Enigmatic Realism
Philosophical reflections on art

General remark: The following discussion is only a draft paper and incomplete. It is my intention to develop a collection of essays from it after I have received some feedback from friends and the general public which this upload will hopefully encourage. Many thanks for your attention and response in advance.

1. The project “Trees” as a starting point

At first glance, there seems to be nothing unusual about the project called “Trees” which was set up by poet Joe Friggieri and Christine Kunkler, the painter, between 2016 and 2018. Their common works refer to trees, which most of them recall areas of Mediterranean Malta, and in a broader sense consider our human condition and relation to nature. The subject matter is easily accessible to old and young. Everybody may enjoy and understand it at the same time: Emphasizing natural beauty within the contemporary context of environmental discussions, the artworks point to the task of humanity to preserve and appreciate rather than only utilize or even destroy nature.

Another point which this art project has in common with other art works and projects is the requirement of personal engagement with the art work. It is emphasized here in this short introduction, because it is unfortunately often forgotten. Personal engagement is key to enjoying and being touched by art as well as to learning from art in many ways. Engaging means that one needs to spend time with an art work, one needs to concentrate aesthetically, emotionally and logically and feel the need to respond to it in some way. In short, an artwork must affect us inside out in order to produce some sort of pleasure or dislike, the wish to share one’s responses with others. If it produces neither like nor dislike in us, we will probably not even notice that work and cannot remember it because it does not enter our consciousness. For the haphazard viewers without time, objects cannot become enigmatic art. To encourage a more profound engagement, one artwork of the project called “The Flame tree” even asks for active physical participation. But, of course, mental and aesthetic involvement or contemplation is required for all of them. Art can only be enigmatic and experienced, if and only if one stops and finds oneself fully encapsulated by the art myth.
This short introduction has led to more or less commonplace albeit important remarks. The following observations, however, may reveal facts about the project which distinguish it in a certain sense:

As was mentioned before, each complete or whole work of this collection consists of one poem AND one painting. Without consistently pertaining to just one particular style or technique, each half of a whole work presents what it is supposed to be: It is supposed to be a dialogue partner of the Other (the other half) – the Other being the element which is strange to itself: the text (poem) remains a stranger to the image (painting) and the image remains a stranger to the text. And yet, for the attentive audience, only because of this kind of juxtaposed dialogue of Otherness in one unified work, a very special way of looking at unity, sense, meaning, function and interpretation emerges within the mind of the viewers. Therefore, the subtitle of the exhibition “Trees” is “A dialogue of texts and images”.

Many philosophical musings have accompanied the process of producing these art works which I wish to share with a wider audience. I do not aim to explain the poems and paintings here at all. My musings will rather follow those “icono-textual” issues I just mentioned – i.e. questions of the concept of art, unity, sense, meaning, function and interpretation. So it will touch Philosophy of Art, of Language, Aesthetics and Art Criticism.

2.1. The real art experience: Enigmatic Realism

If we experience art as art (art qua art), there is usually an artwork that has been made by some artist for exactly this purpose. This art qua art, I will call ENIGMATIC REALISM. For one might argue that there is always a real part, i.e. the physical art work, therefore "Realism", and an ideal part, i.e. what the artist or the audience feel or think about an artwork. The feeling is more or less "enigmatic", because it is linked to a subjective feeling on the scale of what the subject likes or dislikes, of what the subject finds beautiful or less beautiful, and to some kind of interpretation. Both parts, i.e. the real and the ideal, are essential for the art experience.

ENIGMATIC REALISM may be said to exist in four ways:

(1) AN OBJECT that has the POTENTIAL TO BE (become) ENIGMATIC REALISM is not always and at any place Enigmatic Realism. It only means that ONE OF THE FUNCTIONS, which this object has, is to become an enigmatic object for the observer.
Its potential to become Enigmatic Realism is all the greater, the greater its aesthetic appearance and appeal, its moral subversive or critical contents, its emotional charge and its rational attraction.

Outstanding potential enigmatic qualities usually depend on the skill and inventive powers of the artist and how he can charge his work with the right kind of energy and aesthetic idea. Besides its aesthetic appeal which causes instantaneous reactions of pleasure or displeasure in the audience, it contains an idea – all somehow potentially at home in this physical, man-made thing. And this idea always conceals some enigmatic content, something which cannot be fully grasped with words or be substituted by another medium, but which we can hint at and talk about.

Not all art is automatically “Enigmatic Realism”. By Enigmatic Realism I really mean art *qua* art, art in its specific art-function which we feel art investors so often miss to appreciate when they consider an artwork as a financial investment (similar to some shares) and not even look at it. They may buy artworks, for artworks can take many functions besides that of Enigmatic Realism – for instance that of the share, a fetish or a commodity among many others– but no art investor can buy Enigmatic Realism, they can only buy an object that has the potential to become one.

(2) ENIGMATIC REALISM in its second sense IS THE EXPERIENCE OF THE OBSERVER. It is due to his specific attitude and perspective at some instance in time and place that makes it possible for an object to become an enigmatically charged object in his view. All of a sudden, he links his observation to a wider range of considerations: he experiences aesthetic BEAUTY in the form of pleasure or displeasure. And he is beginning to look for reasons of this experience. Thus he connects to his private memories, to his cultural background and to his knowledge in general and asks questions of WONDER. He feels that to be confronted with Enigmatic Realism, he connects to something that is strange to himself and which he can never fully understand. It also touches him in many ways. He will need to make a sacrifice of time and needs to open up. For without time, the experience which can take quite unexpected turns and revelations, at different situations, will not take place. The Enigmatic experience may be always kept as a secret: it is a subjective experience.
(3) ENIGMATIC REALISM can also refer to the RELATION between the viewer’s enthusiastic or critical disposition for the enigmatic object and the potential enigmatic object. This relation is being DISCUSSED PUBLICLY IN SOCIETY.

The enigmatic experience of the subject relates to the enigmatic function of the object. It produces a TENSION in the viewer/groups/society between what is well-known to him/them and the Other, the Unknown, the strange and enigmatic element. At the same time, the enigmatic object because of the way it is for the viewers, causes responses and reactions. There are endless possibilities of looking at them: the enigmatic object is a medium, which is charged like a battery.

In short, Enigmatic Realism stands also for the tension that can be caused by this relation between object and viewer. Some of the tensions it produces are the tension between realism and idealism, between being and seeming, between unity and separation, between sophism and philosophy, between the material and the immaterial, between the Well-known and the Unknown, between morality and immorality, between limitedness and un-limitedness, between the human and the divine. Those tensions touch all kinds of philosophical ideas; they touch meaning and the human condition in general.

(4) Enigmatic Realism as proposed in points 1-3 explain a PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPT OF ART QUA ART (and not for instance as pure entertainment etc.). It is important to recognize that the initial Aesthetic experience in view of an art object is the experience of some kind of beauty in a subject caused by it experiencing a certain type of pleasure or displeasure. It is fundamental but first of all without words (Kant). However, philosophy expresses itself with words. Therefore, what follows from this spontaneous first reaction must be criticism. I would suggest to concentrate on points (1) and (3) in Aesthetics as a philosophical discipline.

One can summarize that the kind of Enigmatic Realism, which is relevant for philosophical discussion, exists as a potential in physical art objects or media (i.e. as an artefact in a certain function), or as a relation, as a tension between the art object and a subject as well as the public. This tension reveals itself notably in public, idealistic, artistic performances or art-related discussions and in any forms of interactions with artefacts qua art.
Furthermore, Philosophy could also be interested in identifying all the other functions of art in order to make it clear that FUNCTION and PERCEPTION do have a very great effect on the MEANING of an artwork in general and on language. The following example will show why.

2.2. A case study: The Flame Tree

The flame tree (delonix regia)

As the wind blows through the branches of the Delonix Regia, the tree starts flickering like a bonfire, and the soft clouds sailing above glow red as they do when the sun sinks below the horizon.

Tongues of fire leap up, the bonfire blazes as the wind whistles through the branches.

You must take off your sandals before approaching the flame tree, because the earth it grows in is holy ground.

“The FLAME TREE” from the art project “TREES” is an activity installation and it is quite obviously an artifact, a man-made thing which was deliberately produced by the artist Christine Kunkler (painting, stone tablets) with the aim of becoming Enigmatic Realism in reaction to the poem by Joe Friggieri. However, when it was carried out as an art event at Shanghai Art Fair in November 2017, it turned out that each visitor engaged with it in various ways. In this project, it became very clear that art and any artwork does indeed have many functions. Even though it was intended to become the prototype for Enigmatic Realism the visitors used it according to what they understood ad hoc when seeing it: they often did not use it for any enigmatic experience at all, but considered it as a selfie-background, as a wish-tree, as a ground to perform some dance, as a playground or saw it as some nice wall-decoration with no further relevance. In fact, their reaction on this experiment proves my assumption right: artworks have different functions, not just one. It is a general misconception to think of art ONLY qua art, ONLY as Enigmatic Realism, and then start a great lamentation if somebody considers it as a share, or as a piece of decoration, as a source for earning money through restoration, as the goal for a sightseeing tour with no interest in the work itself etc. It gives ample and vivid evidence that artworks may be used and understood in so many ways, and that their meaning for the user...
and each subject changes accordingly: we then have art *qua* entertainment, art *qua* decoration, art *qua* selfie-background. Perhaps it is uncommon to come to prove philosophical reflections on art right or wrong by ways of observation and experiments, because this kind of approach is usually regarded as anti-philosophical. However, even in ancient times Plato and Aristotle also analyzed reality and described what they observed and experienced: Plato at length described the various political systems Greece had experienced, Aristotle was an excellent biologist and observer of language. They then drew their reasonable conclusions and built theories. None of them began building theories without any idea of the world they could observe and analyse.  

2.3. About the tension

Perhaps one needs to add a few words about the tensions between the enigmatic beautiful art object the viewer and the public. In talking about tensions, I am taking a phenomenological viewpoint. For tensions exist as a phenomenon. Edmund Husserl also once said that we can have the illusion of some object talking to us, even though objects actually do not talk out of their own accord. There is an element, which one could call a trace, a strange thing, something which we seem to owe an answer to. I am longing for that answer, but feel that I am inadequate, somehow not knowledgeable enough to give it. Even if I was an art historian or a critic and knew a lot about its context (“horizons”) and could identify all the things, which are identifiable, I would still not know everything. The enigma, which remains is no symbol, it is not interchangeable for any kind of interpretation: for what could exchange the profound experience of beauty? I might have the illusion of an inner voice, a “dabar”, a logos which at the same time is an act, and this speaking voice asks me very strictly to answer, but I can only remain silent and acknowledge its Otherness. Because I am always seeking for an answer, this will stimulate my thoughts. All, however, will remain indefinite and open. It is a command to think about this strange beautiful object – only if I can feel beauty, of course –, which I need to protect. It asks me to protect its vulnerability and defend it against people who consider it ugly or without value.

Besides, there is something left of an artist who belongs to the past of that art work. And also, this artist had heard the command of that voice to be as good an artist as he can. In this voice mingle all tones, all rhythms, all concentration. I am trying to understand but cannot. But

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1 Those who are interested in reading the whole description of the activity installation at Shanghai 2017 may look at the PDF-document „An experiment – the Flame tree“.

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this voice follows me when I see, hear or listen to another work. And it reminds me to open my mouth and at least try to say what I like about it and talk about it to others. I have the illusion to relate it to my life, to what is good and bad about it. It asks me to take a moral attitude and feel responsible, responsible for society, which forgot so much to seek for that enigmatic voice as it rushes away from it. I need to remind it of it.

Perhaps society these days makes too much use of the other functions of artifacts: People hardly contemplate the way an artwork is, they hardly realize that there are various content-related tensions in a potentially enigmatic artwork, for instance between the real and the ideal, and even less so, they find time to consider the enigma itself, the greatest of all tensions. For the greatest of all tensions exists between what we can understand and what we will never be able to. To contemplate this is also worth a lot: It puts you in the right place.

3. A correspondence-theory of text and image: On sense and meaning

Change

When the sky is painted red and palm trees sway in the breeze a sweet perfume fills the air and music rises from the blue-green waters of the silent sea.

But when the clouds turn black and the palm trees struggle against the North wind the sand changes into burning stones and the piercing cry of night birds echoes in the hollow caves.

Thesis:

One can develop a thesis and theory from the following philosophical experiment: if a poet and a visual artist work together, one producing a poem and the other producing a related painting, but both conceive the resulting artwork, the object, as one work of art, not two, then a new unity evolves which has two parts, even though it is one whole. Here we have a case of the old problem of “the unity and its parts”. The experiment will show that the resulting unity is created,
because both parts are sense and meaning of the other at the same time. This is the case for any object, which a human mind conceives as one unity.

**Argument:**
Mental texts and mental images are what one adds as texts or thoughts to what one sees or hears (or reads) aesthetically.

I wish to simplify the entire problem by producing an analogy: assuming you and your friend see two different mugs in front of you. You say: "Give me the red-one." The text fixes your thoughts on the topic of colours. He knows which mug you pointed out. If you say: "I like the metal-one", you wish to make a comment about the texture of the mug, or you could mention the size and say "I never wanted the small one, but the large one".

So at any time, you fixed your thoughts in that communication to what you actually see and what seems to be important about that thing at that moment. What you see would have numerous ways of talking about them- considering also the many languages with which you could even express yourself. In terms of Gottlob Frege, you give the mug a certain "sense", but always point to the same object, i.e. meaning. You always mean the same.

However, what I wish to point out is slightly different from Frege, for I wish to make the point that in the relation between poem and painting, we always constitute and complement the other medium mentally with what is missing in the initial medium physically. In the poem, which has a fixed text, the images it produces cannot be aesthetically seen; in the painting, the physical text cannot be (normally) seen or heard or it is extremely reduced (short title), so we always add text. Whatever image or text is complemented mentally – i.e. what one starts thinking about the fixed artwork or poem – it has infinite or at least numerous possibilities.

If the poem, in this case “change” is just by itself, one can create mentally infinite possible associations, images and interpretations. The same is true if you look at the painting, which accompanies the poem: Imagining that it had no title at all, one could call it "Fish" or "Storm", or simply "By the sea" or "At St. Peter’s in bad weather", "Three", "Red sun", "Hope for better times", "Apocalypse" etc. There are infinite possibilities.

Now if we bring the two together, we can say that the text, i.e. the poem fixes the infinite possibilities of interpretation, because it becomes the sense for the meaning, i.e. the physical
object – like in the example of the mug where the “red-one” was clearly fixed to a mug and not to a tomato or other possible items.

At the same time, the painting fixes the infinite possibilities of interpretation and possible mental images, because it becomes the sense for the meaning, the poem.

We have the interesting constellation where both sense and meaning are interchanged very obviously: Both poem and painting are both: meaning and sense at the same time.

That is the main philosophical result of this philosophical experiment: It shows how the possible “waves of thinking” are interrupted and how a new unity is produced. Due to this interruption, the unity becomes conceivable for us human beings, it becomes a new functioning entity, a whole.

To give an example, one may say that the poem "Change" creates numerous mental “waves of thinking”. They are infinite because every interpreting human being will start from the fixed poetic text, and then automatically produce mental images (inside his own mind) which are intermingled with more mental texts. That way, a human being produces interpretations. For instance, in the poem there are no numbers of palm trees mentioned: So each individual will imagine sometimes one, sometimes more palm trees. Each will think of a calm beautiful day when the weather changed, one which he has experienced or heard of before, but in a somewhat blurred way, thus will add text, for he refers his thoughts back to the past or some imagination. The possible mental associations are infinite and they come in waves: images – thoughts (texts) – images etc. I here have artificially extended this process of those thinking waves which in reality might only take a flash of second or do not occur at all automatically, but only if one starts asking somebody all his associations.

The same "wave of thinking" could happen when looking at the painting first.

Now both waves of thinking are interrupted when linking the fixed text, the poem, with the fixed image, the painting. The infinite possibilities are interrupted: A new unity creates one new object, one new meaning. However, this new whole incorporates in itself meaning and sense as I have just explained: it works like glue.
The experiment and its analysis found a possibility to explain how unities of objects in life come about. Any unity in life is held together by an interruption of possible "waves of thinking" because any unity is held together by its elements, being sense and meaning for each other at the same time.

Think of a house (unity) that has is made of bricks and windows.

The window is a part of a house if one speaks just of a house. Still, it is a whole which is produced as a unity by a company that produces windows. Is the window now a part or a unity by itself? It is both. It can exist just by itself. However, then its sense is missing. The same accounts for bricks.

If implemented in a house, the bricks and the window are brought together in a relation to form a unity (with other items, but they must be neglected here to simplify the matter). Both can be meaning and both can be sense of the other. Start from the bricks. If you look at bricks in the way they are placed around a window-hole, they produce an image of a hole/opening in a wall of bricks, which you call by the text "window". The bricks shape the text "window" in your mind. But what is a real window- what is the image of a window in your mind? It actually is not a hole, but a window, which was made by a window-maker placed in a house-wall. So the image you have in your mind by forming the text "window" is the real window which together with the bricks make the house, the unity.

And what about the other way round? You may look at a window at a window-maker’s company and call it a "window"- you give it the text "window". However, what does the text "window" refer to? What is the image of a window you have in your mind, the concept that you would explain to your child? It always refers to the place in that opening in the wall of a house out of which human being can look and the thing which we can open and close while we stand in a room of a house. So it needs bricks (or some other material around it). The meaning is given and the sense in its various possibilities (the various ways the meaning can be realised) is provided. Thus we have a sense-meaning-relationship between the parts where the parts can become the meaning or the sense for the other parts and because they are all related in that way, glued together, we can conceive the whole.

On the object-level, we can talk about function. On the mental level, one can also discuss the problem of parts and the whole as a problem between text-and-image-relationships. The linking
of meaning and sense is the level which intertwines the mental and the object-level. For meaning is always the object, sense always the logic or imagined part.

4. Exploring the meaning of idealism and realism through text-image unities

The Baron’s Garden

It’s been locked and barred for years
the Baron’s Garden
alongside the crumbling chapel
and the old palazzo
echoing with empty rooms.

Wrapped in silence
behind the rusty gate
the gnarled trees grow
stemming with their branches
the ebb and flow of time.

Background knowledge: For more than thirty years, the chapel at Zebbug, the 65-room-palace and the garden have been left to rot. People who live close to the precincts can only gaze through the gate and imagine how nice it would be to walk between the trees and enjoy some tranquillity which otherwise can hardly be found anywhere nearby. Suggestions to turn this into a home for the elderly have been turned down by the owner, it is said. The chapel probably still contains some nice paintings, but people who used to pray and go to mass there every Sunday when they were young, are not even allowed to peep inside. Recently it had been opened for some film production, but all the neighbours were sent away. The lantern’s windows on top of the little church are already broken. All is left to further decay.

This account is rather upsetting. Most human beings – besides those who agree with the rights of owners, which legalize such incredible situations – would like to change this dilemma and open the gates to the public, make the garden accessible and turn it into a building that is for the good of the people of Zebbug.
If one looks at the painting, one cannot detect the “rusty gate” which the poem speaks of. It changes the poem’s IS-state to an OUGHT-TO-BE-state. The poem already takes an enigmatic, metaphysical stance with regard to the whole situation. But the painting now takes it into a possible future which might be friendlier. It is the idealised state which we find most probably nicer and more beautiful. No closed gates any longer.

**What does this tell us about realism and idealism?**

STYLISTICALLY, most ART HISTORIANS would probably say that this painting is painted in a REALISTIC or figurative style while partly imitating an impressionistic impasto-technique of applying colour. Chapel, house and park are clearly distinguishable and there is an attempt of working with a vanishing point and creating some depth, even though proportions are not accurate, but rather somewhat playful.

**From the point of view of philosophy in the Platonic tradition,** however, one should emphasize that realism and idealism are no artistic styles at all, as realism and idealism originally do not mean a certain mechanical or stylistic technique of depiction, but are concerned with function, ontology and logic. In fact, all art objects are real (in the sense of that they are there temporarily) – whatever art-historians might term their style – all is in this world, even though thoughts they contain might enter from a supposed “other-worldliness”. If we as human beings note them, though, they must already be “in our world”.

So according to this philosophical point of view, art works are real and the part of it, which one might call “idealism”, is only a transferring state of adjustment of the logos to its meaning’s function, which is none-the-less “real”.

Both terms belong to the realm of logic and are connected through the idea of the good.

Now, to state this needs some extra explanation.

**a) Relation of art work to the extra-artistic world:**

Any artist works with the concept of “leaving out” and “adding to”. So technically all artworks are idealistic, abstract and fantastic (imaginative) as they never depict ALL that is real in the exterior world. Even photography does not depict and copy ALL: it leaves out the garbage just next to my feet, it is not 3D, it leaves out the smells of air pollution which are disgusting. And it cannot capture the singing of the birds. A film would equally not be able to provide the total
situation with all possible perspectives. When we watch a film, we do not perceive the whole situation of something being filmed at the same time and we don’t smell anything either.

Even Aristotle, the realist, admits this and he says that all art production works with idealized beauty (Poetics). It is the artist’s task to select and design. He must not admit too much and too little into the artwork, but bring the work into the right kind of balance. It is an idealized situation.

However, the artwork itself is real, i.e. physical, and all it depicts is equally real in the philosophical sense of “real”: it is “there” with everything it incorporates. It is a fact as it is. And what it contains content-wise has an enigmatic function: I have called this Enigmatic Realism.

So again: all artworks (even if they wish to depict ugliness and no matter what art historians say about them) are idealised technically because they must exclude and abstract from reality and they may even add fantastic elements; but objectively speaking, they are all enigmatic real objects.

b) Idealism: adjustment of the logos to its meaning’s function

In the beginning of the poem, we encounter various words (logoi): garden, chapel, palazzo, rooms. If we needed to explain these words to some aliens, we would always explain these words according to their function; that is we could not think of them as not actually being used by a human being. A garden is only a garden if it is taken care of and used by a human being. Or else we would call it either an enclosure, a property or wilderness. Likewise a chapel: A chapel is only a chapel, if it is used as a chapel, a house for prayer and mass. It might be used as a museum- but then it “is” a museum. Or it is a building or a heap of debris. But the name chapel refers to its proper usage for mass or as a religious congregation hall. Also, a palazzo is only a palazzo if used and properly kept. If abandoned it is slowly changing from a former palazzo into a ruin.

By means of language we are placed into a state of finding the logoi in the poem “inappropriately” used. We do understand that the previously intact chapel is “crumbling”; but at the same time, we are faced with the knowledge that the chapel is not in a proper state, not in its original good state, not as it “ought-to-be”. So the real-life situation in comparison with the logos “chapel” is “out-of-order”, the order which is required by the logos (to be what it is in its function) itself is broken. Chaos seems to move in. Unconsciously the reader feels this very acutely. The exterior “Is-state” is not as it “ought to be” or as it once was.
Hence all those *logoi* (chapel, palazzo, garden, rooms) are deployed as idealizations if used with adjectives that relativize them (like “crumbling”), for those adjectives indicate their change from what they “ought-to-be” to what they are presently in real life. The reader is very much aware of it and either enjoys this melancholic idealization of constant change or he or she wishes to bring back the golden days of prior beauty where the *logoi’s* meaning and function were one and the same, *not only potential pairs*.

The painting now tries to respond to the reality of the *logoi* themselves: it at least opens the gate so that the garden seems to receive back its life, its function as a garden. Palazzo and chapel are still in “a slumber”, but it is a call for those who listen to the poem’s reality (i.e. extra-poetic reference, real life) to feel that something must be done about it. Poem and painting make us aware through the reality of the *logoi* themselves that we would like to re-establish the good situation, which we connect with the *logoi*: have a real beautiful garden with gnarled trees, have a real beautiful chapel etc. for the people of the Zebbug. When we listen carefully to the *logoi*, we automatically are filled with idealism to bring about a change for the better in our real life.

So to conclude, via language, we are pushed to think of the all-is-good-state, where the *logos*, its original meaning and actual function or application in real life coincide. One could, I suppose call this an unqualified “truth-state” of the *logos*, some positive concept. If this relationship is out-of-order, we are somehow pushed via the theory that lies within each *logos* to bring it about in real-life. **This is certainly one way how ethics works in us.** We are filled with idealism to bring about this pure-*logos*-state in reality. Otherwise we will have to put up with a reality that is deviating from this state of the good idea which each *logos* incorporates and use adjectives to qualify it: we then can still speak truthfully. There are also nouns that demonstrate a corrupt state of *logos* (positive concept). For example: the noun “ruin” makes no sense if there had not been an intact building beforehand. Or else, we would simply refer to “stones”, for instance, another positive *logos*. To summarize it, there are also nouns like “ruins” that refer to the de-functioned state of a positive *logos*’ meaning (building). The new noun (ruin) is only reminiscent of a *logos* that must be as an idea before it. Adjectives provide us with a qualification of the *logoi* or nouns.

The 20th c. is also a debate on Beauty in art. First of all, it has been unclear to most participants in this debate that there is only “idealized” Beauty (not “Beauty” as such) in artistic depictions and what we think of it subjectively can vary to taste. “Idealized Beauty” used in art
and art criticism is not only often confused with “subjective or public taste” but also mixed with what we understand by “attraction”. Therefore it is better to talk about “beautifulness” or “attractiveness” if we refer to what we like, and avoid the expression of “idealized Beauty” in art altogether. This afore mentioned 20th art-debate (what we like and feel attracted to) discusses conceptually not only what we consider as a good-and beautiful-artwork, but also some people’s attraction to the ugly, disgusting, so to all sorts of non-art or a-art as well as the glorification of evil and bad. Or one can propose every-day-objects for artistic considerations that attract by merely thinking about them conceptually. It is possible to depict evil things in an attractive therefore quasi-beautiful manner or think of interesting thoughts as being beautiful constructs.

However, the positive logos that “backs up”, for instance, some work glorifying vicious ideas theoretically belongs to the realm of Beauty and the Good. The evil ideas expressed in such a work are the corrupt state, negative concept of the positive ideas. The meanings of the words and depictions of “war”, “cruelty” and “fierceness” for example retain their negative meanings from the logoi which refer to the all-is-good-state, the idea of the good. They are simply contrasts of it.

Beauty (just by itself, not idealized beauty) as well as the idea of the good always refers to an overall wonderful, harmonious, balanced, peaceful EXPERIENCE WITHIN a subject while at this moment of the experience no exterior good is necessarily needed. It can be caused by it, but it is not necessary. The Beauty-Good-Harmony-Balance-Peace- experience is the point of orientation, which motivates us ethically in our actions and by which we understand language. We want to bring this experience about again and again in our lives. Because our language additionally imbibes us with the idea of the good theoretically and unconsciously, we are always moved idealistically to bring about the good state in reality.

Coming back to speak of our artworks which initiated those thoughts on text (logos) and image (our perceptions and feelings) we have already noticed that there is an obvious difference between the poem and the painting- besides its obvious material difference, of course. If it wasn’t for the “closed gate” the poem could be one possible text or expression for the painting and the painting could be one possible way of depicting the poem. But in the poem it is there, in the painting it is missing. The mysterious melancholy of the poem which just by itself works fine is disturbed by the thought that creeps in-between the painting and the poem. Our own eyes, our own “gates” so to speak, are “opened”. We become alert and understand that
something is not quite right: “WHY has the painter left out the gate?” Is the question we immediately ask.

If the Baron sees this work of art- and of course if the neighbours of this existing place see it, they will all know why. This poem and the image reflect on real-life: they do not reflect it in the sense that they simply depict it like a mirror, but in the sense that the artwork which exists in a clear image-text combination reaches out to the moral level and speaks the truth in an indirect way. The enigma of art is meta-physical, saying something with the material that is not physical.

Generally speaking, it is our wish to bring things into a balance, harmony, peace and beauty: adjust reality to the idea of the good. This makes our minds and thoughts move ethically. Both image and poem are in a balance as artworks- they are idealizations. But the tension between image and text creates an unspoken, indirect truth-statement about external reality which we feel “ought to be” good, too.

5. A final remark

I shall continue editing my musings on the project. I would appreciate your comments very much. The catalogue (21x21cm) with the poems in three languages (Maltese, English, German) and full colour images can be ordered. In case you are interested, please write me an email: Christine.s.kunkler.12(et)um.edu.mt.