

## CREATIVITY AS SOCIAL CRITIQUE: A CASE STUDY OF THE OPERA *HAVE A GOOD DAY!*

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**Abstract.** The article explores the communication of social critique in contemporary art. The article aims to reveal the connections between art and politics existing in the theory of art aesthetics and art practice. Empirical research: the content analysis of critical reviews allowed to determine that the pronouncements of the authors and the official agenda presentation of a work of art that potentially articulates a political message but is considered hermetic affect and indicate the direction of reception. An example of contemporary opera was deliberately chosen for the research. Contemporary opera is often considered as a hermetic domain of creativity, solving only aesthetic, but not socio-political challenges. However, from the very first examples, the opera genre has been treated as an improvised and aestheticized public sphere, enabling to communicate ideology principles of the dominant political power or, conversely, to demonstrate social criticism to those in power. Opera research that focuses on political aspects is usually based on the musicological paradigm conducted on the basis of analysis of aesthetic regime -opera as a work of art communicating a socio-political message is still rarely explored. However, contemporary artists often creatively rely on politically active narratives and themes. This enables the opera genre to be seen as a platform for political communication.

**Keywords:** art, communication, contemporary opera, creativity, politics, social critique, reception.

### Introduction

Art and politics function both in parallel and in synergy. The point of intersection of art and politics in time and space is not defined and static, as it changes along with cultural practices and canons. However, both art and politics respond to, or are directly affected by, the events of social life, and are inevitably linked by a variety of internal and external connections. The reflection of social life is more easily appreciable in works of fine art and literature, where the depicted object is easily recognizable. However, even abstract art of music is composed and consumed in a certain social and political environment, so although focused on solving aesthetic challenges, it is not autonomous.

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Creatively articulating social critique has always been a favourable genre of opera. Since its foundation in 1600, the production principles of opera have been controlled by the authorities (Alano, 2005, p. 126). The plots reflected the principles of the dominant political ideology, and the subsequent comic forms of the opera genre enabled composers and librettists to communicate artistically expressed criticism of the dominant political power or the prevailing socio-political system (Paul, 1971, p. 396). However, the creators of the opera genre focused on only aesthetic but not political challenges, so sophisticated forms of social critique were considered as artistic, namely the hermetic content of the opera.

Thus, the complexity and specificity of the opera genre not only enables to treat opera as an improvised and aestheticized public sphere but also to analyse it in various aspects. However, the field of opera as politically engaged genre research is dominated by a musicological paradigm in which, even when analysing the relationship between opera and politics, one focuses on the aesthetic regime. Thus, the relationship between art and politics is often treated broadly by focusing on opera fables, literary or musical characteristics of opera characters, the influence of socio-political context on opera genre narratives, or the principles of repertoire formation. The opera genre, as a work of art that constructs and potentially articulates a socio-political message, is rarely explored to this day. However, contemporary artists frequently rely on politically engaged narratives: the socio-political message is articulated by examples of the opera genre by Leonard Bernstein, Astor Piazzolla, John Adams, Steve Reich, Philip Glass, and other contemporary composers. This enables the opera media to be considered as a platform for political communication.

This article aims to identify the connections between art and politics in the theory of art aesthetics and art practice. The research presented in the article allowed to investigate whether the socio-political message deliberately constructed by the authors of a work of art is recognizable and apprehensible in the process of reception.

## **1. Art and politics**

In the field of research on the relationship between art and politics emerge two paradigms: art and politics exist immanently or separately. Jacques Rancière, for example, argues that art and politics cannot coexist because these two categories contradict each other. A work of art that emphasizes political but not aesthetic challenges ceases to be art and becomes politics. Thus, responsibility of provoking political intelligibility deals with heterogeneous or even shocking aesthetics (Rancière, 2009, pp. 83–84). However, according to Rancière, even art forms that seek autonomy and are focused on a purely aesthetic effect are not detached from politicization. In the paradigm of artistic autonomy, the main function of art is considered to fill with beauty what the human soul lacks. Rancière observes that even such a position, which treats art as a hermetic phenomenon, presupposes the heterogeneity of art (2010, p. 116). Rancière also points out that the aesthetic experience of art involves not the work of art itself but the consumer of the work of art, so even politically inactive art that deals solely with aesthetic tasks is not autonomous. However, Rancière suggests that a work of art participates in sensory experience as much as any other object that is not a work of art, so a work of art may not produce an aesthetic effect (2010, pp. 116–118).

Rockhill argues that art is not decoupled from politics because art itself is a social category whose effects are not unambiguous and predetermined (2014, p. 47). Art and politics do not exist as cultural constants, so they have neither universal ideas nor fixed concepts that define their features or possibilities of use. What we consider art and politics are constantly changing theoretical practices that are given meanings by different discourses (Rockhill, 2014, pp. 44–45). According to Rockhill, a work of art is not merely a physical form – although art originates from within the creator, it acquires a material form in a certain time and space. Having become part of cultural practices, art, regardless of the author's intentions, may be politically neutral or active, so the division of art into political and non-political is not legitimate (Rockhill, 2014, p. 27).

The discussion between Rancière and Rockhill continues the problem outlined by Friedrich Schiller. Schiller decoupled art from political and moral functions but did not deny the aesthetic significance of the experience. Schiller argued that art is free from human conventions because it arises and is consumed from a spiritual but not a material needs (1999, p. 26). However, according to Schiller, an aesthetically inclined person tends to make the right decisions and act correctly (1999, p. 119). Thus, although art does not in itself educate, it is a free reflection that takes us into the world of ideas and “gives access to the mind but does not lead to whether that opportunity will be seized” (Schiller, 1999, p. 118).

Schiller's concept of artistic autonomy was reflected in the motto *l'art pour l'art* which exploded in the Romantic paradigm of art. Poe argued that the purpose of art is only aesthetic: to reflect the spirit of the creator and to elevate the spectator (1996, pp. 1431–1436). Rancière notes, however, that *l'art pour l'art* not only established the autonomy of art, but also became an aestheticized form of life, enshrining the free state and expression of thought acquired during the French Revolution (2006, pp. 23–27). Ligeti argued that a work of art is not merely a set of signs – the text of a work of art is fixated in a specific time, namely, surrounded by certain economic and political conditions that construct the foundations of artistic dialectics (1978, pp. 19–21). An analogous concept of artistic communication was presented by Foucault, who stated that the written text is a discourse recorded in verbal language (1998, pp. 206–207). According to Ligeti's and Foucault's concepts of art and the social environment connections, the principles and peculiarities of artistic expression *per se* reflect the social environment.

Julia Kristeva suggests that each text is an absorption and transformation of another text, so every text is intertextual (1986, p. 37). The Romantic paradigm of art aspires to communicate on the basis of intertextuality – via emotions or additional narratives given by the title of a work of art. For instance, Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 (composed in 1802–1804) *Eroica* as well as the personal experiences caused by the certain social environment and expressed through the music point to the context of the French Revolution (Rehfeldt et al., 2021, p. 74). Documentary artefacts – such as the testimonies of three the Holocaust survivors recorded in the tape record of Reich's string quartet *Different Trains* (composed in 1988) (Włodarski, 2010, p. 103) – creatively reflect political events and their consequences. Rancière observes that documentary sets heterogeneity of aesthetics and communicates doubly: strangely and at the same time easily perceived, which brings art closer to reality, thus provokes political intelligibility (2009, p. 84).

Forms of art that, in addition to shaping the aesthetic agenda, deliberately set political agenda, rely on radical aesthetics opposing to the dominant one, as the fostering of aesthetics is considered a privilege of the bourgeoisie (Bürger, 1984, p. 48). Adorno observed that dissonances that were intentionally highlighted in the early 20th century music functioned as a resistance to the dominant taste of the bourgeois audience (2006, pp. 9–11). Debord observed that artistic critique of capitalist consumption of the art is merely a repetitive phase of the same discourse (Debord & Wolman, 1997) and suggested that spectacular consumption of the written word turns art into commodity, thus politically engaged art should operate outside the traditional art system, raising radical social issues in situations constructed in everyday life (2006, pp. 171–177). However, Rancière notes that de-aestheticization of the art is an alternative way to focus on aesthetic challenges that strengthens the hermeticism of art (2010, p. 130).

Previously exposed various concepts of political communication in art demonstrate that art and politics exist immanently. Consequently, in refined and abstract works of art a certain political agenda may exist. The research presented below seeks to address the research question – to determine whether the political agenda presented by the authors of a work of art affects and indicates the direction of reception of a work of art that potentially articulates a political message. An example of contemporary opera has been deliberately chosen for the study: contemporary music is often seen as hermetic and solving only aesthetic but not social or political challenges.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Roland Barthes suggests that a work of art communicates via three dimensions: informational, symbolic, and subjective, which he identifies as a third meaning. The informational dimension communicates most clearly as it provides information about the object presented in a work of art. The symbolic dimension provides the recipient with references to social context, historical events, values, or other works of art. Symbols displayed in a work of art may be presented by the author, but they may also be given meaning by the reader, depending on their social, cultural or personal experience. The third meaning is individual. Consumer of a work of art considers it the most important as it fulfils the reception. Barthes suggests that the third meaning is independent from external factors, such as cultural learning, social context. The third meaning always contains an individual emotion that does not signify what the subject feels when reading the text, but what the subject likes or what position he or she represents (Barthes, 1978, pp. 55–60).

## 3. Methods and data

The objective of the research is to determine whether a legitimate reception narrative of a work of art that potentially articulates a political message exists. Tasks of the research: a) to analyse the characteristics of the aesthetic and political reflections on the work of art that was chosen for the research; b) to determine whether a political message that is potentially articulated in a chosen work of art is recognizable and to examine how it is apprehended;

c) to explore whether the chosen work of art, which potentially articulates a political message, provokes political intelligibility; d) to determine whether reception of a chosen work of art follows a homogeneous narrative.

The research focuses on the professional reception of the opera *Have a Good Day!* (Lithuanian: *Geros dienos!*) composed by composer and music director Lina Lapelytė, librettist Vaiva Grainytė and director and set designer Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė. Opera *Have a Good Day!* was firstly performed in 2011, in a contemporary alternative opera and multidisciplinary art festival *New Opera Action* in Vilnius, Lithuania. *New Opera Action* is produced by a production house *Operomanija* based in Lithuania, dedicated to the creation and promotion of new music theatre (Haveagoodyday.lt, 2018). In 2013, *Have a Good Day!* was selected by an International Theatre Institute jury for a presentation at the finals of the worldwide competition *Music – Theatre – NOW*, where the opera was awarded the Globe Teana – Theatre Observation prize. In 2014, *Have a Good Day!* was awarded the *Golden Cross of the Stage* prize for the best Lithuanian authors' performance and eventually was presented in various international theatre festivals in Europe and the United States (US). In their collaborative practice, writer, playwright and poet Grainytė, artist, composer and performer Lapelytė and filmmaker, theatre director and visual artist Barzdžiukaitė focus on relationship between documentary and fiction, reality and poetry, the overlap of theatre, music and the visual arts (Haveagoodyday.lt, 2018).

The choice was conditioned by the minimalist aesthetics of the work of art, the political agenda constructed by the authors and the definiteness of the object depicted in the opera. The plot of the opera is based on a simulation of a supermarket in fiction, where protagonists are the cashiers. Their arias are accompanied by a continuous beep that mimics an item being scanned. The monotony of the supermarket is conveyed in a minimalist style of music. *Have a Good Day!* is an example of mimetic high art, addressing both aesthetic and political challenges. The author of the libretto states that she relied on keeping the poetic idea, but not deviating from the daily issues. Therefore, the authors of the opera paid interest and research into the policy of supermarkets, behind the scenes of cashiers' workplaces, and the stories of cashiers acquainted with the (Juodelienė, 2013). Grainytė observes that opera consists of several dimensions: sociological research, imagination, poetry, personal experience, when she graduated from the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, Lithuania and registered at the labour office (Juodelienė, 2013).

Authors of *Have a Good Day!* suggest that the main idea of the work of art is to talk about people who look like robots but are in fact real people (Passages Transfestival, 2015) and critically, ironically but not depressively criticize capitalism (Passages Transfestival, 2015). One of the objectives revealed was to empower invisible characters by giving them a voice (Theatre-Contemporain.net, 1998–2021): by showing cashiers as if through a magnifying glass, to raise them above what is seen in everyday life (Passages Transfestival, 2015). According to the authors, one of the narratives of the opera is excessive consumption, revealed in the portrait of a cashier who sells all day and goes shopping after work herself (Kešytė, 2020). The opera demonstrates the buy-sell phenomenon in everyday life and the monotony it causes. In order to bring artistic expression closer to reality, trained performances and more complex musical language have been abandoned (LRT, 2021).

The research of *Have a Good Day!* reception was performed on the basis of qualitative data analysis. The collection of data was facilitated by the creative company *Operomanija* which submitted the bibliographical references of critical reviews of works of art copyrighted by *Operomanija*. From the submitted bibliographical references, all reviews available online written in English and Lithuanian were selected by the targeted sampling method. A total of 11 reviews were analysed, published between 2011 and 2020.

For 2011, after premiere of *Have a Good Day!* at the festival *New Opera Action*, only one critical review was discovered, reviewing the entire *New Opera Action* festival. Reviewer Liepa Aukštaitė participated in the “Young Critics Competition”, which was part of *New Opera Action*. Rated as one of the three best, the author’s review was published in *Music Bays* (Lithuanian: *Muzikos barai*), journal of science and art (Aukštaitė, 2011). More detailed insights into *Have a Good Day!* was presented in a daily paper *Kaunas Daily* (Lithuanian: *Kauno diena*) by journalist Juodelienė (2013). More reviews were published in 2014, following an opera performance at the *PROTOTYPE: Opera – Theatre – Now* festival in New York, US. A more in-depth analytical look of art critics Smith and Ross was featured in the daily *The New York Times* (Smith, 2014) and the art magazine *The New Yorker* (Ross, 2014). In a daily paper *The Wall Street Journal*, opera critic Waleson’s (2014) insights into opera presented reflections on the entire *PROTOTYPE: Opera – Theatre – Now* festival program. Similarly, the festival was reviewed by Rockwell (2014), author of the opera magazine *Urban Arias*, and Daniel Witkin (2014), art critic for *The Moscow Times*. In 2015, author Šiugždaitė (2021) reviewed the *New Opera Action* festival, where *Have a Good Day!* was performed repeatedly. In 2018, the performance in Vilnius was evaluated by the economist and opera journalist Lyapustina (2018) in the online portal *Opera Wire*. In 2018, after vinyl record of *Have a Good Day!* was released, art historian Bajarkevičius (2018) presented reflections on the opera with more detailed insights, including connections between art and politics issues in the cultural newspaper *The Athens of the North* (Lithuanian: *Šiaurės Atėnai*). In 2020, performing arts critic Jūraitė (2020) presented an article about creative company *Operomanija*, published on *Art Fracture* (Lithuanian: *Menu faktūra*) website, where reflections on *Have a Good Day!*, were presented as well. The fragmentation of critical reviews over time was due to the fact that the opera received more public attention only in 2013, when it was awarded the main prize in the international theatre festival *Fast Forward* held in Germany.

The research is based on *Have a Good Day!* authors’ insights, presented in this article previously, as well as the official presentation of the opera content (Noa.lt, 2011; Haveagood-day.lt, 2018), which provides guidelines for the following agenda:

- Opera is an ode to capitalism, illustrating the inevitability of consumption;
- The anonymous cashier character acts as a collective salesman character;
- The plot of the opera reflects the inner life of the cashiers and reveals what lies beyond mechanical or even robotic greetings and smiles;
- The opera abandons classical singing, arias sound like recurring banal melodies, minimalist music reproduces the sounds of the mall;
- The mosaic of the fates of different cashiers in the opera turns into an ode that affirms the pleasure of consumption;
- The spectator is invited to identify themselves as a participant in the earn-buy circle;
- The atmosphere of the supermarket is restored with shiny installations, sounds of electronics, and a piano imitating a scanner;

- Goods exist only in verbal and acoustic form;
- The monotony of artistic expression illustrates the phenomenon of everyday consumption;
- The opera avoids a didactic tone, criticizing capitalism is communicated poetically through humor and irony.

## 4. Results of the research

### 4.1. Coding conceptions and interpretations

Critical reviews were coded on the basis of three dimensions of reception presented by Barthes: informational, symbolic, and subjective, which Barthes identified as the third meaning (1978, pp. 55–60). The concept of the informational reception dimension was associated with the reflections on the content, the symbolic – with the reflections on the message and meanings, the subjective – with the subjective experience of the reviewer. The concept of the informational reception dimension was operationalized into the reflections on the artistic content and the reflections on the object depicted in chosen work of art. Reflections on the artistic agenda include the aesthetic reflections on the text and its performance. Reviewers' insights, which reflect the plot of the opera, were assigned to reflections on the object. Thematic and socio-political messages were chosen as variables of the symbolic reception dimension concept. The thematic message is revealed by reflections into the character traits, inner experiences of the characters or plot twists communicated through artistic expression. The words discovered, which refer to the political phenomenon, precisely criticism, capitalism, consumption, empowerment, exclusion, functioned as variables of the socio-political message. Subjective reflections were operationalized into aesthetic and provoking political intelligibility. The aesthetic experience includes the subjective experiences presented by the reviewers, which were inspired by the opera *Have a Good Day!* artistic expression. An experience that provokes political intelligibility was tied to reviewers' insights that presuppose a transformation of thought.

### 4.2. Informational dimension of reception of the opera *Have a Good Day!*

The insights of the reviewers, assigned to the informational dimension of reception, reveal that the artistic agenda of the opera as well as its performance, are reflected with restraint and conciseness. The performance quality is observed by only a few authors: they note that vocalists were excellent (Smith, 2014) and had different professional experiences, so they sounded different (Lyapustina, 2018). The artistic agenda of the opera is reflected in relation to the aesthetics of traditional opera: the exploitation of the female choir and the multi-layered texture of the music, the change of registers, strict rhythm, and harmony are positively assessed, classical singing abandoned in the opera is also noted and acknowledged. The musical text of the opera is rated as well-balanced (Lyapustina, 2018), and the libretto is considered to be cunning (Rockwell, 2014), specific, and nuanced (Bajarkevičius, 2018).

The reflections on artistic agenda are commonly accompanied by presuppositions that artistic expression in the opera reveals the plot and more accurately simulates the situation

of reality. Minimalist musical language and banal melodies are considered to reflect the monotony of the supermarket, repetition and minimalist musical expression are associated with monotonous work, electronics convey noise, the piano emphasizes emotions shown by the cashiers, the beep works as an unfettered overture, scattered throughout the piece, the libretto approaches the everyday life (Bajarkevičius, 2018). These insights suggest that the aesthetics of *Have a Good Day!* is recognized as mesmerizingly imitating and aestheticizing reality. Thus, the attention of the reviewers, who are looking for an aesthetic agenda, is shifted to the political agenda of the opera, which is interpreted as an imitation of reality.

Reflections on the object are dominated by interpreting opera as a suggestive reflection of social life. It is observed that the format of the opera accurately recreates not only the atmosphere of the supermarket but also the ritual of visiting it (Bajarkevičius, 2018). The reflections on the opera's plot as a mesmerizing reality simulation were found in all the reviews analysed. The political agenda of the chosen opera is recognized but interpreted as a reflection of social life, though unrelated to political meanings. An analysis of the informational dimension of reception also reveals that most of the opera reviews follow the agenda guidelines presented officially: insights that opera depicts robotic figures, artificial smiles, individual portraits of cashiers and the functioning of the individualized cashier character as a collective are indicated in the official presentation of the opera agenda. Consequently, the reviewers' reflections do not only deviate from the agenda presented by the authors, but also do not provide original insights that do not correspond to the guidelines specified in the officially presented opera agenda.

### 4.3. Reception of thematic and political messages of the opera *Have a Good Day!*

The analysis of the symbolic reception dimension highlights two narratives of the opera message decoding: thematic and socio-political. The research of the thematic narrative discloses that the artistic language of opera is interpreted as revealing the literary message of the opera – the inner experiences of the characters and the life stories of the characters: broad melodies convey individuality and subjective dreams of characters (Witkin, 2014), individual stories of characters are told through melody and harmony (Smith, 2014), gentle arias reflect the fatigue of cashiers (Lyapustina, 2018). Symbolic meanings were also detected in the libretto: yogurt suffering from insomnia was interpreted as an allusion to the early cashier's morning (Witkin, 2014). The authors of the opera did not present any insights regarding the literary narrative of the opera. Consequently, the reviewers provided additional narratives for the opera themselves. This reveals that the cultural competence of the reviewers is dominated by the experience of relying on the Romantic paradigm of art that orients to search for an implied literary plot in the work of art.

The thematic message was also assessed from a psychoanalytic perspective: the mosaic of characters decoded a palette of universal human desires (Witkin, 2014) and universal archetypes that we might discover in everyday life (Lyapustina, 2018). The sung motive depicting the search for the work of an art historian is interpreted as a symbol of widespread torturous frustration, recognized everywhere (Witkin, 2014). Current reflections shall also be considered as additional narratives provided by the reviewers, as the authors did not present



any data on psychoanalytic motives in the opera. The diversity of opinions discovered in the analysis of the thematic narrative disclosed that the thematic message is decoded individually and the interpretation is autonomous from the officially presented agenda. The reception of the thematic message approaches the individual reception on the subjective level.

The reception of a socio-political message follows a more homogeneous narrative than the reception of a thematic message. It is most commonly observed that *Have a Good Day!* criticizes the phenomenon of capitalism and consumerism. It is argued that the opera is a satire of a supermarket in which cashiers perform a liturgy of consumerism (Ross, 2014). The opera is named as the ode to capitalism and an illustration of endless consumption (Jūraitė, 2020), a critique of post-communist consumption with a flashy touch (Rockwell, 2014), a critique of the trap of capitalism (Smith, 2014), opera characters are interpreted as symbols of capitalism (Juodelienė, 2013). The scenographic conception to place each cashier on a separate platform is associated with a paradoxical isolation of cashiers, but this insight is not explained in more detail (Witkin, 2014). It has been observed that the phenomenon of consumerism is also conveyed by musical language: when cashiers' arias merge into a chorus, consumption floods the audience both physically and metaphorically (Lyapustina, 2018). *Have a Good Day!* is assessed as universal: Juodelienė (2013) suggests that a work of art that depicts dehumanizing mechanical work is relevant to all cultures and nationalities.

Only one reflection on another political narrative constructed by the authors – the empowerment of the social group on whose behalf it is spoken (Bajarkevičius, 2018) – was detected. Raising the aspect of the responsibility of socially engaged art towards the specific social groups on whose behalf it is spoken, Bajarkevičius raises a rhetorical question – how many real cashiers have seen *Have a Good Day!* and what do they think about it? The reviewer notes that the stage design and the libretto of the opera are non-theatrical, therefore distance the spectator from the fictional situation constructed on stage and reflect the *Verfremdungseffekt* (in English: distancing effect) originated by Bertolt Brecht and questions whether *Have a Good Day!* really provokes political intelligibility.

The research reveals that interpretations of the thematic message are more diverse and original than the insights on the socio-political message. The reflections on thematic message do not repeat the official opera guidelines presented by the authors or in the official presentation of the opera agenda. Current reflections are presented in a sophisticated vocabulary but do not provide original meanings given to the opera agenda. The reviewer, who identified the authors' objective to empower cashiers, thus demonstrates competence in the theory and practice of politically engaged art. This reveals that the socio-political message is fully recognized and perceived only by an art critic who is attentive to socio-political art.

#### 4.4. Aesthetic and political effect of the opera *Have a Good Day!*

Subjective reviewers' reflections of their experiences were divided into aesthetic and provoking political intelligibility. Reflecting on the aesthetic experience reviewers remark “refreshing” polemics of the opera, “charm”, wit, bite, humour, melancholy. The artistic direction is considered clever, efficient, economical, engaging. It was noticed that the stage design was antiseptic, as for the reviewer, the image seen on stage was associated with the smell of paint

in air (Smith, 2014). Music is assessed as warm, gentle, engaging, evoking a sense of everyday life, emotionally compelling or, conversely, strict and detached from emotionality. Insights into the genre of the work were discovered: it is suggested that the opera disclaims the myth of the opera genre as posh and sophisticated (Juodelienė, 2013). The opera is named after the cashiers' soap opera (Aukštaitė, 2011), a banality transformed into art (Waleson, 2014) and identified as strong, politically nuanced, but retaining posh and not descending to the level of agitation (Waleson, 2014).

Reflections on the aesthetic experience follow a coherent narrative. The only contradiction discovered is based on the dichotomy of emotionality and detachment from emotionality. As Barthes argued, the subjective dimension of reception denotes not what the subject feels, but what he likes (1978, pp. 55–60). Thus, the emotionality of opera music, or vice versa, the absence of emotionality, is defined by the tendency to emphasize the communication of art through emotions essential in the Romantic paradigm of art. Subjective reflections commonly present subjective epithets reflecting opera content, but not more detailed aesthetic experiences. This reveals that *Have a Good Day!* did not evoke a significant aesthetic effect.

Reviewers' insights into the opera that reflect a transformation of thinking assume that social critique detected in the opera does not necessarily provoke political intelligibility. A more pronounced transformation of political intelligibility is presupposed only by Lyapustina's statement that opera changes the perception of oneself as a participant in the capitalist structure. According to the reviewer, after the performance of the opera, we no longer feel happy consumers as we perceive the culture of consumption as a monster that we have created ourselves (Lyapustina, 2018). Juodelienė points out the fact that *Have a Good Day!* might have a political effect. She argues that the opera provokes a reflection: while running a shopping marathon, we do not notice a person sitting on the other side of the supermarket wall (Juodelienė, 2013), but she does not provide more detailed reflections on the transformation in her own thought. Recognizing the socio-political message, Witkin suggests that the authors of the opera, criticizing consumerism, do not persuade to change modern capitalism. The reviewer links the political message to an additional psychoanalytic narrative, bringing the political agenda closer to the thematic one. Witkin argues that the inner struggles of the characters are universal, cleverly presented tragedies of life that bring the viewer closer to the dark context of the present. Women's stories are filled with longing, lost hope, and a desire to be somewhere else (Witkin, 2014).

The research of the subjective dimension of reception discloses that *Have a Good Day!* did not have a significant aesthetic or political effect, but the aesthetic effect was more pronounced compared to the political one. This reveals that art that potentially articulates socio-political message does not necessarily provoke political intelligibility. The research also reveals that the aesthetics of the opera is interpreted as legitimate and attractive, therefore not shocking. Based on Rancière's insight that shocking aesthetics provoke political perception (2009, pp. 83–84), it shall be assumed that one of the possible reasons why *Have a Good Day!* has not presented a significant political effect is a vague aesthetic effect associated with positive emotions.

## Discussion

The research reveals that a professional reception of the art that potentially articulates a socio-political message mostly focuses on a symbolic level, but the thematic message of the work of art is contemplated more evidently rather than a socio-political message. The aesthetic agenda of the work of art that potentially articulates a political message is reflected in the foreground. The socio-political challenge is interpreted as an aesthetic task that does not provoke a political effect. The research highlights the tendency to approach a work of art that potentially articulates a political message on the basis of a Romantic paradigm of artistic communication, which suggests demonstrating feelings and additional narratives in a work of art, although authors of the chosen work of art do not present either emotional or thematic agendas. The research also discloses that commonly only part of the socio-political message is recognized, and reflections on the chosen work of art do not deviate from the authors' intentions. This indicates that the reception of the selected work of art is homogeneous. The political meanings of the work of art decoded by the reviewers coincide with the political meanings that are displayed in the officially presented agenda of the chosen work of art. This discloses that peculiar legitimate narrative of the reception of a work of art that potentially articulates a political message exists, though it is formed by the prior presentation of the agenda of the work of art. Solitary instances of reflections revealing the transformation of the perception of consumption phenomenon suggest that the reactions of reviewers may have been indicated by the legitimate narrative of the reception of the chosen work of art. This indicates that the reception of a work of art that potentially articulates a political message is not autonomous – the reception guidelines are provided by the formal presentation of the agenda of the work of art as well as the discourse of reception that is implicated empirically, namely learned and internalized.

## Conclusions

The research reveals that high art, which is ambitious to solve not only aesthetic challenges but to communicate social critique through creative expression as well, is perceived as a hermetic sphere of creativity. The political agenda of a work of art constructing social critique is interpreted as a thematic narrative of a work of art, and the socio-political message is fully recognized and apprehended only by the spectator attentive to the socially engaged subjects. However, according to Rancière, art, while not autonomous, shall reject the aspiration of becoming an arena displaying direct and manifested political communication (2009, pp. 83–84). Consequently, the communication of a work of art that potentially articulates a political message involves not only the recipient of the political message but also the sender. Thus, art that does not provoke political perception, but constructs a socio-political message, is to be treated as politically active. The theoretical discussion of the intercourses between art and politics revealed in this article and the results of the empirical research presented previously return to Schiller's insight that art does not in itself educate, but it is a free reflection that provides an opportunity to use the mind. Whether the opportunity will be used is decided by the spectator himself (Schiller, 1999, p. 118).

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