

Laura László

Doctoral School of Philosophical Sciences, ELTE, Budapest

“BLOW UP”

Framing and zooming as an artistic device in Attila Szűcs's and Elżbieta Janicka's works

Abstract

The question of the frame can be treated as one of the most cardinal notions of art from ancient aesthetics. However, it seems that its “story” is an implicit one, it has remained in the background for a long time. At first sight, perhaps, it is mostly related to the visual arts, in which its significance also seems to be invisible. As Paul Duro states, “we see the artwork, but we do not see the frame”,¹ though, this notion is also picked up sometimes mainly in the beginning of the 20th century art history.² Literally, the *term* of frame got into the theoretical focus by Erving Goffman's influential work³, and it was also extended to the *whole* field of art. This means that frame is not only to be understood in its physical sense, but it is related to the artistic whole itself. What kind of elements are required to achieve an intelligible coherence, which conditions are needed for the works of art?

However, the artistic and teorethical approaches to this “wholeness” is periodically changing. Contemporary aesthetics are fairly far from the Aristotelian thought of the unity as a precondition of any artworks,⁴ and mainly „after Holocaust”, using Theodor W. Adorno's well-known phrase, the expression became irreversibly different. But how different is this „poetry”? Does any *positive* artistic „expression” exist at all in working through the 20th century's past, or do we only speak in the language of absence?

¹ Paul Duro (ed.): *The Rethoric of Frame. Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*. Introduction. p. 1.

² Georg Simmel: „The Picture Frame: An Aesthetic Study.” In *Theory, Culture and Society*, 11, 1, 1994, pp. 11-18.; Heinrich Wölfflin: *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe: das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst*. München, 1915.; Wilhelm Worringer: *Abstraktion und Einfühlung. Ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*. München, Piper, 1921.

³ Erving Goffman: *Frame Analysis. An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York, Harper and Row, 1974.

⁴ “The component incidents must be so arranged that if one of them be transposed or removed, the unity of the whole is dislocated and destroyed.” Aristotle: *Poetics*. 1451a. In <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0056%3Asection%3D1451a>

In this presentation, I would focus on genocide-related visual artworks and their special representational techniques, if they have any in the basic sense of the term. As we surely will see, *representation* itself is highly problematic in this case, because no one can *show* the formerly unimaginable and unspeakable horror of the Nazi regime in World War II.: the disappearance of “beauty” makes any harmonic composition impossible (or simply kitsch), and the notion of the *whole* gets into crisis. Thus, the frame itself gets into crisis, but it can play an important role: its absence or the “anti-composition” may be meaningful as well. According to my hypothesis, the special frame techniques and cutting methods themselves may contain a deep dramatic effect, and the potential to artistically “speak” of any tragedy, or to avoid to be profane at least: they also may “help” in working through past in a way, if we take a rather sociological perspective, which is quasi required in any Holocaust-related art. For the analysis, the Hungarian painter Attila Szűcs’s “Postcard from Lidice” and the Polish artist Elżbieta Janicka’s “Sobibor” will serve as a starting point. In the former case I will examine the *zooming in* and *out* phenomenon, by which a picture can “lose” the focus; in the latter image, I will more closely consider the “mythical” significance of the frame in showing an absence, an unsayable entity, and the possible artistic reason to use this kind of method. However, the analysis will be always accompanied by the theoretical approaches in relation to the frame too.