

## 11. THE DEFINITION OF THE ART WORK: ONTOLOGICAL ASPECTS

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**Abstract:** *Based on the theoretical developments, the article hereby defines the art work from the ontological perspective and identifies the qualities/features given to the art work: as spiritual, unitary and simple process and product. The art work is the result of many variables, resulting from: the type of thinking, the way of action, the complexity of the artistic personality, the interaction of the subject with the cultural environment and the society. The art work is proposed to the artistic experience, at the edge of which the aesthetic object is constituted as value carrier.*

**Key words:** *the work of art, principles of organizing the art work, aesthetic experience*

Art is a dimension by which the establishment of the man in the society is taking shape in a totally specific way. The work of art is the man's most determined modality of expression. From Parmenide and Aristotel to Hegel and Heidegger, the important landmarks of the identity interpretation of the art work are bulleted. Significant contributions keeping to a great extent their topicality have been brought by the Romanian philosophical schools: Lucian Blaga, Tudor Vianu, Constantin Noica.

By means of arts, the person transforms the outer and the inner world as „object of his spiritual conscience”, in which, as G.W. Hegel notes, recognizes own ego and looks at it from the eternity perspective [3, p. 37]. Referring to the essence of art, G.W. Hegel, in a metaphysical light, remarks the idea, according to which the artistic creation does not purchase anymore the spiritual satisfactions expected from it by the other-century people [idem, p.17]. In the opinion of the same thinker, “the work of art is not a product of nature, but it is realized by the human activity”, „is essentially done for the man and, namely, it is more or less taken from what is sensitive for his senses”; „anyway, but the work of art is not only for the sensitive perception, as sensitive object, but its state is in such a way, that, being something sensitive, it is at the same time, something essential for the spirit” [ibidem, p. 31, 41].

The work of art is the product created in the activity of creation, which constitutes the starting point of the „creation” and the „creator”. As M. Heidegger states, the origin of the work of art is art: „The artist and the work are, each in itself and in their correlation, through a third term, which indeed is the first one as well, namely through the something from which the artist and the work of art take their names: through art” [4, p. 17]. In other words, none of these terms can exist one without the other. „Art is nothing else that a word to which nothing real belongs anymore” [idem]. As a way of being, the work of art is an object, „something made”, according to M. Heidegger's expression, with lots of attributes and determinations, through which it differentiates from any other type of work, at the same time marking its identity. The origin of the work

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of art should be searched in the origin of its essence, „the work is born from and through the activity of the artist” [4]. Looking for an answer to the questions: what is and how exactly is a work of art, where and how does the art exist, M. Heidegger thinks that the essence of art cannot be acquired by a comparative research of the existing works of art, but by determining the direct and full reality of the work of art. But, by comparing the work of art with a thing, M. Heidegger clearly reaches two ideas [4, p. 45]: 1. The means by which the work of art catches the reality are entirely special, they seem „both adequate”; 2. The something which constitutes the content of the art work does not belong to the work itself, as the artist transposes into its structure „the way he conceives the work”. From here, the work includes „the opening for the establishment of being” [4, p. 44]. The word *opening* necessarily corresponds to the being, in the Heideggerian meaning, and the *discovery* necessarily belongs to the establishment. The being opens as soon as the establishment is discovered. For a reality to be discovered by the man, it should obligatorily enter in the field of the human being opening. A person which discovers one thing/a work is the one that attracts the work/creation in the opening field of own being and, in such a way, absorbing him in his own field of interest, he confers a being to the thing (namely, a meaning, a value) which it is acquiring only now.

As a constituent of the work of art, the *artistic* comes, as something else to which art is in beside work. The opera is a symbol. The general representation in the perspective of which the art work characterizing is moving for a long time, are *the allegory* and *the symbol*. These characteristics of the work are a kind of support in the work of art and this is what indeed counts. „The work of art opens in a specific way the establishment of the being”, the artist of the work, though, is the one to “sacrifice himself”. In relation to the opera, the artist is an indifferent element – one point, which destroys itself while creating, letting the creation pass onto the foreground. The work of art **ex-poses** (ist *Aufstellend*) a world, „by rising in itself, the work opens a world and keeps it in a permanent sovereignty” [4, p. 52]. The world which M. Heidegger speaks about is the content of the image of the works of art, which may become an „opening” for the art receiver, „a necessity of closeness”, „a directing to high”. In the process of making (*Herstellung*), the work is produced for this or that material, due to fact that the nature of the opera implies the character of **pro-posal** itself (ist *Herstellend*). It means that the essence of the work refers to two features, making a common body: the *pro-posal* of a material and *ex-posure* of a world. The work of art contains the truth occurrence, M. Heidegger says. Thus, **the work becoming of the work** is one of the ways for the truth to become and occur. Putting the truth into the creation means „put on move and make the nature of the work appears” [4, p. 86]. M. Heidegger’s point of view is also relevant, according to which not the work creation only, but also „its storage and confirmation” are both important. The phrase „confirming storage”, in M. Heidegger’s concept [4, p. 91], probably designates the act of receiving the work of art, a kind of *foundation* with three meanings: as offering a gift (*Schenken*), as foundation (*Gründen*), as beginning (*Anfangen*). *The gift* and *foundation* include

immediacy, which M. Heidegger calls *beginning*. The role of art being underlined by the fact that, as many times as art occurs, „when a beginning starts, History knows an impulse, History starts or revives”. The word „History” here does not represent a series of events occurring in time, but it identifies itself with a nation that „happens by insuring themselves into what they have been conferred” [4, p. 93]. M. Heidegger states that a meditative acknowledgement (it prepares the space for the work, the path for the creators, their own place for the keepers-confirmers), indispensable to art, it may realize by a raise only, leisurely, and they may decide whether art can be *an originating jump* and, after that, become *a predictive jump*, or maybe it should come in the end, so that it accompanies us as a simple phenomenon, belonging to culture.

The truly valuable art, M. Heidegger is saying, by which it represents in itself and its essence, has been estranged from the man, seized to fulfill its duties in the man’s existence. [4, p. 108]. The philosopher considers that the art can be understood not only as expression of the beauty in itself or of the living, but it must be looked at as a truth expression of the being. Consequently, art can be investigated as an aesthetic fact and artistic phenomenon, at the intersection of the aesthetics with arts and value philosophy. The grounds of the theoretical developments from the book *The Origin of the Art Work* by M. Heidegger, which I synthesized more concisely above, even today keeps its power to express meanings in forms addressing our sensitiveness and constitutes the fundamental meaning in which the work of art reveals its hidden.

In another order of ideas, Tudor Vianu reveals the work of art as a nucleus of its aesthetic system, outlining the work of art regarded in it, the process of its production and reception. In essence, „the artistic creation is in fact intentional. It awaringly heads towards the production of the work” [11, p. 217], of an entirely new world against what we have in the natural and existential premises in general. The work of art is the result of a procession, „a special way of organizing the material and composition of the conscience data”. In the opera research, we should differentiate between the processed material and the act of organization.

One of the ideas most characteristic to T. Vianu is that „the material” of arts is not unexpressive, but „lit and perceived by the significance of certain values”, the origin of which is „in the artist’s soul, in its way of understanding and experiencing the world and life”: the feelings of the artist are not simple accumulations of facts and images, they are also their appreciation and selection, as „prior to being an artist, the art creator is a man able to express the world in a personal way and each of his experiences has a moral or political, theoretical or religious meaning” [11, p. 234]. Different „values interlaced in its unity” (of the work), the hierarchical structure, representing „subsumption of multiple values under the large category of the aesthetic value” – finally contributes to acquiring „spiritual depth”. „The work has its own life” not because „it is guided by a goal chosen by the creator”, guidance which is possible namely because the value is „another attribute characteristic to the work” [11, p. 521, 529].

A notable contribution constitutes the comprehensive definition given to the work of art by T. Vianu, being very general, it can be applied to all the arts: **art is a way of organizing the material and data of the conscience** [11, p. 137]. The work of art understood as a whole, a final and perfect cosmos, to or from which you cannot add or take anything, T. Vianu recognizes an eternal existence of the work of art, insured by its aesthetic feature. This feature gives the work the power to chronologically transgress time and establish itself in the time as such, understood as a form of the universality by which Platon called „the aion picture”, meaning through eternity. At the same time, **the work of art is directly related to the entire society, by its extraaesthetic values** which it sums up and supposes to its unity. The extraaesthetic content itself gives expressiveness to art and makes it participative in the dynamism of the historic life and excises a great force of influence on the society. As **principles of organization of the work of art**, according to T. Vianu, are well recognized [11, p.137]:

a) **Isolation.** The first constituent moment of the work of art, isolation – flows from characterizing the aesthetic value as a goal in itself and allows the isolation of the work from the complex of phenomena compiling the field of practical experiences. The isolation modalities vary each time. Thus, the silence preceding the beginning of a musical creation or of a theatre representation works in these arts as an isolation framework. The silence preceding the music is not only a psychological condition for its good reception, but also an aesthetic constituent moment. That which is represented by the silence and darkness in music, is the framework in painting. There is no work of art which by its way of representation does not display its feature of being isolated against the rest of the reality.

b) **Ordering.** For a conscience which is not guided either by the scientific discipline or by the art, the impressions penetrate in it in a completely casual manner. The world icon can be put in order, but unlike science, art does not need to sacrifice its sensitive qualities. We may say, „art remains in all circumstances the world ordering as an image”.

c) **Clarification.** While knowing the world, we can distinguish a perceptive and a normative content, its aspect and significance. Clarification, as an art constituent moment, for its works, does not involve the obligativity to represent clear creations only, meaning well outlined and well lit.

In painting, for example, the representation of the chiaroscuro comes off from suggested elements, in music and poetry the states of spirit are expressed with no well determined shape.

d) **Idealization.** By the operation of isolation, ordinance and clarification, the piece of material or the group of facts of the conscience processed by the artist may acquire an ideal feature, which compiles the fourth constituent moment of the art work. The art work may be considered independent of the conscience it reflects, to be able to determine this way the peculiarities of its objective structure. Art always remains correlated with the human spirit. Being a way of appearing, it is a way of appearance for the human science. The peculiarities of

its structure are constantly adapted to the conscience functions. Isolated from amidst the world, not conditioned by that, simple appearance, we should admit its ideal feature.

Consequently, merging the axiological point of view (T. Vianu) with the understanding of the work in the ontological perspective brings, undoubtedly, an increase of clarity and study in the field of our topic of research, useful in tackling the artistic phenomenon in education.

A different position is taken by the direction of Georg Lukács, who builds the ontology of the work focusing on the meaning of the creating subjectivity. The merits of G. Lukács lie in the elaboration of the **reflection concept** and its ultimate application **in the study of the art work**. „Even we cannot indicate in principle any determined object in the existing world in itself, able to be „imitated” by a determined object in an art work, it certainly doesn’t mean, cancellation of its character of reflecting the reality” [6, p.273]. As „the art work naturally and primarily constitutes for us – us in the aesthetic reflection, not for us – which directly meets the important characteristics of the self” [6, p. 276]. The exemplarity of the work, is observed by G. Lukács through the fact that it is not a copy based on the specific of the creation: the connection between „existence and perfection”, but also „just of a determined way of performance” [6, p. 281, 282]. Against „all the other objectifications”, the art creation is „the being for itself”, which results into „a direct action of the subjectification on the whole and an all the parts of the art work”, as, „the existence for itself”, it „is „a world”, a kind of objective self, which stands in front of the receptive ones (...) in a grounded need” [6, p. 284]. Through these very significances, the work appears as a „supreme way, the richest and most unfolded of display of the human subjectivity. Its power of making the subjectivity reach the people in expression, towards flourishing, is limitless in itself. But this power is of an objectification one, of putting, of the new conception, and in no case, of a subject" [6, p. 285].

In search of a definition of the art work, Roger Prouvet settled three conditions [10, p.10]: 1. *The Conditions of the Intelligibility*, when the definition is comprehensible, without the mediation of an art theory; 2. *The Condition of Neutrality*, when the definition does not constitute a preliminary judgment of values (artistic/aesthetic); 3. *The Condition of Universality*, when the definition is applied to the majority of the things we call art creations. Preoccupied by finding a definition reported to the above mentioned conditions, R. Prouvet identifies the extrinsic and relational features in the art creation, classifying all the attempts of defining the art work in more groups [idem, pp. 43-63]:

1. Definitions by representations, form or expression (the theory of the creation as representation – Platon; the theory of the arts expressiveness – Robin George Collinwood);
2. The definition through the aesthetic experience (Monroe Beardsley, Noel Carroll);
3. The procedural and institutional definition (the institutional theory of the art - George Dickie, Arthur Danto);

4. The historic and intentional definition (Jerrold Levinson);
5. The functional and substantial definition (Aristotel, Nelson Goodman, Roger Prouvet).
6. The definition as an art factual substance (Gerard Genette, David Armstrong, A. Denken).

Imposing as a methodological filter the intelligibility, neutrality and universality, R. Prouvet describes, analyzes and tests the main definitions of the art work in circulation: some of them evoking extrinsic and relational *properties*, definitions by representation, form or expression, definitions in terms of aesthetic experience, others included in *procedural*, historic and intentional arguments. To come to a reasonable definition, R. Prouvet considers, that we should overcome three difficulties requiring avoiding eliminating the role of the context and dissolve the ontology of the art work, use the concept of the art work within evaluating terms; not to exclude the objects and events from the category which we call art.

Almost all the works of R. Pouivet are characterized by two assumptions: 1) „no aesthetics exists without ontology” and 2) any aesthetics sends towards a certain metaphysical position. The tentative to define the art work relates to the specific of a strictly philosophical enterprise. The ontological problems regard the way of existence of the art works or the meaning of their „nature”. R. Pouivet invokes „the manner of being” or the „way of existence” („the way of functioning” or „specific functioning”) in order to characterize that which makes the art work be taken as such [10]. There are two suppositions common almost to all the creations of R. Prouivet: 1) „there is no aesthetics without ontology” and 2) any aesthetic sends to a certain metaphysical position. The tentative to define the art work refers to the specific of an enterprise strictly philosophical. The definition is determining the significance or the conceptual content of a term or expression („What is Arts?”). It can be implied, real, nominal, conventional, ostensive, contextual, nominal, recursive, stipulation, persuasive ... Often, though, the definitions are vague, partial or obscure. They do not necessarily express themselves upon the ontological statute of a thing („what does a work of art consist in?”). In an almost scholastic manner, R. Prouvet states that the „art creation is an art factual substance, the aesthetic functioning of which determines its specific nature” [10, p. 75].

We support the vision of Petru Bejan [1], according to whom, this definition does not answer the universal exigence, as it leaves outside the artistic experience where the message is important, not its „creation” quality.

Gregory Currie mentioned that what we lack is not information for understanding and evaluating the work, but the elements from which the art work is constituted [Apud: 10, p. 119]: *the process* (H) through which an artist reached the *discovery* (D) of a certain structure (S) at a certain *moment* (t), all of these forming a type of action or event. The formula suggested by G. Currie - [x, S, H, **D**, τ], *the artistic creation as an event-type*, is the ensemble of these elements. This formulas is inspired from the **theory of events** proposed by Jaegwon Kim, through which is realized the passing from the concept of the

creation as an object to the concept of the creation as an event. In this respect, the creation is the creating activity as a property of the artist, realization of the artist discovering something the art creation cannot be translated exclusively in event terms, as G. Currie argues.

We should remember the observation of V. Morar [8, p.193], according to which the art works, besides the substituted format of words, sounds, movements, lines, volumes, colours, etc., we find a meaning we cannot subordinate to a concept or to a link of precise concepts, a richer meaning and which, continuously overflowing the concept, provokes the limitless work of the meaning reestablishment. So, the artistic symbol is limited. The artistic originality is not only immutable, but also limitlessly symbolic. We can say that the work is the finalist product endowed with value of a moral creator who, using material and integrating multiplicity, introduced in reality a qualitatively new object. This qualitatively new object is original and symbolic in case of the works of philosophy and science. It is immutably original and limitless symbolically in case of the works of art.

Along with the appearance of the post-modern art, they stress the interest for the reformulation of the working definition of the art creation. The postmodern thinking is characterized, according to Jean-François Lyotard [7], by a vivid homology with the modern art, seen as *avangarde* of the transformations in society and thinking. More than that, as arts in general may be considered an "elementary school of the plurality" (Welsch), the aesthetic paradigm becomes the model according to which they reflect general philosophical orientations (for example, post-heideggerian and post-gadamerian hermeneutics) and currents coming from the science, like the constructivist thinking, which some place in parallel with the postmodern thinking.

In this order of ideas, we should mention the vision of Mădălina Diaconu [2, p. 63], through which they refer to the reasons that led to revising the definition of the art work from the perspective of the modern arts. Thus, for example, the contemporary plastic arts gives an extremely large field of verification (more, of infirmation) of the usual beliefs about the identity and unity of the art work, as it is destroyed by a collage and by the procedure of the collective creation; the creation is not working anymore, it becomes an event or a lifestyle - "the sculpture of itself" planned by Michel Onfray, following Foucault), if it does not remain a simple mental project; also, they cultivate the confusion, often calculated, between nature and artifacts.

**Art is withdrawing from an object-producing activity into a purely spiritual one**, as the reverie and meditation, following, amongst other things, the correlation of the artistic practice with the existence of the artist. Thus, they consider that art should become a goal in itself, a tool of the existential fulfillment, first of all, of the artist and then, eventually, of the receiver. She should reconcile the man and nature, from which he broke up by his scientific mentality and technique, and to re-teach him the "living", to help him find the feeling of intimacy with the world. Other artists use the art as an experience of discovering the otherness of the objects, which can be interpreted either

positively, as recovery of a meaning of the „wonderful“ and of the „miraculous“, or negatively, as expression of the alienation.

So, starting from the **transformations of the art work concept** in the avanguard movements (dissolution of the work unity, of the author in collages, using as creating agent of the hazard in dadaism or of the inconscientious in suprarealism), passing from *happening*, and through those trials where the receiver actively contributes to the *production* of the work (of the structure or of its configuration) and ending with the radical experiments like the conceptual art and *Land Art* or with the most recent of the digitization – all these contest the concept of creation.

In contemporary art, the creation is understood, on one hand, as a proposal that can be accepted, changed or even declined by contemplators, in their position of participants to the ”co-creation“, art being transformed in an action essentially social and communicational [2, p. 69]. On another hand, it falls into the opposite side, by, absolutizing the creation into its reic character and we speak instead of „art work“ by *Stück* or *Pièce*. Other prudently advance vague solutions, of the type that this concept that became problematic should be limited, extended or eliminated. In other words, we should choose between limiting it, by using it only for the European art between Renaissance and the second half of the XIXth century, and use it in a very broad meaning (and at least apparently nebulous), as „everything that refers to history and the present of any culture, and which is displayed in museums and exhibitions or is studied in sciences“; finally, it could be eliminated when they describe the contemporary art [2, p. 187]. In the specialized literature, we cannot find appreciations regarding the need of such radical solutions. Probably, the current transformations in the art field regard the concept of the art creation in general, but as a one of its variants.

As I have mentioned, **the contestation of the theoretical primacy of the art work** comes today especially from the plastic arts. The fact can, actually, be explained, as most of aesthetics so far applied an ontological model from the field of the plastic arts and calked, in its turn, by the work paradigm. Thus, the art work is considered a physical object endowed with the aesthetic value, obtained by processing a material of creative spirituality, called artist. He had an ideal content, but a material shape, the two aspects being indissolubly linked. This is where the importance of the theory of the symbol for aesthetics comes from, as the symbol was the nodule linking two worlds, that of the spirit and the material. But the work has a closed unity, that of the substance; the fact that it enters the budding and that its accidents vary in time does not hinder it from keeping to a constant and continuity, in other words, a static identity.

So, **the traditional design of the art creation** leaves from certain ontology, based on a determined understanding of the identity. The latter is characteristic to the common sense and that is why it roots deep in our current way of tackling any object of the knowledge or action, being defined as:

- natural process continued on the spirituality plan (G. Séailles),
- delirious act, even insane or mystical, impulse of the Divinity (Platon),

- sensitive expression of the Absolute Idea (G. Hegel),
- spiritual prelogical and immoral activity (B. Croce),
- pure revelation (A. Brémond),
- sublimated compensation or manifestation of the instinctual discharge (S. Freud),
- a pathological product (C. Lombroso) or of the automatic dictation (A. Bréton),
- free act, random or simple game (K. Gross),
- expression of the harmonious and superior synthesis of the vital availabilities (J. M. Guyau),
- the art factual substance the aesthetic functionality of which determines its specific nature, having a relation between the non-aesthetic properties and the aesthetic properties, which co-vary (R. Prouvet).

The aestheticians see in these transformations a radically new beginning in the arts history, as they put under question a fundamental concept of the arts theory so far – the art creation. As a solution, they suggest that the aesthetics takes as an object the **aesthetic experience** not the **creation**. In this meaning, the work, the process of creation/the artistic act and the personality of an artist/receptor of arts are coherent and parties of a unitary whole, like a live being – expressions of an individualized way of thinking, of reporting to culture, society, the historic evolution of the artistic phenomenon.

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