which is of fundamental significance for the telecommunication and signalling systems. (M. Waters and M. F. Guillén). The third approach links the beginnings of globalisation with the turning point demarcated by the end of World War II. The development of the nuclear era and emancipation of colonies since that moment constitute the grounds for this approach.

At present this concept has been split into three aspects referred to as: „globalism”, „globality” and "globalisation". Globalism describes a process in which the global market forces out political games and supersedes them by economic rules. Globality refers to the awareness that such processes and their consequences do exist and function throughout the world. Whatever happens relates and influences our whole planet. Globalisation, to a high degree, is the process of forcing out national structures and institutions by supranational ones - this also touches the area of culture. The causative role in this case is played by the capital and the level of organisation and technology, which many a time, exceeds the possibilities of individual countries. Apart from these three terms there are

also the words such as: antiglobalism and alterglobalism as well as deglobalism and reglobalism. Antiglobalism is a reaction against and negation of the globalism and is an opposite to alterglobalism, which proposes alternative solutions. Deglobalism is founded on the belief that liquidation of all globalisation phenomena and processes is possible and effective. On the other hand, reglobalisation has been founded on the belief that all effects of globalisation may be removed. The characteristic feature of the phenomena described by these terms is that they do not neutralise one another, but they cross one another or go in parallel. Consequently, this feature of the globalisation phenomenon makes all these descriptive definitions equally valid, although they are so varied and different.

2. Globalisation – economic aspect

The changes that occurred in the economic dimensions of the functioning of the highly developed societies form the basic and original grounds for the globalisation processes. Specifically, these are the processes, which lead to the crossing over national, state and continental divisions by economic interests. The role of supranational co-ordination and integration has been increasing and a good example of this are, among others: EFTA - European Free Trade Association, OPEC – Oil Producing and Exporting Countries. The global distribution of labour has been intensified as well as the importance of supranational corporations such as Nissan, Toyota, Pepsi-Cola, McDonad's, General Motors. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank also play the dominant role. On one hand, these financial organisations supply tools for the capital groups funding these organisations to achieve their goals and, on the other hand, they promote recovery programs for the national economies suffering from crises, which - as Joseph E. Stieglitz in his book *Globalization and Its Discontents* says - to a decisive degree make these economies even more dependent on the international capital.² Noam Chomsky draws our attention to similar problems and warns against the dictatorship of the totalitarian corporations and also against "virtual government" of the financial markets.

3. Globalisation – political and cultural aspects

Globalisation in the area of politics is manifested in the establishment of the supranational political organisations where European Union is a good example. Common law systems - International Tribunal of Justice, institutions such as European Parliament and the Constitution at the stage of its preparation constitute the most relevant elements of this structure. These are also coalitions of the dominant powers (Seven Wealthiest Countries of the World – G7) or world international organisations (UN and its agencies such as: FAO, WHO, WTO, UNESCO, UNICEF).

Certainly, globalisation in the area of culture is associated with the dissemination, adaptation and consolidation, on the worldwide scale, of a certain system of values, standards, and styles of life for which consumerism makes up the basis. Intensification of consumption leads to the growth of the production. That process became one of the decisive causes for the highly developed societies to enter into the new organisational and structural stage, which is often referred to as the stage of societies of the consumer type. Up till then, industrial societies, characterised by the abundance of goods, were restructured into the post-industrial societies characterised by an excess of material

goods. Sales and consumption of this excess of goods became the basic question, that is why advertising, marketing and hectic use and replacement for another goods won a special place. This has had a tremendous impact on the changes in the hierarchies of values and social awareness and imposed a new network of social relations. What is more, the axiological system, which determined the direction of aspirations and the hierarchy of values, being a heritage of the French Revolution (liberty, equality, justice and brotherhood), started to be forced out by another one, more coherent with the occurring transformations. First of all permissiveness which is a degenerated version of the concept of tolerance as it constitutes a consent for going too far, acceptance and tolerance of the behaviour, which up till not long ago was blameworthy, unacceptable and condemned. Secondly, total diversity and unlimited pluralism, which offers a possibility to use liberty into an infinite number of ways under an assumption that each way is equally good. This results in "nomadism"³ or, in other words, in travelling across a variety of roads to use one's own liberty where man feels no attachment with any of these roads and does not subject any of these routes to a critical judgement. This leads to a feeling of a lack of roots and to the treatment of reality not in terms of a challenge, but in terms of a kaleidoscope of ever changing opportunities one can enjoy. Thirdly, unconstrained freedom of choices and principles of behaving where the freedom within this social structure is apparent, formed by the competing managers of the public opinion.

If I may use here the category of global mass consciousness I would say that it is fed with two basic myths. The first myth, at the level of this mass consciousness is that the more an individual may absorb, the more he is able to digest the food to reach for another food the happier and free he is. This way of thinking leads an ordinary consumer to a conclusion that the goal and sense of life is to experience successive and varied satisfactions, which should be immediate and intensive. The belief that one is totally independent and sovereign in making decisions and choices is the central point of this common mythology. This belief is an illusion because any choice is a response to the pressure of the universally dominant simulacra. The selection of what should appease the hunger for satisfactions. This is more a problem of developing the needs whose satisfaction ensures this pleasure. It is the advertisements, television, cinema and politics, among other, which suggest and generate the domain of needs in the mass conscience.

Hedonism remains in a clear and open contradiction to the concept of right, which is always sensitive and respectful for the Other. Maximization of pleasures in life leads to the neutralisation of sensitiveness to the challenge of the presence of the Other. The myth of rigor, discipline, the myth of a kind of an asceticism, the myth of producing goods, their rational collection and economic use has been replaced with the hedonistic myth: enjoy delights and pleasures of life, satiate your need for various stimuli, which change at vertiginous speed, carnivalisation of life and treating both external and internal worlds as temporary and episodic. The myth of hedonism may be complemented with the myth of nomadism, which is a result of adopting a multi-rhizome concept of reality.

„At the level of mass conscience [...] this vagabondage assumes the form of a feverish pursuit for newer and newer stimuli, for an almost morbid mobility, for unbalanced stress and desires for thrills which should be more and more exciting, specially that every day mass media habituate to cruelty and violence. As there are not constant points, as the individual identity turns into a series of masks, poses and roles determined by current circumstances, as things serve to be consumed as quickly as possible and thrown into the dust-bin, as one becomes a kind of a tourist of one's own ground [...] as life is scattered

into fragments, dodging the traces of others and blurring one's own traces, rather than travelling with no destination in mind becomes almost a habit, although one tries to avoid the habits"⁴.

The myth of a hedonist and the myth of a nomad (vagabond) make up the main frames for the global mass conscience. They are not that much commonly met, but they are dominant. They function aside – parallel to the modernist myths; however, they are already going away and have smaller and smaller number of believers, while the others enjoy greater popularity and are followed by an overwhelming majority.

4. Art towards globalisation processes⁵

Art within the context of the common social conscience ceased to play its assigned role, i.e. ceased to embrace qualities and aesthetically valent values and elicit aesthetical feelings and experiences. The adopted obligatory aesthetical paradigm was forced out mainly as a result of avantguard art and, in particular, neo-avantguard art (happening, performance, body art, earth art, conceptual art). It became clear that the artist's workshop skills may be replaced by an act of selection form among ready-made artefacts or natural objects. Especially within the neo-avantguard, the meta-artistic reflection as to the essence, limits and function of art became more important than the creative process itself. Conceptualism decided to reduce art to the stage of an idea only, by promoting a belief, among others, that art is not for sale. The piece of art also underwent a deep modification. It no longer has to have any aesthetical values, what, by some artists, was believed to be a defect. On the other hand the structure should be left open and virtual, and, which would be the best solution, interactive, i.e. created together with the addressee. The artist himself may be a piece of art: his body, his created image or his life. Perceptual feelings, which in the contact with art were associated, in the long historical tradition, with contemplations and aesthetical experiences were simply questioned. Many contemporary theorists find that art is not to satisfy any aesthetical needs of its addressees. To the contrary, it should only attract attention, snatch away from the state of indifference, shock and break moral or customary taboo. The addressee is required to demonstrate competence and intellectual reflection. Consequently, art, which may be referred to as avantguard postmodernist art ceased to satisfy aesthetical needs and its area of influence is certainly not on the global scale. This trend of artistic activities may be opposed to product-oriented trend, where these products, on the one hand, satisfy aesthetical needs and, on the other, play a role of catharsis and compensation nature at a decidedly low and not complicated level. It should be accepted that the need for aesthetical experiences did not extinguish in man once art resigned from this paradigm. At present we have to do - partly due to the globalisation processes and dissemination of the consumer attitudes among the societies – with deaesthetisation of art and aesthetisation of every day life. The cause of this situation is the fact that stimulation and satisfaction, to a certain degree, of the aesthetical needs became a stimulus to increase consumption in the same way as it is in case of typical utilitarian needs. Increased consumption leads to the economic growth, its decrease leads to the falling trends, stagnation and crisis. Advertising, fashion, industrial product design have been playing more and more important role. Goods of every day use: cars, furniture, packaging of various products must not only be functional, practical and useful, but also beautiful. They should be beautifully designed, beautifully exhibited or beautifully advertised. The idea standing behind it is not that much to satisfy the needs, but to stimulate (provoke).

On the other hand, a phenomenon of anaesthesia, i.e. indifference of the addressee to aesthetical qualities has also been observed. The cause for this is saturation with qualities existing all around people in their every day lives. We may indicate three basic forms of cultural activities within consumer societies which enable to make good business by using qualities and values aesthetically valent. Firstly, tourism has been developing on a large scale within societies where people may enjoy a longer time for entertainment and larger amounts of money. Thanks to this situation people get into personal and direct contact with masterpieces of painting, sculpture, architecture and the beauty of wildlife: Niagara Falls, landscape of the Alps or Norwegian Fiords.

Secondly, mass events and sports performances. The mass events which, to a certain degree, represent some aesthetical values include: annual carnival in the streets of Rio de Janeiro, open air rock bands performances, religious processions, mass garden parties and picnics on the occasion of festivities, anniversaries and important events. They do not include all mass events, but only those which represent aesthetical values. The sports events which may be classified to this type of performances are: artistic ice skating, artistic gymnastics and horse-riding and, to the smaller degree, basketball or volleyball. Thirdly, the cult of the human body proposes the common and obligatory canon of the beauty of a young, healthy, athletic and cared for body. Indeed, from one hand this is well grounded within the context of the consumer society as such an appearance potentially promises consumption at a high level, both in terms of quantity and quality. On the other hand, however, this is intrinsically contradictory because the participation at the level of potential possibilities destructs the values of the beauty of the human body understood in this way. However, it is not difficult to notice popularity of the beauty contests organised for children, teenager-girls, unmarried women, married women, mothers-in-law or grandmothers. The complementary and supportive nature of this sphere of activities are Para artistic performances (aerobic), Para sports (body building) or Para medicine (some areas of plastic surgery and dentistry, aesthetical dermatology) which shape the aesthetical values of the human body.

Although the postmodernist avantguard art does not satisfy aesthetical needs this does not mean that no artistic means are used to satisfy them in the consumer society. Quite contrary, an unbelievable flourishing of various forms of popular, Para artistic and pseudo artistic art is being observed: phonographic industry production, video-clips, fashion shows, calendars, picture post cards, etc.

To conclude I would like to highlight the catharsis and compensation function of art. I think that it is commonly used in the film productions of a global extent. The problems of the catharsis and compensation function of art were the object of study conducted by such researchers as: Eric Bentley, Bohdan Dziemidok, Zygmunt Freud, Jane Harrison, Arnold Hauser, Yrjö Hirn, Arthur Koestler, Ernst Simon O. Lesser, Mark Markov, Edgar Morin, Stephen C. Pepper, Ivor A. Richards, Anthony Wallace and Lev Wygotski. Essential from our point of view is the analysis of influences and relations occurring between art and emotional sphere of the addressee with respect to his experiences of catharsis and their social relevance. Putting aside the question of disputes and inspirations we draw the attention to the basic elements of this concept. Firstly, it is commonly accepted that art may play the role of a catharsis and compensation nature because "it is able to efficiently satisfy such human needs, which guarantee internal balance and good frame of mind"⁶. „Catharsis” is understood here as a kind of a discharge and purification of psyche from

all experiences which disturb mental balance (as opposed to sublimation). This discharge is the basis to regain mental balance. This relates not only to the emotions and feelings which are generated in the course of a contact with a masterpiece, but also to the facts when the addressee reads a book, goes to a theatre or film performance. The catharsis function is complemented by the compensation function. Art offers the addressee an opportunity to experience emotions which every day life does not offer and which the addressee consciously or unconsciously needs. The basis for these options is the assumptions of Freud's psychoanalysis: firstly release of the patient's subdued feelings which leads to the discharge of stress and a feeling of relief; secondly, it is a human natural inclination to be free and released from tensions and excitements which brings a relief and a feeling of pleasure. Thirdly, mental health depends on maintaining a balance between the conscience and subconsciousness. Fourthly, imagined experiences may provide partial fulfilment of our desires and this is ensured by defensive mechanisms of identification and projection. These are universal mechanisms which offer a possibility of influence on a global scale. In this way art, through its catharsis and compensation nature offers an opportunity to satisfy human needs which guarantee internal balance and good frame of mind. In this respect Dziemidok includes such needs as a need for recreation and entertainment, a need to experience various sensual impressions and emotions, a need to dream and to escape from every day worries, a need to extend individual existence, a need to fully express one's personality, a need to discharge and moderate painful stresses.⁷ High art offers deep and varied experiences of a catharsis compensation nature while popular art, of a worldwide range, provides very superficial perceptions. However, thanks to this "superficiality" it may be perceived in all latitudes of the Earth and by the addressees of various competence and sensitiveness.

Globalisation processes, which are strictly associated with the dissemination of the consumer societies, use popular art, Para art and art-similar products to intensify these processes. A distinctive feature is deaesthetisation of art and aesthetisation of every day life. This does not preclude the use of artistic means to reach this goal. The catharsis and compensation functions are also used in popular art and having regard to its communicativeness in a global dimension they are commonly explored.

¹ Comp. M. Waters, *Globalization*, Routledge, London and New York 1995; M. F. Guillén, *Is Globalization Civilizing, Destructive or Feeble? A Critique of Five Key Debates in the Social Science Literature*, "Annual Review Sociol.", 2001, no 27, p. 235-260.

² Polish publication of this work: J. E. Stiglitz, *Globalizacja*, PWN, Warsaw 2004.

³ The notion „nomadism” popularized Z. Bauman, comp.: Z. Bauman, *Globalization . The Human Consequences*, London 1998; polish publication of this work: Z. Bauman, *Globalizacja. I co z tego wynika*, PIW, Warszawa 2000. Z. Bauman described nomads as the so-called global people (CNN viewers), glob-trotters freely moving around the world, who do not experience spatial limitations and who feel „at home” everywhere.

⁴ S. Morawski, *Mitologiczne aspekty postmodernizmu (jeden z papierków lakmusowych „kryzysu kultury”)*, „Konteksty”, 1996, no 1 – 2, p. 10.

⁵ G. Dziamski entered into issues of the art in the times of globalisation, comp. G. Dziamski, *Sztuka w czasach globalizacji*, „Pogranicza”, 2002, no 6, p. 25-32; G. Dziamski, *Sztuka w kulturze globalnej*, „Format”, 2003, no 3/4, p. 3-5; G. Dziamski, *The Artist in the Time of Globalization*, „Art. Inquiry”, 2004, vol. VI, p. 59-69.

⁶ B. Dziemidok, *Główne kontrowersje estetyki współczesnej*, PWN, Warszawa 2002, p. 208.

⁷ Comp., *Ibid.*, p. 224-228.