KOSOVEL'S "CONS" POEMS: AN UNEASY BALANCE BETWEEN INDIVIDUUM AND SOCIETY

Alenka Jovanovski

Faculty of Arts, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Let me approach the subject of Kosovel's "cons" poems from the perspective of the Aesthetics of Reception by considering a thesis which H. R. Jauß develops on the basis of Aristotel's catharsis, St Augustine's criticism of self-enjoyment in his *curiositas* and Gorgias' doctrine on the persuasive potential of affects in speech-making (Jauß 1982: 92). The cathartic pleasure and the very essence of the communicative efficacy of aesthetic experience are thus defined as "the dialectical interplay of self-enjoyment through the enjoyment of what is other and makes the recipient an active participant in the constitution of the imaginary, something which is denied him as long as aesthetic distance is understood according to traditional theory as one-directional, as a purely contemplative and disinterested relationship to an object at a certain remove" (Jauß 1982: 92). The dialectical interplay has two poles: self-enjoyment and the enjoyment of "what is other". The relationship between them thus ideally encompasses both a turning in on oneself *and* out towards the other. Jauß, however, acknowledges the potential of reduction of either of the two poles whenever "the state of suspension characteristic of the attitude of aesthetic pleasure becomes one-sided and either a distance-less enjoyment of the object or sentimental self-enjoyment, that cathartic experience thus runs risk of being used for ideological purposes or of becoming prefabricated consumption, thereby losing its genuinely communicative efficacy" (Jauß 1982: 92–93).

I would like to add two things: first, the common denominator of the two poles of the communicative efficacy of aesthetic experience always derives some kind of realization through which one gains an insight as both an individual and a social being. However, one does not merely understand oneself to a point of closure, but rather finds oneself continually in the *process* of self-understanding. This triggers a set of reactions: affirmation, negation, critical appreciation, to name the more obvious ones.

Second: the two poles of the communicative efficacy of aesthetic experience should not be thought of as fixtures, synchronic or diachronic. In fact, throughout history they have undergone a number of variations. To give an example: in the Middle Ages, the pole of 'the other' was structured as the divine Thou, or rather, his representative, Jesus Christ, whereas in modern

times the other can be perceived as either the individual's personal unconscious content or the social conventions not yet made conscious. Since the problem of Kosovel's 'cons' poems interests me from the perspective of the contemporary model of communicative efficacy, I will not go further into historical parallels. The somewhat schematic and inevitably simplified description of the medieval model of communicative efficacy simply serves to illustrate the historical background or context, against which I will map out the problem of the communicative quality of Kosovel's 'cons' poems.

According to Jauß, the modern model of the communicative efficacy of aesthetic experience can first be seen in terms of the subject's regarding their own subjectivity and the unconscious social norms. Only secondly does the recipient react (or not react) to social norms and their own intimate content. The risk of aesthetic experience being invaded by ideology is highest in the case of utterly uncritical affirmative responses to society or in a total lack of response (Jauß 1982: 92–93) This, of course, endangers the core achievement of modern aesthetics: the autonomy of art. Moving on from here to Adorno's thesis about the autonomy of art as an aesthetic and social fact, it becomes clear that this autonomy collapses when the balanced relationship between art/aesthetics and society becomes unbalanced (Adorno 2002: 5).

Gadamer's thesis of the subjectification of aesthetics after Kant and Schiller turns on the notion that an abstract aesthetic consciousness is caused by the separation of art from life. Also, Jauß's understanding of the essence of the communicative efficacy can be fine tuned to the conclusion that art is safe from ideological attacks only when both poles of the communicative efficacy of aesthetic experience are preserved in their entirety. In other words, my self-understanding is complete only when *the self* (as an individual and a member of society) is in a dynamic, ever open dialogue with *the other* (as an individual and as society). Therefore, if one of the elements is missing, this not only affects the dialogue between the two poles of an aesthetic experience, but it also obstructs and hinders my very self-understanding. Can my self-understanding gain a true dimension if it neglects either the self or the other?

According to Adorno, the warrant of art's autonomy is precisely the balance between the individual and society. In modern times, this relation has not always been in perfect equilibrium; a historical overview would probably give a picture of a constant imbalance between the individual and society which, in turn, also frustrates the need for a continuous and playful oscillation between the self and the other. Here I can offer only a cursory glance at the matter.

Kant's scheme of aesthetic experience assumes a number of factors which support the recipient's orientation towards society: one such factor, for instance, is the imperative for universal liking/pleasing,[1] for the subjective universality of a pure aesthetic judgement, of its general communicability, all of which can be linked to the maxim that "beauty is merely a symbol of what is moral" (KU § 59.259). On the other hand, there is the so-called *sensus communis*[2] that comes into play here, which connects the

aesthetically affected subject with society. Moreover, according to some contemporary interpretations which approach Kant's third *Critique* in the light of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, aesthetics, particularly with the principle of disinterested pleasure, acts as key support to moral philosophy as a tendency towards surpassing one's desires and interests (for example, Marquard 1995: 37–69).

From Kant onwards, what was a tentative balance between the individual and society began to lean further and further toward the subject's confrontation with the contents of his/her own inner world. In other words, the appreciation of the 'self' in relation to the 'other' was considerably reduced by the abstract aesthetic consciousness. The danger of this for aesthetic experience was that it could ultimately lead to sentimental self-indulgence.

A crucial shift in this direction is already visible in Schiller's more radical extrapolation of Kant's scheme of aesthetic experience. In the 19th century, Schiller's shift postulated such aesthetic experience whereby the reading act enabled the recipient to constitute his/her own subjectivity – mainly with the aim of reinforcing it, so as to withhold the pressure of day-to-day reality even after coming back to the everyday world.

Marquard derives his thesis of aesthetics as non-aesthetics[*] precisely through late Schiller to describe the effects of those works of art which make the recipient turn increasingly in on him/herself to contemplate his/her own personal contents (Marquard 1995). Effectively art/aesthetics began to have the effect of a sedative and became a means of alleviating the pain and shock (Marquard 1995: 21–35) that the romantic – and even more so the post-romantic – subject would experience against the backdrop of the socio-historical horizon. Such isolation of art, such severing of the social umbilicus from which art grows, however, can lead to its degeneration, into escapism, whereby art loses its vitality. This is not to say that art/aesthetics as non-aesthetics is (simply) non-art, or beauty temporarily put to sleep. On the contrary, in its radical form, it anaesthetises itself, sleeps the sleep of death, thereby passively, silently, consenting to – and thus upholding –unjust social norms. This, of course, means that its autonomy *is* threatened, or even that it exists merely as facade.

If I apply Marquard's concept of non-aesthetics to the field of the communicative efficacy of aesthetic experience, then I can say that the end of the 19th century crisis in art went hand in hand with the crisis of the communicative efficacy of aesthetic experience. Let me demonstrate by way of the French symbolists. Mallarmé's wish to utter in *language,* down to the last nuance, also that which is unutterable, served as a way out of the crisis in art; that is, it further separated art from life (society), pushing it deeper into a crisis of communication. Those lesser creative moments of *fin de siècle* – lesser in their powers of artistic persuasion – were not ultimately concerned with penetrating the innermost depths, but seemed content with presenting Weltschmerz, melancholy and depression as the quintessence of

[*] The Latin term Maquard uses, *Anasthetica*, carries the double meaning of aesthetics as non-aesthetics and also aesthetics as that which anaesthetisizes (transl.).

subjectivity – in other words, those qualities that characterise the unified beautiful soul against the ugly fragmented world.

It is precisely to this state of things that the various European literary avant-garde movements reacted, with the aim of adjusting the degenerate model of communicative efficacy by re-introducing the maxim of the interconnectedness of art and life. The avant-garde renewal of the communicative efficacy of aesthetic experience operated on at least two levels, and was in itself highly ambivalent. On the one hand, it was concerned with a direct attack on abstract aesthetic consciousness. The scope of slogans about burning down museums and the rejection of canonised art and literary tradition[3] almost never went beyond the mere subversion of the 19th century "traditional" model of the communicative efficacy of aesthetic experience. The avant-garde artists strove to shatter both the Poet and his ivory tower, in which the reader, in all his or her pathetic aloofness, contemplates the Poet's feelings wrapped in a decorous veil of melancholy. This tendency is most transparent in Italian futurism, and Kosovel saw it also in Micić's zenitism.

The avant-garde renewal of the communicative efficacy of aesthetic experience was equally concerned with opening the recipient to society at the cost of neglecting the subject's personal self-reflection. W. Benjamin has drawn the main distinction between the Italian and the Soviet avant-garde.[4] The Italian avant-garde artists, even as they were announcing, with great vehemence, the necessity of a war that would destroy the terminally sick western world, their concern never went beyond the aesthetics of society/regime – into enlarging the aesthetic sphere so as to encompass life fully, making it aesthetic. This would then be the source from which art could draw its vital sap. In contrast to the Italian avant-garde artists, the Russian avant-garde was not concerned with the aesthetisation of society, but with making society bear crucially on art – infusing art with society/regime. In other words, they strove to broaden the sphere of reality into the sphere of art. The aesthetic renewal, that is the subversion of the traditional scheme of the communicative efficacy of aesthetic experience, in this case needed to join hands with a revitalisation of content – with a social revolution. All the negative and positive sides of such strivings showed themselves fairly early on in the Soviet regime. Thus we can conclude that the radical dose of avant-garde medicine administered to the autonomy of art in fact endangered autonomy just as much, if not more so, than was the case with art based on the degenerate Kant-Schiller model.

Both the models of connecting art and life we have looked at will need to be considered in the light of Iser's understanding of the fictive, the fictive as the mediator between the field of the real and the field of the imaginary. (Iser 1978 and 1993). Italian and Russian avant-garde artists dealt with and developed the connection between art and life in different ways. The Italian avant-garde sought for the field of imaginary to penetrate the real via the field of the fictive, and – through the process of aesthetisation – structure it according to its own principles. The Russian avant-garde, on the other hand, strove for the field of the real to break into the imaginary via the fic-

tive sphere and subordinate it to its own principles. Clearly, the fictive was deprived of its autonomous status in both instances, and poetry thereby weakened in its force of artistic persuasion.

We are now ready to consider how the second wave of the Slovenian avant-garde reacted to the crisis of autonomous art. Kosovel, who was the leading proponent of this wave (Vrečko 1986: 81), perceived the general crisis of art with profound insight and also saw the specifics of the Slovenian situation. In his essays *Crisis, Art and the Proletarian, Crisis in Humanity, the Breakdown of Society and Collapse of Art*, Kosovel perceived the gulf between art and life/man (Collected Works (CW) 3/1: 12–21) as being at the heart of a general European crisis. It could be overcome only if (Slovenian) art was to draw from everyday life, rather than run away from it into art for art's sake.[5] According to Kosovel, the source of connection between art and life lies in the artist's understanding (CW 3/1: 41)[6] of him/herself and the world around: only understanding can bring this somewhat abstract task of connecting life and art to fulfilment, and extending it to encompass the wider connections between art, life, humanity, and truth. In other words, art, according to Kosovel, is not merely an "aesthetic question", it is "a question that concerns life itself" (CW 3/1, Journal VII/9: 650).

Kosovel was also aware of the crisis of the communicative efficacy of aesthetic experience.[7] As already mentioned, the Italian futurists strove for rather facile, even if inventive, connections between art and life; their art admittedly attacked the traditionally passive role of the reader, but no more than that. Unlike them, Kosovel saw the way out of the crisis of communicative efficacy and the crisis of art in an *ethical, spiritual* revolution, a revolution on the level of *content*, not form,[8] one that would connect art with life at a deep level.

Having established the theoretical framework which will guide my interpretation of Kosovel's 'cons' poems, I now wish to posit two main questions: firstly, do the 'cons' poems manage to hold in balance the two poles of the communicative efficacy of aesthetic experience? Secondly, did Kosovel in these poems overcome what was widely acknowledged as "the refusal of communicative identification", typical of the contemporary experience of art (Jauß 1982: 94)?

I will approach these two questions by looking first at a structural element that features frequently in Kosovel's 'cons' poems, and which I will refer to as *ironisation*. Ironisation is one mode of poetic expression with which Kosovel tries to put a hold on the degenerate form of recipient's confrontation with him/herself and generate a critical evaluation of social norms in the reader. In fact, ironisation is a minus function. Such functions, according to Iser, typically characterise modernist texts. Namely, a text structured by means of minus functions does not fulfil the expectations readers cultivate through reading nonsmodern texts: it offers no key to the production of textual meaning. As such, minus functions are the reason modernist texts, instead of offering the reader a key to reading practice and the production of textual meaning, offer a blank – that which remains once

the reader's expectations are abandoned. Blanks in modernist texts not only stimulate a textual transfer into the reader's consciousness, but also enhance the reader's interpretative activity. In other words, the reader is constantly searching for a key to interpretation. But since each such interpretative act reveals itself to be deficient the more one reads into the text, the reader of the more radical modernist texts can only ever reach a provisional interpretation, which is then displaced by the next interpretative key.[9]

In Kosovel, ironisation as the crucial type of minus function is based on the concept of the *beautiful soul*. What this means is that its function is not only related to reading act techniques, but crosses over into the field of the subject's self-consciousness. The function of Kosovel's ironisation is therefore hermeneutic.

It needs to be said that Kosovel's *entire* body of poetry, not only his early poems, are most strongly marked with the notion of the *beautiful soul*.[10] M. Kos differentiates between two forms of this concept: the first can be traced in Kosovel's early poetry, and bears close resemblance to the Hegelian beautiful soul, more precisely, its post-romantic extrapolation. Some of Kosovel's diary entries suggest that this form of the beautiful soul was a source of great struggle for him.[11] The other form of this concept was prompted by a number of factors: Ivan Cankar's ethos, the traumatic experience of WWI, the allocation of a part of Slovenia's coastal region to Italy, the experience of fascism in Trieste, and a strong sense of both artistic and ethical dormancy on the part of the Slovenes in Ljubljana. In Kosovel's essays this other variant of the *beautiful soul* acquires the dimension of the new man/artist – a human being who is "the priest of truth, justice and beauty" (CW 3/1: 650). Moreover, the other variant of the *beautiful soul* is, in fact, a bridge from the post-romantic beautiful soul to Kosovel's social and socialist commitment.

Although, at a given moment, Kosovel left behind the early form of the *beautiful soul*, his 'cons' poems did not articulate the other, more mature form, but precisely this naive one. "*Cons*" poems often lure the reader into identification with the "beautiful soul", into some kind of "harmony with weary pain". It is as though they were appealing to the melancholy and lonely aspect of reader's subjectivity. Kosovel, of course, knew exactly what he was doing: he wanted the reader to see how utterly useless and ethically futile it was, in that day and age, to regard yourself as a beautiful, melancholy subjectivity. It is through ironisation that "*cons*" poems achieve this rupture in the reader's identification with the beautiful soul – by *distancing* readers from the beautiful soul, as well as from their own indulgence in it. Having achieved such an aesthetic distance, the reader is more likely to think critically both about his social environment and his relation to it. A good example of this can be found in two poems: *Culture's Prostitution* and *The Heart in Alcohol.*

A famous example of ironisation combined with metaphor appears in the first three lines of the poem *Spherical Mirror.*[12] The spherical mirror is a metaphor for art that highlights deficiencies, and in this way stands in contrast to the normal mirror. *Spherical Mirror* achieves this through mon-

tage, by juxtaposing a newspaper fragment, a treatise on art and a snippet imitating a romantic model of poetry where chestnuts rustle by the water (l. 7–9). All of this is bait to entice the beautiful soul, with the aim of preventing the recipient from undergoing the wrong type of aesthetic identification (l. 10–11).[13]

The continuation of this poem, however, seems to carry more meaning for Kosovel than the reader. Namely, Kosovel is ironic towards his own nihilo-metaphysical subjectivity, and wonders about his own poetic production and the scope of its influence on society. The marginal line, in the form of a spherical mirror, "WHY DID YOU DROP/A GOLDEN BOAT INTO THE MARSHES?" refers to his early, 'velvety-style' lyrics, with their own form of the beautiful soul that is a total anachronism in the marshes of society – it can only be swallowed up. To my mind, this marginal line is uttered by a beautiful soul. At the same time it presents a critique of the weakness of the degenerate Kant-Schiller model of the communicative efficacy of aesthetic experience, in which the recipient passively and uncritically acquiesces and consents to social norms.[14] At the same time it is possible to read it as a way out of the deficiency of the degenerate model of aesthetic experience: the poet simply had to drop the golden boat of his velvety verse into the marshy (social) reality of the everyday; he simply had to transform the golden boat into a spherical mirror. In this way he was able to forge a link between life (the marshes) and poetry (the boat/the spherical mirror).

The cognitive dimension of such verse suddenly gains in prominence: the spherical mirror is not simply any normal mirror; it is more distinctively shaped, one which throws the marshy social reality into sharp relief and makes a caricature of it. Inter-textually playing with the reference to Cankar's white chrysanthemum, which Kosovel steeps in socialist red, the poem offers another possible reading of new art. The socialist red chrysanthemum does not condemn society from an elevated position, but stays firmly *within* society, criticising and operating from inside. Kosovel's essays and his signing up with the socialist party show that he began to see the possibility of a productive social function more and more in connection with the class struggle. Only such art could become the social and true-to-life factor that would bring about a transformation from the marshy Slovenian and European society infected with metaphysical nihilism to a healthy, vibrant, constructive society, in which each individual adjusts his or her understanding of the other (human being, society) in the light of an on-going self-reflection.

In this way *Spherical Mirror* is suddenly transformed into a much wider reflection on contemporary art, as well as the poet's creative strivings. The reader, however, is pushed into a rather unpleasant role: there are only two possibilities at one's disposal. One can take on the role of a somewhat quiet, voyeuristic observer of the poet's nihilistic self-destruction and his contemplation of the possibilities of poetry. Kosovel was aware of the absurdity of such a role for the reader; on more than one occasion he wrote in his diary that each person has to go through the phase of nihilistic destruction and descend into nothingness within him or herself.[15] Everyone – but

especially a poet – must walk across the bridge of nihilism alone. Only then can he go public with his poetry, confront it with its spherical mirror and begin constructive work. This may be why, until the autumn of 1925, Kosovel was writing his 'cons' poems – and he himself might have understood them as merely fleeting products of his own personal and aesthetic transformation – in utter secrecy (Vrečko 1986: 110).

The other role the reader of Kosovel's 'cons' poems is offered to take up is more daring, as it ventures to make sense where no sense can be made. The reader in this case needs to overcome the paralysing aesthetic distance imposed by them. At the same time, one needs to tackle one's own (in)ability to receive literary texts, having been exposed to predominantly non-modernist texts. One has to constantly confront one's desire to indulge in passive reception and, instead, overcome it with activity. The reception of a given poem thus becomes markedly more active. In short, the poem forces the reader to take on the role which in the 19th century was reserved for the literary critic.

In the effort to create textual meaning, there is yet another, hidden task: the constitution of the reader's subjectivity. It is arguably even more important than the first, and is typically modernist. Subjectivity formation in an early modernist text is characteristically marked by a contradiction: whilst guided by a desire for a unified and ordered subjectivity, it is also presented with the world-as-text that is fragmented, chaotic, and robbed of a unified referential framework. The desire for a unified subjectivity is thus constantly frustrated. Pinning down such a text becomes only possible through the simultaneous transformation of the act of reading into an act of interpretation. In reading the 'cons' poems, the reader is therefore creating an infinite subjectivity as mere interpretation – highly unstable, fragile, bound only to understanding as an endless (personal and historical) project. In other words, subjectivity as interpretation conceives of understanding as a multilingual project. (The latter possibility of the constitution of textual meaning undoubtedly informs the Slovenian post-modern reception of Kosovel, which sees in the constituted meaning/subjectivity only one of the myriad possible subjectivities/interpretations.) Subjectivity as (mere) interpretation is therefore founded on aesthetic distance which, in the process of reading, constantly undermines meaning/subjectivity as something definite!

It seems that when Kosovel's constructivist poetry gave way to his poetry of constructiveness, Kosovel was able to see this quite clearly – in his journal he wrote: "Do you write with the heart? No / with a pen. But what comes not of the soul does not go soul-deep and has no price. Form" (CW 3/1, Journal XII/16: 735). What might initially smack of anti-modernism in fact turns out to be very modern. To write with "a pen" is to reduce oneself to reason and therefore to an utterly non-aesthetic and inhuman mechanism. To write from "the heart" does not mean merely bringing to the surface what was unconsciously already there; it also implies an ethical quality and a wish to communicate that quality to the reader. Can it be that the interpretability of modernist subjectivity has in Kosovel found its *fluid*

solidity precisely in "the heart"? This would certainly go beyond the scope of the 'cons' poems, and yet it seems that Kosovel did strive for such a solution at the time when his main focus within the multi-faceted world of his poetic creativity did fall on the poetry of constructiveness.

In *Spherical Mirror* aesthetic distance gains the upper hand through the various "techniques" of preventing the reader from constituting and strengthening the beautiful soul as a false type of subjectivity. At the same time, however, the recipient's turning outwards to society also fails to achieve its end: it remains on the level of a distanced reflection, on the level of interpretation. "Writing with the pen" thus never moves beyond outlining the form, and is an impoverishment of life as such, and therefore cannot be introduced back into life. The primacy of aesthetic distance thus becomes the cause for a loss of communicativeness. Brecht, who faced a similar problem in relation to aesthetic distance, came to the conclusion that the *sine qua non* of connecting life and art is aesthetic identification (Jauß 1982: 105).

If there are 'cons' poems that succeed fairly well in balancing the relation between the individual and society, the poem *Spherical Mirror* represents a strong impediment to this effort. The recipient might even stop to critically ponder the role of contemporary art in society, but this will inevitably be along the lines of pronounced mental and theoretical exertion – in interpretation and self-interpretation, both of which are, as it were, built into the text of the poem, and which the reading act needs to realize at least to some degree. This pronounced self-reflection is merely a slightly finer, even if self-critical, form of the recipient's indulgent self-preoccupation. To come back to the question of the balance between the two poles of the communicative efficacy of aesthetic experience, I am once again led to conclude that, despite the freedom to interpret which the 'cons' poems push the reader towards, they nevertheless fail to establish an entirely living connection between art and life.

Kosovel himself consciously came to such a conclusion: after attending the reading of the zenitists in Ljubljana in April or May 1925, he acknowledged that the transformation they championed could not merely be aesthetic or formal empty play. The transformation of art should not merely prevent certain typical aesthetic responses, but needs to become an inner transformation. What Kosovel had in mind was an inner transformation, first of the individual, and then of society. The cause as well as the consequence of both was new art.[16] This realisation led Kosovel gradually (soon after joining the socialist party in the summer of 1925) to shift the focus within his admittedly very diverse creative aspirations from the writing of 'cons' poems to the poetry of constructiveness, and eventually to plans for writing prose.

I will try to get to the core of this shift by bringing in the principle of movement – but movement in what sense? I do not take it in the sense of speed, which is what the Italian futurists so enthused over. Kosovel, if anything, had an ambivalent attitude towards such a meaning of movement.[17] Nor do I mean it in the sense of montage as the structural principle of constructing a poetic text.

Montage compositions demand great associative speed on the part of the reader. They force one into leaps from one semantic field to another, into gluing together various fragments, into a modernist collage of various poetic forms; in short, they force the reader into greater mental activity. One is asked to see and acknowledge one's own subjectivity as something dynamic, fluid, interpretable, as something radically unstable in an age of instability; to acknowledge defeat in modern man's striving to create an ordered whole from a chaotic world. The reader can accept this recognition, even delights in, or juggles with it – but it is just as legitimate to discard it, thinking, "No; my subjectivity is beautiful and whole; it is the world around me that is subverting it, setting me up for a tragic fall."

This latter possibility of receiving Kosovel's 'cons' poems is possibly one of the main reasons that Slovenia, until as late as the 'seventies, was unable to receive avant-garde or rather modernist art (also Kosovel's) as a relevant form of art. The reader, whose aesthetic education was based on a degenerate Kant-Schiller schema, simply could not perceive 'cons' poems as anything but bad poetry. After all, these small explosive poems blew the reader's (traditional) horizon of expectations to smithereens. The core of rejection of these poems thus turned mainly on the fact that the subversion of the idea of subjectivity as an absolute or even a monolithic totality (the subversion of the post-romantic concept of the beautiful soul) was totally unacceptable to the great majority of the Slovenian readers.

Once both of the mentioned explanations are discarded, we are left with a third possibility. The movement principle can only be the principle with which Kosovel strove – in the most constructive way – to open out his poetry into society. But this movement cannot be compared to a straight line, which is what characterises the above-mentioned principles of movement. The principle of movement I am speaking of is more a vector – it is movement with direction, which aims for a given goal and a certain effect in the reader and in the society. It is this type of movement which can be linked with the concept of "movement philosophy", which Kosovel understood as action: being actively engaged with social questions.[18] Kosovel's poetic activity gradually began to build itself directly into society with literary readings, lectures, and various plans for starting clubs and societies, and the Strelci publishing house (see Vrečko 1986: 168–214, 218–229). In other words, Kosovel's poetic creativity began to take on the form of social creativity, creativity which would mediate between – and connect – different individuals as different parts of society, at once transforming it and binding it into a dynamic whole. In a sense, Kosovel's poetic activity was beginning to resemble the role of *poeisis* in ancient Greece before Plato. In Kosovel, poetic *poeisis* becomes the *poeisis* of society.

If what we have said is true, then this would be the most effective solution to the communication crisis in modern art. This active engagement with society, with life and truth that Kosovel strove to achieve in poetry, however, poses new challenges as well as threats to the search for balance between the two poles of the communicative efficacy of aesthetic experience. The poetry of some Russian avant-garde artists, for example, did not

rise to meet the challenge, but instead succumbed to the threats, showing (a) a reduced recipient's confrontation with him/herself, (b) a manipulated "reflection" of social norms and (c) a push for the ideologically controlled "reflection" to be socially in-built.

Kosovel would probably have avoided this danger, even if it were not for his untimely death. His essays are full of references to "true" art growing out of the artist's *personal* inner realisation – from the time of walking alone across the bridge of nihilism. The strong emphasis Kosovel laid on the need to turn vitally into oneself is a fairly good guarantee that also in his own constructive poetry he would succeed in drawing the reader into critical self-reflection.

This hypothesis, however, would need to be tested against an analysis of Kosovel's ethical stance, the basis of which would most probably be a special form of religion that has managed to avoid ideology. And it would probably reveal the precious remains of that extra-aesthetic field to which the aesthetic experience turned before the modern age, whereas in Kosovel it realized itself through greater emphasis on ethos or through expressions such as *man, humanity*.[19] An uneasy balance between the two poles of the communicative efficacy of aesthetic experience would probably have been achieved in Kosovel's socialist revolutionary poetry through an unabated insistence on the recipient's self-understanding as that tool which puts a hold on frenzied party activity or a totalitarian regime as the super-subject.

Translated by Ana Jelnikar

NOTES

[1] KU § 6.18, § 8.24–25, § 9.32, § 22.67.

[2] KU § 20.64, § 21.65, § 40.158.

[3] See *Manifesto del futurismo* in Grisi 1990: 29, 30. Benjamin talks about the shock as the main intention of the Dadaist art (Benjamin 2000: 335).

[4] "'*Fiat ars – pereat mundus*', says Fascism, and, as Marinetti admits, expects war to supply the artistic gratification of a sense perception that has been changed by technology. This is evidently the consummation of *l'art pour l'art*. Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicising art" (Benjamin 2000: 337).

[5] CW 3/1, 35 (*The Breakdown of Society and Collapse of Art*): "This fictive conversation is a faithful portrayal of our soul life. Eschewing reality, fearing the hard and unbending stick of the everyday, and what inevitably follows – utter disorientation in all questions regarding life, even the most vital." CW 3/1: 37: "… if to him (the artist), life's ideal becomes inactivity and leisure, then he loses that potent force that originates from hard contact with everyday life's battles. If his sole aim is self-fulfillment, he loses the power to solve everyday questions, he loses contact with life in its entirety."

[6] See Kosovel's letter to F. Obidova, dated 27/8/1925 (CW 3/1: 401), where the act of realising is not empty didacticism: "Literature must bring about some kind of a knowledge [spoznanje] in people! It has to intensify life's power!"

[7] CW 3/1, Journal VII (1925): 656, 28: "… art is the vehicle of life and not a sedative drug to be taken for pleasure, it is a stimulus for the soul's activity to be continued in living."

[8] CW 3/1, Journal VII/10: 651 and Journal VII/35, 37, 38: 658 isl.

[9] "The frustration of such basic expectations leaves a blank which the traditional novel had always filled" (Iser 1978: 207). Iser's statement can easily be applied to Kosovel's 'cons' poems. For 'a blank', see also Iser 1978: 202–203. For 'the minus function', see Iser 1978: 207 – 210. "the more modern the text, the more will it fulfill its 'minus functions'" (Iser 1978: 208).

[10] M. Kos draws our attention to a number of 'velvety' words in the 'cons' poems; "for example: soul, suffering, pain, beauty, dreams, heart, solitude, sickness/grief, weariness" (M. Kos 1997: 163, see also p. 145-152 and 154-160).

[11] For an illustration of this, see his letter to F. Obidova, dated 25/8/1923 (CW 3/1: 381): "It is autumn today, which robs Beauty to reveal the Truth [this Truth is Death, comment by A. Jo.], which is infinite terror. Do you ever think about – the beauty of autumn – that infinite sadness, in which you find yourself alone, and give yourself over to this embrace of sadness, as a child would to his mother, and you are a harmony of weary pain, and all you want is to lie down and sleep?"

[12] "Is it the mirror's fault / if you have a hooked nose./ Hail to Heine!/ Look in a spherical mirror / to know yourself!/ Nationalism is a lie./ Chestnuts rustling by the water,/ the autumn has come to antiquaries./ Their shops are full of antiques./ Ting-a-ling./ Hang yourself from a swing. / Red chrysanthemum. / Autumn grave… / white grave./ Ivan Cankar. // WHY DID YOU DROP / A GOLDEN BOAT INTO THE MARSHES?"

[13] Spherical Mirror, l. 10-11: "Ting-a-ling./ Hang yourself from a swing."

[14] See CW 3/1: Journal VII/9: 650 (from 1925): "…only the artist who has stepped out of the marshes of contemporary society and walked into a new society he himself has felt – only he is the new priest of truth, justice, humanity and goodness."

[15] CW 3/1: 398 and 400 (letters to F. Obidova, dated 12/7 and 17/7/1925).

[16] "Revolution is a phenomenon that effects content not form. /…/ The revolution of form is too shallow and too short, the revolution we herald is the revolution of the content of the European, the revolution of life as such, because if there is no such revolution there can be no art" (CW 3/1, Journal VII/37: 658).

[17] See the manifesto *To The Mechanics*! in Kosovel 2003a. See also Vrečko 1996.

[18] CW 3/1, Journal, VII/7: 650, see Vrečko 1986: 105-110.

[19] About this, see Kermauner 1993.

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■ ABSTRACT

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A reader's response analysis of Kosovel's poems focuses on the break in the communicative efficacy of an aesthetic experience, in as much as this is suggested by the poet's shift away from his "velvety" lyrics in search of a new poetic expression. The paper's starting point is the relationship between the recipient's turning in on him/herself and his or her openness into the extra-aesthetic sphere. The crisis of the Kant-Schiller scheme of aesthetic experience led avant-garde artists to revolutionise their poetic forms in an attempt to counterbalance the recipient's self-indulgent introspection with an opening out into society, into life itself. Through ironisation of the "beautiful soul", Kosovel's "cons" poems prevent the reader from indulging in introspection; rather they force him to adopt aesthetic distance, from where he/she is able to

evaluate him-/herself as well as the values of society. In some "cons" poems the two poles of the aesthetic experience's communicative efficacy are in balance, but in others this balance is disrupted through too great an aesthetic distance. In these poems, the constitution of meaning is enabled through a pronounced interpretative activity on the part of the recipient, whereby the interpretative effort corresponds to the effort needed to constitute one's own subjectivity. Since the outcome of both is merely subjectivity as interpretation, the recipient once again fails to open out into society to the satisfactory extent. Kosovel saw a way out of such a condition in socialist activity and in integrals, which would lead the recipient to transform his/her critical self-evaluation and an evaluation of his/her society into action, thereby directly incorporating it into society.