

Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis

Studia de Arte et Educatione 14 (2019)

ISSN 2081-3325

DOI 10.24917/20813325.14.6

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Endorphins of Error¹

To make an error is to fail to meet the requirements set by a commonly accepted mode of conduct, defined rules of behaviour, laws of nature, or methods whereby certain goals are achieved. In the perspective proposed below, error is an unintentional action that arises from the lack of skill, knowledge, lack of attention, or simple accident.²

Error in art rarely occurs in the field of visual arts in the sense in which it is commonly understood, i.e. as a diversion from strictly defined practice, like that found for instance in medicine; in artistic practice, it can be made to serve as an accidental effect that is embraced by the author of the work. The artwork is understood here as a set (composition) of stimuli intentionally designed for the mode of perception that typifies art. An example of such useful error, in graphic arts, is an imperfect print from the matrix that diversifies the effect; in painting, it is the accidentally spilled paint; in photography, inadequate choice of parameters of the camera; in digital arts, an accidental decoding of electronic image. This diversion from the norm, or from the author's intention, may lead to formally more attractive results than what was originally planned. An artwork created originally, with formal freedom of its reception, does not need to employ codified rules of its creation and reception. Such an artwork, based on para-information (Mazur, 1976: 137),³ does not need to be informatively precise, because it is open to individual and personal interpretations by the viewer. The artist's alleged will is paramount here and, as viewers, we are able to approve of and interpret things like torn paper

1 "Endorphins" (contracted from "endogenous morphine") – peptide hormones; they cause well-being and self-satisfaction and generally cause all other euphoric states (so-called happiness hormones); they suppress the feeling of numbness and inhibit pain signals; see: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Endorphins>, access: 6.12.2016.

2 Error is defined as: a. «Incompatibility with current rules of writing, counting, pronunciation, etc.» b. «Incorrect move» c. «False notion about something», <http://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/b%C5%82%C4%85d;2445263>, access: 6.12.2016.

3 "Without para-information, information would only be issued and received. Thanks to para-information, information is understood" (Mazur, 1976: 137).

of contemporary drawing by referring to the code built on historical experience, for instance artworks by old masters, stored in inadequate conditions, whose author (artist) never intended his work to be torn, it was a result of other people's actions, yet our interpretation of this fact is not an error, but rather an act that expands the artwork's meaning by adding something the artist never intended. When we learn about our mistake, we experience a post-error pleasure at the fact that we were able to create a refined interpretation of the work's meaning that grows from and beyond the artist's intention. The author may be embarrassed that his message was seen as too simplistic (although very personal), since the artwork's sense (meaning), created by the viewer, and the para-texts of art criticism alike, are incompatible with his intention.

However, error is not accepted in the sense that it has in the saying "learn from others' mistakes" (meaning: avoid your own), but is it rightfully so, since there is a coincidence between error and the post-error pleasure from something unintended, that is to say, from an unexpected surprise? As a matter of fact, error is unavoidable, and so is the post-error pleasure, which comes as if by itself and without the subject's will, as a gift from the cosmos driven by the energy of planets and galaxies.

Error is also one of the oldest cognitive methods, as proven by the perennial method of *trial and error*. This method confirms the historical importance of this phenomenon also in its positive, cognitive sense. Error, as a deviation from the norm, emphasises the existence of this norm, and its dismissal may prove instructive, creative, or even innovative. Similarly, creative process, which is founded upon the transgression of previous experience, and norms of conduct, rules for how events unravel, is a way of doing something different, interpreting something differently, although it entails a planned action, always seeking predictable results.

These aspects highlight the significance of error both in the practice of everyday life, as well as in logic and philosophy. An error in counting and calculating has strikingly different consequences than in art; error in technology may lead to catastrophic results in house building; error in navigation prevents us from reaching our goal or leads to a discovery of a new continent (the case of America), be it as a mistake in calculations of the route or the lack of knowledge of how to behave during the journey.

My interest is not so much in the error itself, but in the "post-error" effects, that is, events after the error is discovered. When we are lost in the woods and find our way back after several hours of unsuccessful attempts, and the world comes back to us as an intelligible entity, we are consumed by a kind of irrational joy, which comes from endorphins, chemistry, like a self-releasing, unconscious event. The error was unintended, our being lost was not planned, and yet, as a result, we have experienced a distinct pleasure. The bigger the negative emotion that accompanied this event, fear for our lives, the threat of animals etc., the greater the pleasure.

Perhaps this attempt to conceal the consequences of the error with the pleasure at avoiding them erases the painful feeling of discomfort, which makes us ready to make the same mistakes again? Getting lost in a city "forces" us to visit places we never meant to visit: "we got lost, but we are not sorry, for we have discovered a wonderful place that was never on the originally planned route." An error can lead

us outside the routine, rational, and planned behaviour, beyond established spatial and semantic contexts; it appears against our will, but, fortunately, its effects can also be positive. The post-error joy is an unplanned pleasure, and it is difficult to be located within the body, as is an orgasmic pleasure, for instance, but perhaps it is indeed located in the pituitary gland? We receive an unplanned pleasure by accident, and its intensity often outgrows the ones that were planned and sought for. According to the legend, Adam made a mistake for which he was expelled from paradise, but thanks to that he not only populated the earth, but he also experienced orgasmic pleasure, or perhaps even bliss.

We encounter an informed error in a risk situation, when we test if we are able not to make a mistake, for instance in extreme sports, where a mistake might equal death, or like in a saying “a sapper makes only one mistake.” Adrenaline and control of the situation push us to repeat purposefully provoked events and risk losing our life or health, but here, the pleasure comes from avoiding the mistake.

Another kind of joy or pleasure comes from other people’s mistakes, for instance from slips of the tongue or verbal twists, like when someone says “I prefer a gay foot to an orange,” which gives a listener an explosive pleasure, which is difficult to resist, like the one in intentional cabaret jokes.

Error contains cognitive potential; in technological media, e.g. screen distortions, we can recognise whether we are dealing with an analogue or digital image, while effects of such error might often reveal the way given apparatus works, or how things appear in our eyes. Mistakes may also become the axis of philosophical reflection. For instance, Wolfgang Iser’s theory of transversal reason⁴ is based on the phenomenon of free navigation around contexts previously unrecognised by the subject who reacts in real time to encountered situations, and thus often makes mistakes. Such reactions turn mistakes into navigation, and wandering into *flâneur’s* walk, yet they do not eliminate erroneous decisions from the assessment of the transversal reason, but rather continuously put it to the test, whose rules are stored in the subject’s personal biological memory. In a sense, we follow here the definition of intelligence, seen as an *apt behaviour in a new situation*, assessed *post factum*, but during the course of events, including shifts and repetitions. Norms and goals are not so much observed here, but they are sensed, foreseen or created from encountered events. Philosophy and mass ideologies often encounter false *ideas of something*, which are not always mistakes that can be proven, as they come as results of following different, often contradictory rules; although science knows the notion and act of falsification, it is hardly effective in complex discourses. Error refreshes our excessively routinised experience and tested rules and works as a warning against even more dangerous outcomes; we are happy that a car accident *did not end any worse*.

Post-error pleasures are also typical for religions; error, as sin, is erased through the Catholic act of confession, for instance, bringing joy from resetting one’s account and ability to sin again, which is reflected in the folk saying: “if God grants health, sins will come as well.” We are bound to make mistakes in various spheres,

4 The term is taken from the texts of Wolfgang Iser (Iser, 1998).

therefore the post-error pleasure is offered us by “our fate.” It is a self-powering mechanism of losing and finding the way, of repetition, of relying on something that does not depend on us. New opportunities for that are offered in great numbers by new technologies, and we often wonder if using all kinds of media gadgets does not lead to situations intended by their manufacturers, whether applications are not purposefully built in such a way that we continually make mistakes, need to search through our data bases and settings to finally switch to factory settings and be joyful that the problem solved itself? So deeply ingrained into our lives, error is then not only a vehicle for development, innovation, creativity, and progress, but also a source of post-error pleasure. Visual art, as a part of fine culture, and even more as a form of creativity, draws all kinds of profits from erroneous practices, finding therein original forms, actions, and emotions freed from typical behaviours. This way, it also reveals the regulatory forces of social life as restraints on imagination, and introduces unconventional solutions that offer the joy of creation.

Error, as a failure to meet commonly accepted standard of conduct, is a guarantee of cognition different from the “proper” view of reality; it opens up other references, contexts, or views that inspire new investigations. There is also certain poetics of error, a pulling depth that differentiates between knowing and being able to, which is clear in the popularity of YouTube videos, where some daredevils try to shoot from a cannon, jump over a highway on their bike, etc. They fail more often than not but give joy to their viewers.

There is also the pressure of error, understood as an attempt to get out of a random situation, which gives rise to previously unpredicted solutions; examples of those include various unplanned scientific revolutions and inventions, such as gunpowder, atom, penicillin, arcuate rack, and many others. In this sense, the inevitability of error, though variously understood and defined, makes it a driving force of inventiveness and creative effort. Error invests actions with a unique, singular character; it is bound to particular environment and a particular, unique situation.

However, in this text, I do not wish to propose reflections that are, in fact, merely indexing the types and categories of error, academic comparisons, and historical quotations, and, in this context, whatever was written on errors by Socrates, Descartes, Derrida, Baudrillard, Foucault, Barthes, and Nietzsche, to name but a few. I am interested in errors, but only as sources of the post-error pleasure from discovering a thinking different from the unmistaken and rigorously correct thinking. In artistic practice, errors have a complex nature, because original works, formed as packages of impressions of intentional nature, open to viewers’ interpretations (typically for art), do not refer to clear-cut norms, and potential errors do not bring consequences as grave as those in medicine or construction. Error may be seen as a failure to meet a requirement of a single aspect of interpretation, which has particular context, history or established way of doing something. A badly made print from a matrix is a technical error, but as a means of artistic expression it is a rightful effect, accepted by artistic practice. It is also obvious that there exists some form of scientific historicity of the philosophical understanding of error, according to which Umberto Eco would possibly write about openness to error, Baudrillard

about the simulacra of errors, Foucault about the pendulum of error, or about social oppression. What is important for me is the post-error discovery and creation of a new perspective on reality, development forced and pushed by error, and the post-error pleasure.

In its suggestion made to the perceiving subject to participate in art creation, interactive art does not dictate the rules of conduct, but it inspires the participant to undertake creation understood as operational activity, rather than as interpretation of others' works. This way, errors in art are of potential nature, in the way works are being created and "consumed," when the artist makes a conscious use of the technical error as a means of expression; then, his action ceases to be erroneous. Fashionable in the 1990s, acoustic noises, conglomerates, and interferences of waves, erroneous in the eyes of earlier music, became new means of expression rather than mistakes generated by technical devices. The use of such effects in media art becomes common in interactive installations, musical film scores, and musical experiments. The emergence of technological, temporal, and interactive art raised an interest in the transformation of the original work in the user's operational perception,⁵ together with inherent disturbances in the course of creation in the presence of viewers. Both the interactive viewer and the artwork's author consider the possibility of emerging unpredicted effects, stemming from a behaviour that is accidental, difficult or impossible to foresee. Therefore, it is difficult, or altogether impossible, to tell whether in his operations the interactive viewer makes mistakes. Although we can observe his operations by means of trial and error, it is full of continuous repetitions and sudden changes of course, manifesting the personal nature of the dialogue between the user and technical devices.

In its form, an interactive artwork⁶ is unfinished by its author, it is a structure open to be reformulated by the interactive user, without any strict limits imposed by the author, who usually indicates merely the possible choice and procedures of transformation, without giving any set rules for creating the work as a predictable final result. The interacting viewer's post-error pleasure is greater when the rules of conduct are more rigorous and more defined, while their transgression has a strong potential for difference. The blurring of rules, boundaries, disciplines, and habits, although it boosts the sense of authorial freedom, it diminishes the power of satisfaction coming from crossing the boundaries and the pleasure of moving around a flexibly structured world, which makes it different from the post-error pleasure defined above. The freedom of blurred, fluid, undefined borders deprives the interacting viewer of the experience of change, suddenness, difference, and shift into a different situational context than norm; in this sense, error is much like the sense of shock, art's favourite means of expression. Scandal in art consists in transgressing

5 "An operational perception", unlike conceptual-contemplative, is characterized by multi-sensory contact with the artefact, including bodily (tactile, kinaesthetic); the perceiving subject (interactor) is usually inside the artefact, but most importantly, it can also transform the existing state of the environment, i.e. the structure of the artefact. For more see: Porczak, 2003: 130.

6 Interactivity is understood here as media (mediated) interrelationships between units and devices.

established social norms, but when we leave behind rational discourse, we need to agree that in the artistic context the meaning of slogans or expressions is merely a casual suggestion in directing the viewer's interpretation, just like the painting's title does not constitute its basic meaning. In the art world, many exhibitions, competitions, or shows, organised *under a slogan* in no apparent way refer to that slogan; what is more, works or actions more remote from the slogan's semantic scope are considered more interesting. Openness of interpretation often leads to the situation when the author's intended meaning is banal and primitive in comparison to the refined associations made by the viewer, who invests the art form with his own content (associations). The author's motivation is quite straightforward; the author knows he is considered a creative agent, he is not worried and knows that the viewer-given meaning "will do the job." He can even afford to be ignorant. If the meaning extracted by the viewer will be significantly different from the author's intended meaning, the author will still profit from it, because it is commonly acknowledged that the artwork has inherent meanings (inherent in their form), which the viewer can merely try to uncover. One of the authors of an exhibited work could not contain his joy at the fact that he created something with such refined meaning without even knowing (or suspecting) that this meaning was possible to express by such simple form. The error of the belief that the author makes meaning and the viewer deciphers it may lead to the author's euphoric post-error pleasure at learning the viewer's rightful interpretation.

A condition experienced before an erroneous interpretation is made is hesitation about which interpretive code to choose in a situation when we have an imprecisely marked intention, scarcity of information about the context, and a pressure of effective action, which leads to a drama of indecision, as exemplified by Hamlet, Konrad, or other classic literary figures. This way, all rational choices produce equally dramatic result, yet they entail considerations of error. This kind of consideration is different from a stock market game, when "to be or not to be" is supplanted by "to buy or to sell," where the aim is the pleasure of profit. This kind of pleasure is anticipated, and only in the final result do we recognise the relevance of our decision; this kind of pleasure stems from an intuitive or calculated, but always conscious action. The post-error pleasure comes from an unintended action; it is an error that gives us (chemical) shivers of pleasure, which seems absurd, but it is real. What can art, with its "freedom of creation," gain from error, when it purposefully invalidates all boundaries between fields and disciplines, techniques, aesthetics, meanings, and messages? If everything is permitted, instead of rules, we get an infinite number of equally rightful stances and artistic practices; error is a contradiction of thus understood freedom: if there are no rules, there are no errors. The goal of error (if such a phrasing is possible) is to reveal the working of social regulators, as well as of nature's practices and actions. However, error-free activity is not among the objectives of society, the collective, or individuals. Error highlights the norm and we are never free from its power; it can result from a multiplicity and diversity of norms, for it is the difference between the norms that produces errors. *Faux pas* is an erroneous behaviour in particular circumstances of someone who adheres to different norms and habits to those required in this situation.

I omit the intentional misleading of others to achieve some goal, an action that is one of more efficient tactics used in war and competition, particularly now, when wars are often fought through information. Disinformation is a means of political, economic, and technological warfare, as well as all other types of warfare based on provoking mistakes that are profitable for the agent of disinformation. We could point to a similar activity in art, when a refined strategy of informative impact of the work on viewers assumes its so-called hidden message, that is, a double or multi-layered meaning. This strategy is quite efficient in fighting censorship, for instance, when the work's official guise of acceptable meanings hides other, concealed meanings that are deciphered by the viewers who know the secret code. However, this is also an intentional action which concerns not so much art but its social role in informing viewers about the difference between the rejected official norm and the desired but politically or socially prohibited one. Since such actions are intentional and do not entail a post-error pleasure in the sense specified in the opening parts of this text, where pleasure comes from unplanned events, I merely mention but do not analyse them in detail.

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