

Cristina GELAN
"Ovidius" University, Constanta, Romania

ANAMORPHOSIS - A PRINCIPLE OF AXIOLOGY? REFLECTIONS ON THE INTERPRETATION OF THE ARTWORK

Review
Article

Keywords

*Artistic-aesthetic attitude,
Contemporary art,
Symbolic hermeneutics,
Anamorphosis,
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Abstract

The paper provides an analysis of ways to measure and value the contemporary artworks. In this regard, the paper proposes a dual perspective approach, namely: reporting of some criteria against which may be assessed a work of art, on the one hand and, on the other side, recognizing the importance of a complex hermeneutical approach that has in the valorization. The context is of the evolution forms of expression, techniques, and artistic means, determined mostly by the evolving technology, which led to breaking the traditional specific boundaries of art and to the development of an artistic syncretism. Thus, the artistic object becomes as difficult to define as it is difficult to assess and artwork can be seen as a symbol or a system of signs that serves an aesthetic purpose. The interpretation involves the establishment of a syncretic stylistics and the evaluation becomes a semiosis.

INTRODUCTION

The development of art s in the last period has brought new perspectives into the artistic phenomenon, creating controversy both in the creators and consumers of art. Artistic innovations have come to develop so traditional standards were shattered. On these issues, H. G. Gadamer wrote: "Do older aesthetic concepts that we got used to define the essence of art are still available today? Through most of its outstanding representatives, modern art deliberately rejects our expectation concerning an image, expectation that we approach this art. It usually produces a strong rebound effect. What happened? What attitude of the painter which shatters all expectations and traditions so far, what requirement makes us all?" (Gadamer, 2000:15).

Being in a constant pursuit of originality, the creators began to use various forms of expression that have helped to redefine the essential concepts with which they operate. We are witnessing the emergence of *homo aestheticus* (Ferry, 1997), endowed with the ability to "aesthetic" filter the reality, to transfigure it and recreate it and that renounce at the aesthetic and axiological relevance of the beauty, analyzing art of works in terms of *taste* and other aesthetic categories, such as: the sublime, the ugly, comic or tragic. Categories of concepts, such as beautiful - ugly, aesthetic - unaesthetic, ethical - unethical, began to become increasingly insubstantial. This lack of substance involving a stylistic plurality, in the sense that meaning of art of work, and hence of the artistic act in general, are readjusted in new formulas. This re-adaptation involves the instauration of syncretic stylistics. Thus, the border of traditional art - painting, sculpture, graphics, architecture, - are falling, but end up interfering with different means of expression and it creates an artistic syncretism.

Jerrold Levinson pays attention to the fact that since the beginning of modernist forms of expression, art techniques and methods have significantly widened. Inserting fine arts photography is an example. Then, the fact that there has been introduced the so-called *new media*, as, for example, radio and television, and video also, online media and other in the arts, but also in drama or literature, are elements that we have to take into account when we relate to contemporary art. In this context, there are new genres of art, such as *installation* or *media art* beyond the reach of interpretation used for classical artistic genres (Levinson, 2003:16).

Contemporary artist's work is deliberately ex-centric: subversive, non-objective, fleeting, futile, ironic and provocative. In addition, instead of "artwork" of yore is moved from conventional spaces. Experiences like *the body art* take art directly on human body; the surgical scalpel, syringes for injection, tattoo and piercing tools shape

living forms. The artist's blood or his models acquire virtues of sacrifice and substitute the artificiality of industrial colors. Experiences like those of *performances* and *happenings* are staging event-like works of art. Digital art, *computer art*, *art reseaux*, *mail art*, silent fractal art, transfers the artistic object in space of computer technology and the Internet. *Land art*, *street art*, *graffiti* appropriates and aestheticizes the raw space or the public space. The artist does not necessarily exhibit, but proposes signals, disturbs, defies, shocks or protests. Giving up the manufacture of objects and their immediate display, art completely "dematerializes"; it becomes "gas" (Michaud, 2003), emission, reception, misappropriation of messages or information. The artwork becomes *open*, transient, willingly perishable within an indefinite space. There emerge artists without work as well as "artists without art," although "art is proved through works and not by what it may be proposed as art" (Domecq, 2005:38).

One of the essential features of contemporary art is that it is mainly oriented toward meeting the viewer's intellect at the expense of the spirit. Thus, it is determined to leave the attitude of a simple viewer and to enter into a state of reflection upon the sent message or to interact with her artistic object to test its authenticity. Concerning this, we say that the receiver must have the ability and willingness to understand the purpose of artistic performance, just so he can understand the idea of contemporary art in its complexity. As a metaphorical attempt to reveal the mystery with means related to stylistically structures plan of sensitivity, art as understood by Lucian Blaga is an experience of truth and mystery. The horizon of mystery is virtualized in most individuals, so contemplation of the work of art has the role to update this horizon within the viewer, so that it could be automatically integrated in its own ontological way: "The individual is overwhelmed by updating within himself a horizon that he knows well, but that has been virtualized under the pressure of daily life. While assimilating artwork, the individual declined in his essence, feels becoming fully human. [...]. It's about of an ontological mutation in small, facsimile and individual conditions" (Blaga, 1996:57).

An important role in the development and evolution of contemporary art is indisputably played by technology. As in any other field, the art technology, too, makes its presence felt to the full. We can say that contemporary art owes its current form to the very technical improvements. The implications it had computer or video art and the strong impact of their changed thinking and creative concepts in art. Moreover, the meanings of contemporary artists that can express themselves have become virtually limitless.

The historical context was an important variable in terms of major changes in contemporary art. Thus, the infusion of values in art or science who

emigrated from Europe to the US for fear of the World War II, led to the formation of vast cultural centers. Here, European artists were able to express themselves through their work without they encountered on the native continent. Also, artists originating on other meridians were able to display their artistic products in an environment without constraints.

ANAMORPHOSIS - A PRINCIPLE OF AXIOLOGY?

The lack of constraints and the endless possibilities of expression generated a philosophy of artistic reality of anamorphic type. Anamorphosis means when someone recognizes a physical object as an artwork without being influenced by prejudices and certain expectations. The term is apparently used for the first time in 1657 (Baltrušaitis, 1975:88) and is mainly applied to the fine arts. It involves a reversal of the elements and principles of perspective. Thus, instead of a reduction of visible limits, there is a projection that exaggerates shapes and displaces them in such a way that they are detected only when viewed from a certain point. The process is produced as a technical curiosity, but it contains a poetic of abstraction, a powerful mechanism of illusion and a philosophy of factual reality (Baltrušaitis, 1975:7). The anamorphosis is "the representation, through a distorted drawing in accordance to certain rules, of a model, that appears unaltered [...] by changing the point of view" (Hocke, 1973:217). At a front view, an anamorphic painting appears as a tangle of lines and colors, a chaotic structure, without any rule that could be understood; perceived from the determined angle from where it was conceived, it reveals its hidden meaning and structure and shows his whole expressive force. "Aesthetic anamorphosis does not constitute an addictive thing of a subject, but a detachment of both a primary, like sharing from within" (Diaconu, 2001:115).

The term is also used in logic being understood like an alteration, like forcing of logical normality or as problematic way to perceive some problematic, logical situations. For example, the sophism can be considered anamorphosis, namely a logical anamorphosis. So, we talk about an anamorphosis of thinking, realized and materialized by logic distortion, logic confusion, an ambiguity, an error or a false. It relies upon a very rigorous, logic-argumentative science.

Subjectively perceived from the angle from which it was conceived, logical anamorphosis can be considered as an expressive and fine reason, in the sense of efficient, but not necessarily real.

The anamorphosis, whether pictorial, literary, musical, optical, or logical is an expression of subjectivity and is encountered under the sign of an imperative: to be perceived from a unique angle, the

one from which it was conceived. Changing the receiving perspective instantly cancels the meaning of the anamorphic object just like not accepting the strictly subjective point of view suddenly destroys the convention. In this context, we are interested in the problem assessment and valuing the artwork as well as the creative artistic action.

To know which are the criteria by which we evaluate an artwork are, involves a complex process, as art incorporates into itself a sum of values, be they ethical, philosophical, or religious. Moreover, as time went by, society modified assessment criteria based on paradigms and ideals of historical eras or periods. Yet, two categories of criteria are mainly used in artistic creation evaluation, mostly aesthetic criteria and extra-aesthetic criteria. Among predominantly aesthetic criteria we include: the degree of expressiveness, the power of suggestion, the degree of representativeness of the theme or topic, as well as the place and role that artistic object occupies in a series of thematic or in a series of stylistic. Regarding the extra-aesthetic criteria, we have: access in understanding the topic or the theme, the degree of representativeness of the theme or subject, the success or failure of the artistic object, its punctual importance, the nature or functions of the social message that it transmits, power of suggestion but also the artist's intention and the final way of accomplishment of the artistic object.

Besides the two types of criteria, we meet other categories, which refer to aspect such as: the degree of expression of the national character or of of the ideational, thematic, or plastic national peculiarity; degree of integration within European or universal art; the degree of plastic or topic novelty; the degree of originality and expressiveness; ability to thrill and influence the viewer's sensitivity.

Related to these endpoints, the contemporary art, lacking purpose, seems to break the traditional aesthetic criteria.

VALORIZATION AS HERMENEUTICS

Beyond the criteria used in assessing the artistic creation, the process of valorization is a hermeneutical one. Thus, the interpretation tends to replace any evaluation and aesthetic appreciation becomes developed according to different interpretative processes, such as phenomenological, structural, psychoanalytic and why not, political, too in its neo-Marxist, neo-liberal, post feminism, post colonialist or gender significances.

Imposing a certain perspective of interpretation of contemporary artwork causes a hermeneutical imperative. According to H. G. Gadamer's hermeneutics, any assessment is made within a certain horizon of expectations, depending on experience and prior knowledge of interpreter (Diaconu, 2001:113). Thus, any encounter with the

work of art involves a meeting with your own self: "Among all the things that we meet in nature, the work of art speaks to us in the most direct way and breathes a mysterious familiarity that grips us all being as if there would be no distance and meeting the artwork would represent a meeting with his own self" (Gadamer, 1997). Once contact occurs with artwork, the human being appears as an ontological universe through which what the specifically for the viewer, as if they were contemporary.

H. G. Gadamer points out that the experience that values concerning artistic objects is one related to communication, dialogue, highlighting the fact that man before facing the objects, has to face himself. We could say that, dealing with the artistic object, the individual faces himself, finds the multiple facets of self. Furthermore, the interpretation requires a targeting towards the possibility of understanding the artistic object: "... what does it mean to interpret? Certainly, there is not an explanation or conceptual understanding, but rather comprehension and explanation ... Yet there is something more in interpretation. Originally, to interpret means to point in one direction. It is an important thing that an interpretation does not specify a particular target, but only points to one direction, mainly towards something open, that can perform in different ways" (Gadamer, 2000:7).

Understanding an artwork involves a dual perspective: there are certain essences or real qualities in the perceived objects or is the subject the one attributing objects its different features? The first perspective corresponds to the theory of objectivist essentialism, that taste is the ability to sense targets properties that make from an object a work of art. The second perspective corresponds to the theory of subjectivist anti-essentialism, according to which taste is defined relying upon a set of beliefs, conviction and values culturally encoded and transmitted through specific media to every historical time.

The artistic value can be defined as learning a work of art that expresses an appreciation of it, and in accordance to this appreciation, it is given a place, a hierarchical rank within a scale of values. The rudest form of appreciating an artwork is the judgment of taste. This is the primary form, the less evolved of the aesthetic judgment, the prevailing subjectivism. It is driven by emotion, making it impossible to motivate it logically. "De gustibus non disputandum!" it can be considered the most popular form of expression of judgment of taste.

The logical expression, concepts and arguments or specific criteria, of an option represents the aesthetic judgment. This is attributed to the experts, assessing the artistic object, they study according to competences acquired in time, through specialization in the field. The aesthetic judgment ensures - usually - the durability of a work. Based on this differentiation is made between what is truly

valuable and what can be described as pseudo-values.

The location of artworks already assessed in terms of aesthetics on a certain scale of values by experts, is a value judgment. This is a higher form of aesthetic judgment and implies calibration on a scale of values concerning artistic objects depending on the value that is given to them by comparison. For example, if we relate to works of already included in the heritage of a nation, then we can say that some are of exceptional value - they are labelled as "Thesaurus" - and others are, in comparison to the first, of lower value, which is why they were included in the heritage category "Fund".

At a certain point, value judgment can change hierarchies within an era. Many national or universal artworks have been perceived and interpreted in accordance with the ideology of time. Thus, they were interpreted through quasi-values criteria, some of them being censored, even truncated or mutilated, disregarding in fact what Umberto Eco (1996:25) called *intentio auctoris*, meaning, the author's intention or the author's conception.

In a study published in 1918, Max Weber (Weber, 1918) drew attention to the fact that values are social deeds, not individual preferences, but socialized, over-individual, which are transmitted and promoted through social mechanisms. The author emphasized the four dimensions of values, namely: objectivity, subjectivity, the absolute character and the relative character. The objectivity of values, M. Weber considered, is determined by two factors, namely: *carriers of the value* or its material or spiritual support and *the assessment criteria*, which can be found in the cultural patterns of society that have determined the social-historical character. In terms of *subjectivity*, it refers to the fact that *values have a significance only for humans, for the subject*. With reference to contemporary art, we could say that human establishes and expands the axiological field. The expansion of the axiological field can be seen, with respect to its relations with contemporary art, as an aesthetic of non-interpretation, too (Sontag, 2000). In this regard, Susan Sontag is against the intention of interpreting the work of art, contrasting it with the sensual design of an "erotic of art" meant to differentiate artistic reception from aggressive interventions of artistic reason. Therefore S. Sontag considers that artwork must be "tested", "lived" and not dissected to reductive tools of intellect (Sontag, 2000:25). We could talk in this regard about a phenomenological aesthetics (Dufrenne, 1976), concerned with issues such as: aesthetic experience and attitude, aesthetic object, artwork and audience, the structure and analysis of artwork, phenomenology of aesthetic perception, critical of aesthetic experience and its ontological significance. On the trail of his predecessor Kant, M. Dufrenne believes that aesthetic experience requires involving some

emotional (human) qualities or categories which constitute a-priori. They exist both in the subject (artist), but also in its interest object (work of art), conceived as complementary and open to each other to improvement (Dufrenne, 1976). In this context aesthetic education plays a fundamental role, since it is formed by an artistic-aesthetic attitude.

THE ARTISTIC-AESTHETIC ATTITUDE - A GOAL OF AESTHETIC EDUCATION

In the contemporary world, the aesthetic values are so diverse that may seem astounding and confusing. Therefore, a specialized education relying upon free thinking and unprejudiced, is a desideratum in this regard. Substantial ideas regarding the education in this respect appear even in the philosophy of Aristotle. It conveys several concepts related to the educational aspect of art, highlighting particularly, the notion of *artistic-aesthetic attitude*, considered one of the human qualities to receive, understand and empathize with the feelings, moods of the characters belonging to the artwork.

An education oriented towards artistic-aesthetic attitude is a laborious process involving different aspects when it comes to contemporary art. We could say that the evaluation process becomes a semiosis, where the artwork can be seen as a system of signs that serves an aesthetic purpose as it appears at Jacques Lacan (1966). According to such an integrating vision, the work of art constitutes a symbol and has an open character, which means it can be interpreted in various ways, from various perspectives.

The artwork should be seen, perhaps, in Heidegger's sense as allegory and symbol (Heidegger, 1982:33-34). It *ex-poses (Aufstellen)* a world (Heidegger, 1982:59) and *pro-poses (her-stellen)* the earth (Heidegger, 1982:62), *that brings to light the one who closes (das Sichverschliessende)*, in other words the work of art take a form that can be subject to interpretation in order to be valued. M. Heidegger's statement is illustrative in this regard "The enclosure of the earth itself, however, is not a uniform and rigid envelop condition, but it is done in an inexhaustible wealth of modes and simple shapes" (Heidegger, 1982:62). In the same vein, H. G. Gadamer describes art as a means of access to the essence of things or "being", understood as the central ontological essence. Contemplation and interpretation of the work of art becomes privileged possibilities to access at "being" and ontological fulfillment and the painting is such an artistic experience. In this context, interpretation of artwork can become the optimal model of interpretation, since both artist and subject to interpretation are caught in a relationship of participation and creative "fusing" (Gadamer, 2000).

The contemporary art has not a defined language. Normative rules that could define a way of understanding art and its artists have been denied. In this regard, H. G. Gadamer used to write: "Things are like that: the notion of painting from the classic museum has become too narrow. Artistic creation shattered frame Organizing the surface that constitutes the picture sends us beyond picture, towards broader ties" (Gadamer, 2000).

The language of art appears much larger. Considering that every artist chooses its own rules and operating parameters, the artistic object becomes as difficult to define as it is difficult to assess. It can be said, however, that *art* is the result of choosing an environment, a set of rules to use it and a set of values that determine what deserves to be expressed through that milieu to induce a feeling, an idea, a sensation, or an experience in the most efficient way possible for it.

Richard Wollheim distinguishes three ways to access the artistic object: realistically, where aesthetic quality is a value independent of any human point of view; objectively, where aesthetic quality is also an absolute value, but depending on general human experience; and relativistically, where aesthetic quality is not an absolute value, but depends on the human experience of different individuals, and vary in close connection with it (Wollheim, 1980:231-239). The nature of art has been described by him as "one of the most elusive of the traditional problems of human culture" (Wollheim, 1980:1).

CONCLUSIONS

In the contemporary world, the aesthetic values are so diverse that may seem astounding and confusing. The evolution of forms of expression, techniques, and artistic means, determined mostly by the spectacular evolution of technology has led to breaking the specific traditional boundaries of art to the development of an artistic syncretism. The lack of constraints and the endless possibilities of expression generated an anamorphic philosophy of reality, characterized by inverting the elements and principles of perspective. Thus, instead of a reduction in the extent of visible, there is a projection that exaggerates shapes and displaces them in such a way that they are reconstituted only when regarded from a certain point. In this context, a specialized education in the spirit of free and unprejudiced thinking, focused on the formation of *an artistic-aesthetic attitude* is a desideratum.

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