

ART AND MUSIC IN LANGUAGE-GAME: PRIVATE LANGUAGE PROBLEM REVISITED

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The virginity of an art lies in the depiction of human feelings, desires, flux of emotions; these direct our attention to the art with the feeling of “how it is like” experience. The work of art must have a subjective perspective, the essence of specificity or particularity, yet a writer or painter may manifest their work in terms of communicating “what we judge or recognize as *essential* to these and to indefinitely many analogous instances in reality”.¹ Art invites us to an amalgam of value-judgement and set of beliefs that help us to assess the work. A painting offers a broad range of experiences or events, it may signify love, betrayal, hatred or it may exhibit a crisis of a specific city or its people. The painting of Monalisa is a signifier to the reaction of the audience in the sense of its exquisite depth in the eyes. It tempts us to offer our opinions in opposite directions, and every time we try to evaluate the worth of the art we fall into the trap of collisions in our own reactions. We have the opportunity to grasp the meaning of an art through our worldview. At the same time, one has to accept that the artist might have some personal association with his work which may not come into the purview of our evaluation of the art. The discovery of his vision is expected to come out in his artistic venture and there should be a parallel view or ‘sahṛdayatā’ (Indian sense) among the audience to make the art successful. But is it all about communication of an art through language?

Susanne Langer claims that art picks up where language signs off; art has some unanswerable parts of human life. An artist is just like a poet because of the creativity he possesses. This point has also been echoed by Martin Heidegger. Heidegger frequently offers poetry as our path to the unsayable, while Wittgenstein simply prefers silence or showing, although both are very cautious about the essentially unsayable.² When Jibananda Das talks about the grey world of Bimbisāra-Asoka, about a journey the character makes in his legendary poem “Banalata Sen”, he pictures the illustration of a possible reality with his creative imagination. There lies the creativity of a poet, when he goes beyond the social parameter of language to set up his own world; yet it does have a

¹ Ronald W. Hepburn, *the Reach of the Aesthetic: Collected essays on art and nature* (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2001), p. 18.

² Nicholas F. Gier, *Wittgenstein and Phenomenology: A Comparative Study of the Later Wittgenstein, Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), p. 217.

meaning. It is by virtue of the mirroring or picturing of facts that language acquires meaning, as far as the *Tractarian* interpretation is concerned. Langer gives it special importance in the sense of the logical necessity. Her interpretation of art is inspired by the *Tractatus* outlook of logico-pictorial form. In *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein talks about the pictorial representation of reality. Langer goes even beyond that to claim that where language cannot speak, art takes off. She offers a similarity between the meaning that art confers and that of the world of inner feeling.³ The emotional quotient of art has something beyond the reach of language. In Langer's interpretation, whereof we cannot speak, there we must endeavour ourselves in composing, painting, writing, making sculpture, so on and so forth.

The above view can be encouraging for supporting some sort of private language. But that is not enough, because interpretation or evaluation of an art is not something totally dissociated from the making of an art. We may object to Langer's view by pointing out that the art is not socially excluded, whatever it offers has a social reflection. Although the artist has an emotional share while making the art, he always has the expectation from the audience for the evaluation of his art. In this sense, he cannot make something which is beyond the appraisal of the audience; otherwise he would not be a successful artist. We may also say that when a person writes his autobiography, he might have some sort of reservation about expressing his most personal incidents, as they might damage one's image in the society. However, this type of concealing is also concerned with the choice that one has to make while giving his account of life to the readers.

The artist has a creative imagination which encourages him to pull out the talent in him to execute it into work. He has a thought process going on that marks the creative aspect in his work. His creativity is evident by his performance at the public gathering. An artist has an intention to perform a certain mission. Wittgenstein's philosophy of language gives a bit of hint in this regard. In his line of thinking an artist's intention is embedded in human customs and social institutions, the intention is not concerned with the mental image of the work. It could bring in confusion to think that the mental imagery brings out the motivation or intention of an artist. Thought can be said to be an enduring part of the work; imagination and thought make an artist creative, although the creative aspect might not be dependent upon the image that is inside the mind of an artist.⁴ The artist thrives for the excellence in his art by the depiction that he makes about something that has some personal association, at the same time reflects his vision about an aspect of the world. Meaning is not a constitution of correlations between mental images and the world, according to Wittgenstein. The understanding of music could be used here as a model for understanding language. In the *Brown Book* Wittgenstein clarifies the linguistic practice that constitutes meaning. Here we can see how he compares the understanding of a sentence to the understanding of music:

What we call "understanding a sentence" has, in many cases, a much greater similarity to understanding a musical theme than we might be inclined to think. But I don't mean that understanding a musical theme is more like the picture which one tends to make oneself of understanding a sentence; but rather that this picture is wrong, and that understanding a sentence is much more like what

³ G.L. Hagberg, *Art as Language: Wittgenstein, Meaning and Aesthetic Theory* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), P. 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

really happens when we understand a tune than at first sight appears. For understanding a sentence, we say, points to a reality outside the sentence. Whereas one might say “Understanding a sentence means getting hold of its content; and the content of the sentence is *in* the sentence.”⁵

Understanding music requires an understanding of rules that are associated with the music. Music is also a kind of practice; it is something to be learned under the system of rules governing it. The musical tones represent a particular practice; tones are the symbol of the way music is directed to. The dimensions of music represent a vast arena of a culture; it depicts the reality of a community too. Therefore, music can be a form of life, it really is. The reaction to the different genres of music demands some attention from the listener, even he may have to have some competence in terms of understanding the music. But then, it is hard to believe that understanding music is a mental event that is totally under control of a person’s mind.⁶ The composer makes a music that could reach the understanding level of a listener as much as possible. Not only this is a practice for understanding, it is the composer’s or the singer’s skill that makes a musical piece enjoyable for the audience. The rules that one follows in composing music, comes with the perspective of the composer. The composer’s creativity lies in his understanding of the tunes that would be worthy enough for fulfilling the expectation of the audience. His choice of singer in this respect could also make the difference. Having said this, what I like to propose is that there is music lying in our language-game too which needs to be looked at.

We have our musicality in our language. We talk in different tunes in different occasions; we express ourselves in various modulations; our gestures are often musical. Wittgenstein makes this point in *Zettel*: “There is a strongly musical element in verbal language. (A sigh, the intonation of voice in a question, in an announcement, in longing; all the innumerable *gestures* made with the voice.)”⁷

The music can also be called a language-game. A performer understands the role assigned to him in terms of his performance. A violinist understands about the music of violin differently than the pianist knows it and vice-versa. The more one practises, the more he reaches the level of perfection. Practice is a part of language game and is followed by rules. Wittgenstein says, “Understanding a musical phrase may also be called understanding a *language*.”⁸ The learning of music requires some technicalities. When a teacher explains a musical piece to a student, he has to read the response of the student to know whether he is learning in a proper way or not. In this way the learning process can be comprehended by a musical practice. One is in the endeavour for a better understanding of the music he is performing, he yearns for the comprehensive knowledge of the musical notes.⁹ The meaning of a musical piece is a transportation of our thought

⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the “Philosophical Investigations”* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), p. 167.

⁶ Paul Johnston, *Wittgenstein: Rethinking the Inner* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 106.

⁷ Wittgenstein, *Zettel* (2nd ed.), G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright (eds.), tr. G.E.M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), §161.

⁸ *Ibid.*, §172.

⁹ I have been benefited by the article “Wittgenstein and Haydn on Understanding Music” by Yael Kaduri (available online @ <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=397>). One might object that there is a part of emotion that contributes to the understanding of music, but I take a rather

to an artistic creation, whether in playing an instrumental, writing a lyric of a song, composing a musical note, or singing a song. About the understanding of music, Wittgenstein explains in *Culture and Value*:

Someone who understands music will listen differently (e.g. with a different expression on his face), he will talk differently, from someone who does not. But he will show that he understands a particular theme not just in manifestations that accompany his hearing or playing that theme but in his understanding for music in general.¹⁰

We have so far outlined a sketch of the involvement of art and music in our linguistic understanding. Art and music both enrich our understanding of the language we are familiar with or not. Even they cross the entire linguistic hurdle in touching a man's heart. The artistic aspect of a language extends the prospect of the understanding; the musicality of language is evident even from our daily life. Thought lies at the root of all the creativities, it is probably human urge of expression of thought that brings about the creativity. The artistic and musical dimensions of language have to be realised in the backdrop of the dimensions of thought. Though we are not claiming that the understanding of language presupposes the understanding of thought in a private activity, one can always examine whether language is determined by the thought, or thought is independent of language. Wittgenstein has rejected the notion of a purely phenomenological language on the basis of the rule-governed use of language. A rule is like a sign-post. Language is never detached from the rules; neither is it dissociated from the social use. Yet, I believe that the understanding of language is an intricate issue, the more I drive to understand language, I deviate from the location of what it actually means.

The artist may not be able to completely put across his inner feelings by his creation as his tormented life could become an impediment. Yet, it is quite possible to assume that the artist tries hard to express, may be his tormented life has come into the being in his painting, may be it becomes a painting of solitude. Even the painting of solitude is expected to produce many interpretations, and those interpretations make the work more fulfilling. The solitude helps the artist to reformulate his ideas, but he gains from the experience he has with the world. His interface with the reality enriches his world-view in the sense that he gets a wide landscape of viewpoints that could fulfil the art. The privacy or individuality of an artist is not a property of the artist himself; it carries the potential of being conveyed to the audience. Although it is sometimes very difficult to pick up the artist's intention, it is assumed that the artist is inescapable to the eyes of the audience; he is always under the scanner. The artist has only to judge how much he can deliver his thoughts into his art. But the deliberation does not necessarily clash with his projection of the art which he might have done in a private frame of mind.

We are now at a point to specify our objective regarding the layers of the language in the backdrop of the private language problem. The following statements can be taken into consideration in describing the artistic imagination and expression in a nutshell:

Wittgensteinian approach in this regard. It is the musical language game that makes music and emotion to meet together, and it is also evident from the reception or criticism of a musical piece.

¹⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, Georg Henrik von Wright [ed.], (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 80.

- An artist is the possessor of his imagination and his creative sense; he is the architect of his creative explorations.
- The audience is the evaluator of the relation between the creation as well as the intention of the artist that is instrumental in the making of his creation.
- The artist can claim that he had certain presuppositions in making the art that are not visible for the spectators.
- The spectators can also claim that the work of the artist is not isolated from the *form of life*, the ‘emotional content’ of the art is related with a particular aspect of life and the work is an activity that is governed by rules which the audience is in a position to substantiate.
- It is not a privileged access to the artist that only he can know about the intention of his work, as his intention is manifested in his work and opens to the public arena for evaluation; a successful artist must do something that is parallel to the understanding of the audience.

We conclude that a painting of an artist or a musical note of a composer or a performance of a singer in the web of imagination, is not confined to the artist, composer or singer concerned. It is left to the audience or the critique since it is not a private sensation or language that is understandable only to the creator, it is a partaking activity for both the creator or performer and the audience or spectator. We are not claiming that a private language is not possible at all, but it is not possible in this way. The point I want to make is that the artist always leaves some scope to the audience for review. It validates Wittgenstein’s stance that the language-game is a social institution, and it also establishes that while making the art as an object for evaluation, the artist expects that the audience has the background to some extent in detecting the objective. Only thing is that it is still difficult to grasp the original intention of the artist, whether he has the same intention which the evaluator understands to be so is a matter of dispute. However, this is an investigation that makes the relation between language and aesthetic object more interesting and hence there is a great prospect with regard to the private language problem to evaluate the artistic and musical dimensions of language. The problem lies at the interface between the artistic intention and the audience evaluation. One has to admit that there is an emotional share between the artist and the audience as the reference. There is also a form of life that comes into play where the art can be seen as a platform of participatory activity on the parts of both the artist and the audience group. In that sense the meaning must have a use even in the form of artistic explorations. This is the reason for acknowledging the greatness of the *private language argument* of Wittgenstein. It opens an avenue for the aesthetic appreciation apart from the conventional language-game. Here I have tried to show a very small glimpse of its contribution to aesthetics. The way art and music play pivotal roles in the language-game, is very significant even to our understanding of the *language-game* in conventional verbal discourse. It is hard to ignore, I think, the artistic and musical dimensions of language if one has to explore the broader scopes of the private language problem.

