

POLITICAL DISCLOSURE OF GADAMER HERMENEUTICS BY  
COMPARISON WITH PAINTING GENRES

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES OF  
THE MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY  
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
OF MASTER OF SCIENCE  
IN  
THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

MAY 2023



Approval of the thesis:

**POLITICAL DISCLOSURE OF GADAMER HERMENEUTICS BY  
COMPARISON WITH PAINTING GENRES**

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## ABSTRACT

### POLITICAL DISCLOSURE OF GADAMER HERMENEUTICS BY COMPARISON WITH PAINTING GENRES

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May 2023, 89 pages

In my thesis, I intend to inspect on the relationship between art and truth in Gadamer hermeneutics. To do that in an original manner, I inspected two painting genres from different historical eras: 17<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch Vanitas still life painting and Kazimir Malevich's Suprematism movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. By highlighting the historical conditions and social changes these two movements were born, I brought focus to the truth works of these genres bear as a result of the social and individual experiences of the artists, the viewers, and the society encountering these changes. Hence, I reconceptualize the historical truth in Gadamer as the politically constructed world of the individual. Also, I emphasized the main conflicts on the modern history of philosophy in order to embody the conditions that required the use of hermeneutics in philosophy. I utilized the *Sensus Communis* and *Erlebnis* concepts in Gadamerian hermeneutics in order to assess the relationship between truth and art in a historical context. I benefited from social historians and art historians explaining the historical conditions and contexts of the genres I used as examples. Moreover, I referred to the respected names from hermeneutical studies and philosophers of the Hegelian school such as Heidegger in my thesis. Some of the concepts of Heidegger such as ready-at-hand and presence-at-hand were beneficial in hermeneutical reading of the paintings I subjected.

**Keywords:** Gadamer, Hermeneutics, Still Life, Common Sense, Experience



## ÖZ

### RESİM AKIMLARI KARŞILAŞTIRMASINDA GADAMER HERMENÖTİĞİNİN SİYASAL AÇILIMI

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Tez Yöneticisi: Prof. Dr. Şeref Halil Turan

Mayıs 2023, 89 Sayfa

Tezimde, sanat ve hakikat arasındaki ilişkiyi, Gadamer hermenötiği ile incelemeyi hedefledim. Bunu özgün bir biçimde yapabilmek için de farklı tarihsel çağlardan iki resim akımını inceledim: 17. Yüzyıl Hollanda Vanitas natürmort resmi ve erken 20. Yüzyılda Kazimir Maleviç'in Suprematizm akımı. Her iki hareketin de doğduğu tarihsel şartlar ve toplumsal değişimleri öne çıkararak, sanatçının, alımlayanların ve toplumun bu değişimlerle karşılaşmaları olan toplumsal ve bireysel tecrübelerinin eserlerin taşıdığı hakikatte var olmalarına dikkat çektim. Bunun sonucu olarak da Gadamer'deki tarihsel hakikati, bireyin siyasal inşası olan dünya olarak yeniden kavramsallaştırdım. Ayrıca, felsefede hermenötik ihtiyacını ortaya çıkaran koşulları açığa çıkarabilmek için felsefenin modern tarihindeki ana çelişkileri de vurguladım. Tarihsel bağlamda sanat ve hakikat arasındaki ilişkiyi inceleyebilmek için Gadamer hermenötiğindeki *Sensus Communis* ve *Erlebnis* kavramlarından yararlandım. Örnek olarak aldığım akımların doğduğu tarihsel şartları ve bağlamları açıklayabilmek için toplum ve sanat tarihçilerinden faydalandım. Dahası, Heidegger gibi Hegelci gelenekten gelen veya Hermenötik çalışmış olan saygıdeğer filozoflara da başvurdum. Heidegger'in el-altında-kullanıma-hazır-olan, el-altında-hazır-varolan gibi bazı kavramlarından da incelediğim resimlerin Hermenötik okumasında yararlandım.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Gadamer, Hermenötik, Natürmort, Sağduyu, Tecrübe

To my father, mother, and sister who encouraged me in dedicating myself to any and every intellectual ground,

to my comrades in academy Cansel and Dicle who walked this never-ending path with me

and to Emek, who always believed in me, even in times when I could not find the strength to believe in myself.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Şeref Halil Turan, for introducing me to Gadamer and a potentiality of philosophy towards the history of art and supporting me in every stage of my thesis.

Also, I am grateful for our Philosophy department in Middle East Technical University, from my professors to classmates for introducing me to the infinite worlds and questions of philosophy since my first day in the building ten years ago.

I would also like to thank to my colleagues in BirGün and Redaksiyon, who supported me when I needed to time and motivation for writing this thesis.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Art is one of the most interesting concepts in philosophy. From aesthetics to ontology, philosophers tried to understand and conceptualize art since Plato. Through the ages, the philosophical subject of art is interpreted by various concepts, the Ancient Greek understanding of the concept always comes to mind as the center of the discussions up to date. Even though the philosophical conception of art is instrumentalized and understood in context of ethics, ontology and existentialism to some degree, the epistemological approach to the subject always comes prominent. In this context, various respected philosophers concentrated on the relationship between truth and art from Plato to Kant. Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical theories about hermeneutics can be understood as a contemporary phase of this debate in the epistemological continuum.

Hans-Georg Gadamer is one of the most influential philosophers in 20<sup>th</sup> century. As one of the respected students of Martin Heidegger, Gadamer contributed significantly to the understanding of both Hegel and Heidegger in contemporary philosophy. Gadamer's interpretation of the dialectic of Hegel and *Dasein* of Heidegger cannot be approached separately in his works, such as his writings on hermeneutics.

Gadamer concentrated his philosophical work on hermeneutics, a method used for studying religion, and social sciences. In this sense, Gadamer's disposition of art in the center of the hermeneutics brings a new light on both hermeneutics and the art. Thus, the historicity aspect of hermeneutics produces new and important interpretations on art, which is a subject having a philosophically rich history through genres.

In my thesis, I will focus on how Gadamer's approach on hermeneutics can be utilized in a political historicity and try to disclose a more complete understanding of the

relationship between truth and the history of art. To do that, I will examine some art genres of my choice and compare their appearance on the historical stage in a political historicity while tracing the truth in a hermeneutical method. I will use some key concepts from Gadamer such as *Erlebnis* and *Sensus Communis* and attempt to enrich the discussion by adding different concepts from German Idealism.

In his magnum opus *Truth and Method*, Gadamer provides a hermeneutical method which he applied and claimed that it could be applied into the whole of the history of art. Gadamer has a vast knowledge on history of art as it can be seen on his works, and he was very interested of the art of his time which he discussed on his work. I will use some examples and discussions about art from different ages and express how Gadamer interpreted the change in art in the contemporary era as part of my effort on bringing the potential of political historicity of hermeneutics.

While Gadamer's studies on art and hermeneutics focuses more on literature, the history of painting is an area Gadamer produced unique and potential discussions and theories that a lot of philosophers followed upon.<sup>1</sup> My thesis is focused on highlighting some of these theories and concepts in contrast with two distinctive genres in painting with their historicity, therefore I will focus on more of the hermeneutics of paintings. I will acknowledge the general terms and concepts key to understanding Gadamer's hermeneutics along with the discussions circling around it. However, the focus of my thesis will be about the hermeneutical discussions and potentials about the historicity and genres of paintings.

Gadamer's choice on studying art makes more sense in the context of hermeneutical discussions. Since Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey resurfaced the concept, the hermeneutical discussions revolve around how to approach social sciences in contrast to systematic structure of natural sciences. Gadamer also joins the discussions about approaches on social sciences with a distinctive perspective. The ontological context of art plays a key role in this distinction, as Gadamer underlines this feature of art to explain his approach on social sciences. Art with its relationship with truth and historicity is a clear example of Gadamer's understanding of how

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<sup>1</sup> There is a lot of critical pieces on art history followed from Gadamer hermeneutics by Robert Innis, Anders Odenstedt, Cynthia Nielsen

hermeneutics can offer a distinctive approach intrinsic to the social sciences. I will delve into these discussions in the related sections.

To ground my thesis, I will refer to the historical backgrounds and related events contemporary to the genres I chose, but I will not make a grand comparison between Gadamer and other philosophers related to the main discussions of the thesis. I will utilize some of the important

names in both hermeneutics, aesthetics, politics and history, alongside Hegel and Heidegger, two key philosophers in Gadamer's studies on the purpose of highlighting Gadamer's texts, philosophy and what my thesis is focusing on the subject. Gadamer's original texts will be centralized in the thesis.

### **1.1 Hermeneutics Before Gadamer**

First of all, I want to explain what hermeneutics is and how Gadamer approaches the concept in his philosophy. The term hermeneutics is originated from Ancient Greek; the word *hermeneuein*, which means "to interpret". The word is latinized in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, even though we can trace the usage of the term in the texts of Ancient Greek philosophers, such as Aristotle. However, the importance of the concept of hermeneutics came with the debates on the interpretations of religious texts, literature and law in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> For a long time; hermeneutics was a key concept for the philosophy of religion and history. (Grondin, Weinsheimer).

After a long absence in the Western thought, Schleiermacher reconceptualized the term as a philosophical concept after Friedrich Ast's *Basic Elements of Grammar, Hermeneutics and Criticism*. Ast's work about the language inspired Schleiermacher to rethink about the philosophical importance of 'to interpret', hence hermeneutics. According to philosopher Jean Grondin, both Ast, Schlegel, Schleiermacher and Dilthey's attempts on reconceptualizing hermeneutics comes from Romantic era's depression of searching for a wordly, meaningful philosophy in the post-Kantian era.

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<sup>2</sup> For better insight, John Kress' *Review: Aristotle's Hermeneutics of Facticity: Heidegger's Early Phenomenological Interpretation of Aristotle* includes the two philosophers' texts and the references of former to the latter.



Grondin explains the problems Kantian metaphysics creates for rationalism and how the writer of the *Critique of Pure Reason* actually emptied the reason from its pureness (Grondin, Weinsheimer). Kant's attempt on reinstating the rationalism by denying a priori reason actually dried the world of the subject and a philosophical tradition based on the prominence of human mind. Therefore, Romanticists tried to recapture this prominence by resurfacing hermeneutics and centralizing the concept.

In a sense, hermeneutics became a critical concept as a rediscovery at the end of a long and important paradigm change of philosophy. It is not the ultimate solution as Gadamer would argue, however, it is important to note that when we think and philosophize about hermeneutics, it is a bearer of a history of philosophical debates that shaped the modern thought. In this sense, hermeneutics is in itself should be understood within a historical, hermeneutical sense.

To be clearer; we should be reminded that after a renaissance of rationalist philosophers such as Spinoza, Descartes and Leibniz, the attack of the Scottish school, notably David Hume, wounded the classical rationalist thought which led the way for Kant's *The Critique of Pure Reason*. With this book, Kant reworked the rationalist thought. He tried to make rationalism more compatible with the new Western world after the great scientific developments which paved the way for positivism and empiricism of the newly founded British tradition. However, Kant's rationalism was based on the rejection of a priori reason and while it was celebrated as a revolutionary step for the majority of philosophers in the coming years and shaped the 19<sup>th</sup> century enlightenment philosophy, for Romanticists, the rejection means the annihilation of the world of the subject.<sup>3</sup> Then the hermeneutics arrived on the scene.

First Schleiermacher then Dilthey attempted to create a universal philosophy which is centralized hermeneutics and bounded with linguistic. They both claimed a philosophical approach on human understanding, an interpretation which is strictly universal and systematic. Their approaches were obvious responses to the discussions about scientific methods, which arise with the developments of natural sciences and philosophical schools around them such as Empiricism and positivism. According to

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<sup>3</sup> Gadamer explains the depression in the classical metaphysical school after Kant in the second part of the *Truth and Method*, page 174

Schleiermacher, “Everything presupposed in hermeneutics but language”.<sup>4</sup> He tried to conceptualize the relation between speech and understanding by inverting it to create a system for understanding the universal meanings and intentions behind expressions by interpretation. It can be possible to say the same for Dilthey, who claimed “*The process of understanding, insofar as it is determined by common conditions and epistemological means, must everywhere have the same characteristics.*”

Of course, Dilthey had different views on his hermeneutics, he developed a slightly distinguished version of hermeneutics. He was occupied with a premature version of psychology in his works, trying to rationalize gestures and psyche as expressions pointing or referring truths which can be disclosed by interpreting the intentions behind them. (Introduction to the Human Sciences, 1883) However, both their respective works couldn't escape the problems of a systematic philosophy around the *Geisteswissenschaften*, something Kantian philosophy, the paradigm changer that caused Romanticists rediscovery of hermeneutics also failed. Both of the attempts contradict the nature of the subject of their works, an attribute that natural sciences do not have, the historical nature of the subject.

The notion of the historical nature, historical aspect or historicity, which will be both used in this thesis in their own accounts appears on many discussions in the modern history of philosophy. Hegel's response on the problem of system in Kant's philosophy can be interpreted as the application of historical understanding into the epistemological discussion. Claiming that there is no starting point in an epistemological system, therefore rejecting a systematic approach by stating that the truth comes in the process in a dialectical progress is also a similar take on the problem of universal systems in philosophy which occupied an important era of the modern thinking. The phenomenological and historical approaches in this sense create new ways of approaching the subjects of philosophy after Copernican revolution. Gadamer also points the importance of a historical aspect in the subject of *Geisteswissenschaften* and hermeneutics. His work is rich in both historical and phenomenological aspects as

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<sup>4</sup> Friedrich E. D. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Hand Written Manuscripts*, 1978, AAR Religion in Translation

a follower of both Hegel and Heidegger, considering the latter dispositions hermeneutics to an ontological degree.

## 1.2 Gadamer's Interpretation of Hermeneutics

Gadamer observes the discussions around the social sciences, *Geisteswissenschaften*. He acknowledges in the first part of his *Truth and Method* that several philosophers tried to imitate the methods and approaches on natural sciences to the social sciences starting with Stuart Mill and David Hume (Gadamer, 2004). These philosophers tried to bring answers to the question of how to approach social sciences with a methodology. In the first part of *Truth & Method*, Gadamer brings a chronological documentation of how different philosophers from first empiricists to the hermeneutics tried to bring an answer to that. He builds his approach on the question by a critique of all these approaches. Therefore, it should be noted that Gadamer's hermeneutics is about epistemology as much as aesthetics.

Gadamer uses the term *Geisteswissenschaften* (human sciences) to address social sciences. His use of the concepts from the metaphysical discipline is a clue to how he handles the question of methodology. According to Gadamer, both the empiricists such as Hume and Mill and the philosophers of the school of historicity; J. G. Droysen and Dilthey couldn't grasp the essentiality of the social sciences. First, Gadamer criticizes bringing empiricists' methods to the social sciences to some extent, by pointing out that what we observe as the result may be of a different articulation rather than a validation of the method.

*But the specific problem that the human sciences present to thought is that one has not rightly grasped their nature if one measures them by the yardstick of a progressive knowledge of regularity. The experience of the sociohistorical world cannot be raised to a science by the inductive procedure of the natural sciences. Whatever "science" may mean here, and even if all historical knowledge includes the application of experiential universals to the particular object of investigation, historical research does not endeavor to grasp the concrete phenomenon as an instance of a universal rule. The individual case does not serve only to confirm a law from which practical predictions can be made. Its ideal is rather to understand the phenomenon itself in its unique and historical concreteness. However much experiential universals are*

*involved, the aim is not to confirm and extend these universalized experiences in order to attain knowledge of a law—e.g., how men, peoples, and states evolve—but to understand how this man, this people, or this state is what it has become or, more generally, how it happened that it is so.* (Gadamer, 2004, pp.4)

Hence, it can be said that neither Dilthey, Droysen or Schleiermacher had applied or defended a direct positivist or empiricist method for *Geisteswissenschaften*. All these respected names contributed greatly to hermeneutics studies. Gadamer's criticism can be understood in comparison, rather than a direct categorization of his predecessors. Gadamer didn't claim that all these names were the positivists of social sciences or clearly applied methods of natural sciences to the social sciences. Rather, there are key concepts and dispositions that can clear the discussions if they're deepened.

One of what Gadamer accounts in this criticism is obviously the importance of historicity. This is a key concept of Gadamer's philosophy in general. Furthermore, Gadamer points out that the hermeneutics of Dilthey and Droysen also suffers from the influence of natural sciences (Gadamer, 2004), as they could not grasp the inherent features of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. The importance of historicity and its processing into the human sciences is very specific to a certain philosophical perspective. At this point, the discussion is similar to how Hegel approaches epistemology. Gadamer's question of "*What kind of knowledge is it that understands that something is so because it understands that it has come about so?*" is clearly a Hegelian response to the discussions. That is because of how Hegel and his respected followers understand truth, science, knowledge and the systems and methodologies around them.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel builds his epistemological approach through a number of critiques of Kant and systematic philosophy. His concepts such as *dialectic thought*, *thing in itself* and *historicity* have important meanings in his epistemological approach. Hegel comes to an understanding of Truth where he claims that the systematic approaches fail for aiming a first ground of truth and cognition. All these efforts can only be used for grasping the truth, not its origin.

*"One must first of all come to an understanding about cognition, which is regarded either as the instrument to get hold of the Absolute, or as the medium through which one discovers."* (Hegel, 1979)

Hegelian understanding of Truth is a clear distinction between Gadamer and his predecessors in hermeneutics. Furthermore, it can be said that the actual discussion around the hermeneutics studies is whether Hegelian metaphysics can be applied through hermeneutics or not. This distinction becomes clearer when we consider Dilthey's own approach to history and metaphysics.

*"The process of understanding, insofar as it is determined by common conditions and epistemological means, must everywhere have the same characteristics."* (Dilthey, 2018).

*"...the inner experience through which I obtain reflexive awareness of my own condition can never by itself bring me to a consciousness of my own individuality. I experience the latter only through a comparison of myself with others."* (Dilthey, 2018)

### **1.3 The Reasons Behind Gravitating Towards Art**

Gadamer claims that the search for the truth through hermeneutics is transcended from the scientific methods but also an inspection of the truth of these methods. Therefore, the area of hermeneutics should be different than the areas of scientific methods, so that the philosophers of hermeneutics search for fertile soils for the transcendent truth. For Gadamer, art is one of those soils to concentrate on hermeneutics. The reasons behind it is a lot, and searching for the truth through experience, the unique and peculiar relation between art and experience is one of the primary reasons. However, Gadamer's argument about a transcendent way of reaching truth which can be used to inspect the scientific methods is itself an original and critical statement for the two hundred years of modern hermeneutics. What Gadamer says different from his predecessors like Schleiermacher and Dilthey is that he does not only reject a scientific method, but also embraces the methods for the natural sciences and call for a transcendent effort to question their legitimacy. It is not a denial of either *Geisteswissenschaften* or natural sciences. For a categorical standpoint, Gadamer establishes a hierarchy between scientific methods and hermeneutics in legitimacy.

Art as an area for hermeneutics also has its own charms. First of all, art has a wider perspective on the subjects of life. It can be about religion as much as a landscape, a drama of the age, politics or just daily life of a common person. It can be tragic,

dramatic in tone while sounds or appear joyous even humorous. As a *Tabula*, art can encapsulate different emotions and subjects all together. Therefore, contrary to law or religious texts, a search for a transcendent truth in the interpretation of art offers a reading of emotions, passions and even common sense within the work. The gestures and signs serving the aesthetics of an artwork is open to the interpretation and disclosing of historical truths as much as the subject described (by words, notes or brush) of the work of art.

Spanish painter Pablo Picasso's (in)famous *Guernica* is a good example of my intention here. The painting is interesting in its choice of subject as much as its technique. Picasso painted *Guernica* in his original cubist style, describing the objects in the painting in incomplete and geometrical forms. However, unlike most Suprematist paintings, the geometric style in *Guernica* does not have a harmonic or holistic form of composition. All the shapes and objects described in the painting seem to be disconnected, tattered pieces scattered in the painting which create a dissipating effect, like a bomb was dropped into the canvas while the painter was working. It is of course an intentional style to describe the subject of the painting; war and violence in a hard-hitting way. Therefore, in *Guernica*, we can understand not only what happened and affected in the bombing of Guernica in 1937 but also what it meant for the Spanish painter, someone who is both an artist and a lively, active and political participant of the Western civilization in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century who witnessed the war from an unsafe distance in various ways. By bearing in mind that Picasso and the Cubist movement was also the target of the nationalist movements in Europe way before the World War II, to see what happened in the war from the eyes of a witness, who is personally interested and politically invested to a degree that endangered his own life is also special. But without the inputs about the artist's own personal experiences about the subject of his painting, his style, method of describing the outcome of a bombing also opens interpretations in various ways. First of all, the cubist style and the all-white-black-grey choice of coloring strengthen both what artist is trying to say and the tragedies of the war. Describing shredded body parts of the residents and animals of Guernica, the clear panic in the eyes of the ruptured heads in an inharmonic, chaotic composition gives way for a clear interpretation of what is the result of a civil bombing. To add more context, we can acknowledge ourselves that Cubism and Suprematism

uses geometric and incomplete forms and lines to describe the chaos, rapidness and mechanics of the modern life. Therefore, we can interpret the preference behind the style as a connection between wars, bombings and what Cubist movement choose to express from daily life with its unique style. It is open to be read as if the monstrosity of the war or reason behind it can be traced back to the modern world by the similarities in the standard Cubist paintings and *Guernica*.

Then, we can see the possibilities of interpretation when we apply hermeneutics to art. Not only a regular art reading but when we include the history and developments of arts, civilizations, the critical moments in history, art can be a fertile soil for searching for a transcendent truth. Not only experience remotely a monstrosity of war, but the techniques, choice of artists, even where and how we experience art can open up varying possibilities for interpretations. This is why I am concentrated on the history of art to showcase the political truths by opening up Gadamer's hermeneutics. To search for the truth of the moment and what would remain till today from the critical paradigm shifts in art history. It is a search for a truth that is transcendent and can inspect the truths of political and historical studies.



Figure 1: *Guernica*, Pablo Picasso, 1937

However, Gadamer does not lean into the linguistics nor psychology. It is understandable that these areas are alluring in search for a legitimate ground for an original method for *Geisteswissenschaften*. However, unlike Dilthey and

Schleiermacher, Gadamer rejects both and while he often refers the language and gestures, he encapsulates these concepts into the interpretation of art.

Searching for a unique soil to apply hermeneutics, Gadamer did not incline to the theological texts as his predecessors did. In need for a more clear and unique approach for social sciences, Gadamer instrumentalizes hermeneutics in itself. The search for Truth is a historical effort as much as a metaphysical one for Gadamer. And for his efforts to be succeed, Gadamer gravitates toward art:

*They are concerned to seek the experience of truth that transcends the domain of scientific method wherever that experience is to be found, and to inquire into its legitimacy. Hence the human sciences are connected to modes of experience that lie outside science: with the experiences of philosophy, of art, and of history itself. These are all modes of experience in which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science.* (Gadamer, 2004, pp. xxi)

We know from his works that Gadamer emphasized more on to the literature texts more than paintings and performance arts. However, it is to be found several important points and arguments about all these arts in his *Truth and Method* and *The Relevance of the Beauty*. In both these two books, Gadamer searches for the historical truth in between brushes, verses, musical notes and theatre curtains. However, while Gadamer's leap of focus on art is a radical shift from theoretical texts which are the focus of the hermeneutics before him, the German philosopher contextualizes his study with important concepts from German idealism, mostly from Hegel. *Erlebnis* and *Sensus Communis* are some of the key concepts to understand Gadamer's hermeneutics about beautiful and truth. I am going to emphasize these two concepts with Gadamer's texts to search for a more social, political and historical potential for hermeneutics.

Also, it should be noted that the time Gadamer lived, studied and wrote was an age of radical changes and revolutions. The paradigm shift of the century and civilization was not just about the wars, economy, regimes and ideologies. The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was fruitful about the philosophy and debates of art. The birth of cubism, avantgarde, suprematism and non-figurative in painting, jazz, atonal sounds and new technologies in music, futurism, dadaism and new realism in literature... New seeks



in performance arts, the effect of Marxism, fascism and nationalist ideologies in the art and culture. The 20<sup>th</sup> century of art was a clear and strong shift from the centuries of classical, romantic and realist art genres. The advancements in technologies, wars around all the world and new political experiences nurtured and shaped the art in every possible way. Therefore, what Gadamer wrote and philosophized about was also a testimonial about the ever-changing world around himself. A follower of the historicity was also a subject of one of the most critical times of the recorded history of humanity. The subject or focus of the history is not about the life of Gadamer or a psycho-political perspective on the philosopher's life on a ground scale. Rather, I want to emphasize how the debates around art was fruitful and in a permanent change. What Gadamer wrote about from *Truth and Method* to *Relevance of the Beauty* focused mostly about a confrontation between the classical understanding of art and a *nouvelle vague* in all kinds of artistry, a permanent evolution process continued for the whole century. A witness of this change, Gadamer's search for truth, something consistent and universal in art was important in many ways.

Therefore, usage of the concepts like *Erlebnis* and *Sensus Communis*, words and concepts of individual and social experience, confrontation and witnessing; are fitting for the *Geist* of 20<sup>th</sup> century. This also shows its effects on how Gadamer still affect the conversations about art and politics on this day. One of the important parts of his success, bridging the beginning the modern era and the 20<sup>th</sup> century is one of the key reasons behind it. Gadamer's search for truth in hermeneutics of art, a concept evolves every day is relatable with our search for universal, consistent meanings for the changes we confront in our lives.

Another important note that I want to include in the introduction of the thesis is a reminder that 20<sup>th</sup> century is also an early era of common people having the opportunity to regularly experience art via museums, galleries, concerts, advancements in publication and communication technologies in masses. Therefore, an age of bringing paintings from the church walls to the museums, ease in reaching instruments and education of art made it more social, common and political. This is a condition that we can keep in our minds considering both the radical changes in art and the time Gadamer lived.

The two key concepts I indicated above; *Erlebnis and Sensus Communis* are important to understand the social and political aspect of Gadamer's hermeneutics. These concepts were fostered from humanitarian tradition and German Idealism; movements of thoughts Gadamer's philosophy is fruited from. Gathering both the individual and social aspect of the experience, confrontation in the age of phenomenology is also an important contribution in the conversation about art and philosophy.

## CHAPTER 2

### KEY CONCEPTS IN GADAMER HERMENEUTICS

#### 2.1 Sensus Communis

Common sense, as a socio-political and philosophical concept; just like hermeneutics. In the Ancient Greek, the term had both positive and negative connotations. The term was used by Socrates, sceptics, Plato, but the philosopher who coined the term as a complete concept was Aristotle, who described common sense, *ψύχη* as a virtue corporates with both rationality and basic senses, to distinct particular objects. However, for different circles in Ancient Greek philosophy, the term was used for understanding rhetoric or described as a mental faculty contrary to *ratio*.

However, the Ancient Rome philosophers and intellectuals embraced the term and developed it with the love and awareness of the community. From there, the Latin term *sensus communis* gained a socio-political meaning by becoming a social and philosophical virtue from a mental faculty. Still even today the term comes with a strong connection with community and used in political sciences as well as philosophy.

However, in coming centuries in each civilization philosophers used the term for their own utilizations. Lord Shaftesbury (1801-1885) provided a more virtual and ethical version of the concept and since 19<sup>th</sup> century his version had an important effect in the related conversations.

*If by Temper any one is passionate, angry, fearful, amorous; yet resists these Passions, and notwithstanding the force of their Impression, adheres to Virtue; we say commonly in this case, that the Virtue is the greater: and we say well. Tho if that which restrains the Person, and holds him to a virtuous-like Behaviour, be no Affection towards Goodness or Virtue it-self, but towards private Good merely, he is not in reality the more virtuous; as has been shewn before. But this still is evident, that if*

*voluntarily, and without foreign Constraint, an angry Temper bears, or an amorous one refrains, so that neither any cruel or immodest Action can be forc'd from such a Person, tho ever so strongly tempted by his Constitution; we applaud his Virtue above what we shou'd naturally do.* (Shaftesbury, 2001, pp.21)

However, Gadamer's adaption of *Sensus Communis* into his hermeneutics is both a social and epistemological effort. In *Truth and Method* (2004) Gadamer reexamines and pursue the historical ties of the concept, from Stoics to Aristotle, Vico and Shaftesbury. For Gadamer, the concept of common sense is an important method when challenging with the arguments of empiricism and metaphysics about *Geisteswissenschaften*. On this notion, Gadamer claims that the common sense was understood as a method for truth, an epistemological instrument about human sciences since the ancient times. The stoics' and Aristotle's adaption of the concept was focused on the epistemological discussions of the time. However, even in that case, the common sense, as a concept was belonged to the concept of commune as well as common. The power of the method comes from its ties with the social, the society and the political sphere around it.

Even after the Ancient Greek, the Romans adapted the common sense as a way of the social perspective and the Italian Renaissance tradition kept the nuance of the concept, starting with Giambattista Vico. Gadamer concentrated on how the concept can be instrumentalized as a method of understanding applying to the *Geisteswissenschaften* by pointing out the historical journey of the concept and how different civilizations of different ages adapted it for their needs. (Gadamer, 2004).

However, the journey of *Sensus Communis* should also be found in the epistemological debates around the early modernist philosophy, between rationalists and empiricists. As Gadamer pointed out in his *Truth and Method*, the concept of the common sense first adapted as a critique of Descartes and then as a central concept of human thinking by the Scottish tradition. Hume centralized the term *sensus* and positioned it as what the rationalists argued as reasoning. Hume used this disposition in favor of the empiricist epistemology which prioritized the *episteme*, the a posteriori observation for grasping the truth. Hume and the Scottish tradition's dismissal of rationalism, reasoning and cause-effect method in favor of the observation with the rise of the

natural sciences created a void for how to approach human thinking where rationalists prioritized as the pure and key concept of understanding and reaching truth. Empiricists ravished rationalists' 'pure doubt' by claiming what is seemed to be reasoning is actually sense, a concept first Hume related to emotions, what seems to be the opposite of the *ratio* in rationalist thinking. This attack, in the age of the advancements of natural sciences was a paradigm shift in epistemology that the philosophy of metaphysics suffered grievously, especially the Cartesian tradition.<sup>5</sup>

There were philosophers of rationalist, metaphysics tradition that this critique didn't affect much, I can argue that Spinoza is an important exception who applied the common sense as a natural virtue of humans. However, the position of common sense was also hurt by this critique. Hume's adaptation of the sense was more emotional, individualistic rather than social and common. Therefore, the adaption of common sense by the empiricists is not only negative but also lacks the notion of the common, social thinking whereas the Ancient Greek and Roman philosophers emphasized dearly.

Gadamer also points out the problematic approach and application of the common sense in the epistemological debates between rationalists and empiricists, to the point where the positive application of the term kept lacking the social attributes which made the sense of the concept.

After several critical philosophical contributions, like Kant's initial deconstruction and reconstruction of the metaphysics in the light of Hume's empirical critique kept deeply affected the application of *Sensus Communis*.

Gadamer traced these changes affecting the term in the search for a positive and complementary way for epistemology. Gadamer clearly states that common sense should be adapted for an original and true method for *Geisteswissenschaften* as well as grasped correctly. The correct method here is understanding the term as a social and political concept. Gadamer criticizes how Shaftesbury and his followers failed to apply the concept into the socio-politics of their countries and kept it as an intellectual, philosophical perspective which then applied for theoretical studies and debates. This

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<sup>5</sup> For a better insight on the subject of philosophical shifts in the face of scientific developments, Tom Rockmore's *Before and After Hegel* (2003)

is the moment in time Gadamer used as a starting point for arguing the problems around the methods of human sciences.

Therefore, the journey of *Sensus Communis* is about the history of epistemology as well as the civilizations started in Athens, transformed in Edinburgh and then transferred to Germany, France and England in different forms. Gadamer favors the Roman version of the term as it prioritized the social, communal sense when applying the term.

Focusing what Vico does with the concept, Gadamer concentrates on the importance of common sense for rhetoric, which is also critical for hermeneutics, as it can be understood as the rhetoric for texts, a similar method. Then, Gadamer finds the positive application of *Sensus Communis* as far as it belongs to the love and inclusion of society and its historical substance in Vico's works.

*Vico's return to the Roman concept of the sensus communis, and his defense of humanist rhetoric against modern science, is of special interest to us, for here we are introduced to an element of truth in the human sciences that was no longer recognizable when they conceptualized themselves in the nineteenth century. Vico lived in an unbroken tradition of rhetorical and humanist culture, and had only to reassert anew its ageless claim. Ultimately, it has always been known that the possibilities of rational proof and instruction do not fully exhaust the sphere of knowledge. Hence Vico's appeal to the sensus communis belongs, as we have seen, in a wider context that goes right back to antiquity and whose continued effect into the present day is our theme. We, on the contrary, must laboriously make our way back into this tradition by first showing the difficulties that result from the application of the modern concept of method to the human sciences. Let us therefore consider how this tradition became so impoverished and how the human sciences' claim to know something true came to be measured by a standard foreign to it—namely the methodical thinking of modern science. (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 21).*

It is clear that Gadamer tries to find both an original and historical application of the term which respects the social attributes of the concept. Recalling the ancient adaptations of *Sensus Communis* is critical for Gadamer's original approach at this point. Common sense always comes with the traditional metaphysical thinking, sometimes side by side and sometimes in opposite directions to challenge each other. However, in every

iteration, the concept was an underlying point of how we understand truth, knowledge and thinking related to our social and communal notion. This is what distinguishes *Geisteswissenschaften* from natural sciences for Gadamer, that it is social and in the sphere of the social, compared to chemistry or physics.

Therefore, it should be noted that even when it is used to amplify the rhetoric, common sense is always a key concept and a historically universal instrument of human understanding.

This is why it is important to build an original hermeneutics when it is not concentrated on theoretical studies. Indeed, Gadamer's critique of the narrowed application of common sense stuck in the theoretical studies also parallels with his experimenting with shifting the field of hermeneutics from theoretical texts to art. By looking to the subtext of his arguments we can say that Gadamer's emphasize of a true adaption of *Sensus Communis* is related to a correct focus for hermeneutics. That it should be approached as a more general and inclusive concept and that is exactly why it should be brought something wider than theoretical discussions. This wider subject in this case is art.

This is where Gadamer's focus and his adaption of *Sensus Communis* placed on: Art is social and communal as well as epistemological. In this point, applying common sense into the reading of art; whether it is a painting, or a text is and should be understood as historical. As a production, an output inspired and produced from different ages and locales, a work of art is the proof of how our modern, historical civilization, the common thinking is shaped. Brick by brick, from the Ancient Greek to the Scottish school of thinking, the church walls of Milano and the ornaments in the tomb of Menna.

Gadamer's contribution to both historical discussions of art and epistemology and the debates around *Geisteswissenschaften* lies within his emphasize of the social. How the socio-political issues and their productions shapes our thinking and art becoming affected as well as a production of this thinking is a great input that is still debated today. This input also contributed greatly to how we can think the ancient paintings and postmodern novels in the same paradigm. A complementary if not holistic perspective paves way for understanding today's art better.

To set an example, one of the two genres I will examine in my thesis; the Dutch Still Paintings is a clear example of the place of *sensus communis* in hermeneutics. The choice of subjects and objects in the Dutch Still Paintings are decaying vegetables, dead animal bodies, bones, bugs in a random composition and a very dim lightning. However, in the same era the still life paintings in Italy and Germany usually subject bright, fresh and richly composed batch of apples, chickens and other foods in a very shiny light with the intent of expressing a lively and prosperous life. I will examine the differences in more details in the related title, however; the difference of choice in the subjects and the expressions in still life paintings of the North and Central Europe comes from the political, social and even religious changes and mobilities in the former country. This is why the concept of *sensus communis* is important in the hermeneutics of art, even in an effort to open up the political historicity in the application; to detect the truth portrayed in the art necessitates detecting and philosophizing over the *sensus communis* of the specific time and place. However, this effort necessitates a meditation on the philosophical ground of the changes of the time, rather than a literature survey. Beyond that, this kind of thinking is how we can think of truth as something we can address for both today's realities and the past. This is how we can universally conceptualize and understand the truth. Then, it should be about the mechanics of what we understand as truth.

If the search for truth, a method for human sciences is socio-historical, then it should be adapted and applied to the different categories and parts of the discussion. It should be applied to understand better the historical and social conditions of different ages, locales and cultures. This is why Gadamer's hermeneutics as he states is not only about an argument about the methods of social sciences or a guide for modern literature texts. The bridge between art and truth is a political and sociological effort if we understand the cultural relations of art and thinking. To be clearer, by applying the common sense to the common sense itself, in its specific time and place.

To understand what conditions and contributes to the common sense of a society in a specific time in the light of the historical research is a common way of how archeology and sociology works. Then, Gadamer's original method of hermeneutics should discover beyond common archeological thinking. Not excluding the cultural studies in



his time, Gadamer's application of his hermeneutics to the history is an epistemological and methodical study which instrumentalizes art to grasp both the universal and isolated truth. The letter version of truth is one of the distinguishable attributes of hermeneutics compared to the different methods of human sciences he argued against, by addressing as an imposition of the methods of natural sciences. Therefore, Gadamer's efforts in pointing the inconsistency, and maladjustment between the soil and the tool can be read by looking at the unique nature of art in a socio-political, *communis* soil.

On this point, I should remind you that how the late German philosopher Heidegger affected and directed the philosophy of Gadamer. Without diverting the subject to vulgar reasoning and historicity, it should be helpful to look into the once tutor of Gadamer's thoughts on art and how it helps to understand why art is the subject of hermeneutics, a method of *Geisteswissenschaften*.

## **2.2 Sensus Communis in Heidegger**

Heidegger's famous lectures about art give us clues on rethinking how Gadamer describes and philosophizes about art in the context of the artist-artwork relationship and how the attributes of art can be conceptualized. It should be noted that hermeneutics has great importance in Heidegger's philosophy up to the point that existence can be grasped through hermeneutics.

Therefore, what Heidegger understands and philosophizes from art would be helpful to both understanding Gadamer and also expanding his method by rethinking both respected philosophers. Heidegger's understanding of art is not far from his original philosophy. He argues about the *Dinglich* attribute of art and closely relates the subject to his approach to the things and their thingly character, a philosophy Heidegger applies to address the things and their existential meanings in daily life.

Heidegger argues what defines a work of art in a distinguishable sense. What makes the work of art not a mere thing? What distinguishes the paintings of Van Gogh travelling from museum to museum from the coals travelling from Ruhe in wagons? (Heidegger, 2002,)

After a long and suspicious investigation about what defines a thing resorting to both the logic of the language, phenomenological perceptions and structuralist thinking, Heidegger comes to the conclusion that we should avoid all the presuppositions and traditional thoughts to grasp the thingly nature of the things. Rather, the artwork resembles the things we concentrate on gives a way for the truth of the essence of the things. Heidegger gives the example of Van Gogh's Shoes (1886) and his famous descriptions of peasant women. Heidegger points that by concentrating the things around us, we usually miss the essence of the beings of the beings. The moment shoes stand before us as in the painting we consider the true meanings of the things. Heidegger is consistent on the methods of thinking I specified above generally are attacks to the thinking itself. What constitutes a shoe, what equips it, what use it constitutes are in relation with how they are parts of our lives. However, the meaning, the truth is buried in our perception of the things. Then the reproduction in the painting is how it actually shows its true meaning to us, standing before it.

*The artwork opens up, in its own way, the being of beings. This opening up, i.e., unconcealing, i.e., the truth of beings, happens in the work. In the artwork, the truth of beings has set itself to the work. Art is the setting itself-to-work of truth. What is truth itself, that it happens at times, as art? What is this setting-itself-to-work?* (Heidegger, 2002, pp. 19)

Then, the artwork is now the bearer of the truth. The trains carrying the coals from Ruhe can show their thingness and being by their description in the work of art, rather than the opposite.

Heidegger's logic and the trace of thinking brings different questions and subjects to the thesis which I consider irrelevant. However, it should be noted that Gadamer's philosophy is affected dearly by his predecessor, and we can trace it in when they necessitate better investigations. The work of art having the truth about the things is an important statement and argument that I want to investigate more intrinsically to what Gadamer wrote while returning Heidegger's effect on him time to time through my thesis.

### 2.3 Erlebnis

The discussions about *Erlebnis* or in general experience starts with the beginning of philosophy. However, a discussion about how Gadamer approach the concept and how I want to develop it as a key concept in my thesis necessitates rather modern theories defining the concept. I want to acknowledge about the concept of *Erlebnis* and how the Kantian theory inquired the term in aesthetics subject and how it is evolved since then.

Just like *Sensus Communis* and hermeneutics, the term *Erlebnis* and its philosophical ground are also challenged with the paradigm shifts and developments in the modern philosophy. After David Hume developed his own version of the concept of sense and centralized it in his empiricist philosophy, rationalist theory or rather, German idealism debated the philosophical concept of aesthetics closely related with Hume's disposition of sense. This is because of that the question of 'what is beautiful' is also about how we can perceive what is beautiful and the act of sense is an inevitable point of discussion in the center of it.

Kant developed his aesthetics theory in regard of his response to Hume's attack on rationalism<sup>6</sup>. Contrary to the Scottish philosopher, Kant devalues sense to a point that is nearly similar to the Platonic distinction of natural and intellectual. Kant states that aesthetics is the outcome of the genius, so that perceiving it necessitates intellect, as opposed to the senses. His devaluation of senses creates questions about his choice of words to describe aesthetics perceptions such as 'perfect sense', but other than that, he creates a very distinct line between the objects of nature and the aesthetics; while one is about senses, even a beautiful landscape or a flower, the other is the work of genius, whether it is a painting, song or poem.

Kant provides his argument with an interesting claim. He states that the feeling of trembling or shivering in the presence of a huge mountain is not a natural humanly response but rather, it is something the civilization learned from the startling, even a bit of divine depictions of these kinds of mountains in the landscape paintings. (Kant, 2007) This is an interesting idea which I mediated when I analyzed the genres of arts

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<sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgement, 2007, Oxford University Press

for the thesis; the idea of how aesthetics, works of arts affects our emotions or thoughts about the very world we occupy. This idea of giving a leading, intellectual role to the arts is an interesting response to the classical approaches on art from the Ancient Greek, when it is seemed to be the lowest level of reality, an imitation of the natural world. For Kant, the world as we perceive, the world we experience is nearly the imitation of art. This is the place Kant applied the aesthetics in his metaphysics.

Kant's successors like Schelling even leveled up the place of aesthetics in Kantian metaphysics to a point where even the nature is the part of the transcendent spirit. While this nearly Spinozian approach is interesting to point out the problems about the hierarchy between nature and aesthetics in Kant, it is not something I will concentrate on my thesis. However, it should be noted that Kant's contributions on the subject of aesthetics reverted and lifted both the position of work of art and experiencing it.

As I mentioned before several times, the hermeneutics and phenomenology became central points of philosophy after Kantian revolution. A search for a spirited philosophy brought such concepts into the discussions of romanticists and rationalists' spheres. However, it should be noted that Kant also mentioned a spirit in his systematic philosophy, a phenomenon of transcendence as the goal of critical theory. We can trace the evolution of this 'spirit' in the works of his successors such as Schelling, however the first name that would come to mind would be a philosopher from Jena and his phenomenology of the spirit. The reason behind my bringing of the concept of spirit is that I find it critical to the discussions of experience. Because after Kant reverted the position of aesthetics and defined it as an act of genius and claimed that it is related to the spirit: *"in judging such an object one must consider the possibility of spirit—and hence of genius—in it."*

The concept of spirit in Kant is similar to Hegel's in the context of metaphysics. Therefore, the place of work of art and aesthetics gains a unique meaning and utilization in terms of rationalism that we can analyze in two concepts: experiencing the world and transcending from it. The concept of genius was a phenomenon of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, the era of the inventor, revolutionary societies and names. The general enlightenment project was to open the philosophical, pedagogical, political and social possibilities of the potential genius in humankind, and the philosophical

theories, arguments and debates around the episteme revolved around the concept of genius, a highest level of intellect, a transcendence from the status quo. According to Gadamer, the term *Erlebnis*, arose as an alternative to the 'coldness' of the mechanic enlightenment rationalism.

*Schleiermacher's appeal to living feeling against the cold rationalism of the Enlightenment, Schiller's call for aesthetic freedom against mechanistic society, Hegel's contrast between life (later, spirit) and "positivity," were the forerunners of the protest against modern industrial society, which at the beginning of our century caused the words Erlebnis and Erleben to become almost sacred clarion calls. The rebellion of the Jugend Bewegung (Youth Movement) against bourgeois culture and its institutions was inspired by these ideas, the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson played its part, but also a "spiritual movement" like that around Stefan George and, not least, the seismographical accuracy with which the philosophy of Georg Simmel reacted to these events, are all part of the same thing. (Gadamer, 2004).*

Therefore, the concept of *Erlebnis* became the latest subject of the conflict between the post-Hume rationalism and the philosophers of romanticism, phenomenology, and their successors. Kant's connecting aesthetics in a transcendental subjectivity, a genius in life philosophy brings *Erlebnis* to a contradicting and philosophically rich field, a clear opening for newer arguments for the inference of art. For my thesis, *Erlebnis* has a critical role which comes from both experiencing and thinking about the world from art and how the artists express their own experience through art and the connection built around it. Thus, *sensus communis* would get a newer meaning through this connection, a collective experience and its expressions and inferences in *Bildung*. Therefore, the concept of *Erlebnis* has an interconnected relation with *Sensus Communis*. In experiencing life, the world around us, from a hermeneutical standpoint concentrated in art, we experience an expression of another, similar experience, even the artist of the work is from a different era, culture, local or civilization. We can trace both the universal values, emotions and ideas as well as what we encounter in our daily lives, even how we encounter them. At this point, I want to bring two modern genres of art different from the subjects of my thesis: impressionism and cubism.

Both of the genres concentrate on how we experience life through our visual perception by deforming the lines and forms in the subjects of the paintings.

Impressionism in this case is a more psychological genre, it focuses on how we encounter the world in real life, always on the go. It is in this case a critique of modern life, an expression of how we can never have time to observe the world around us in a statistical position. Thus, we always see the world around us in blurs. Another reading of impressionism gives way to how we cannot separate our emotional state from our observing and perceiving the world which also creates the blurred, starry visuals that gives no room for sharp lines, measured shadowing, and color transitions.

Cubism also leans on the critique of the daily life of modern people, by describing all of the objects and people in the paintings with geometrical forms and figures. Cubism is a figurative genre unlike suprematism; therefore, the focus of the movement is clearly humans. However, using geometrical forms and deformed shapes, distinct color transitions that gives the impression of patterns rather than a composition of distinct images bears a clear criticism of the dynamic and the mechanical life in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Of course, neither cubism nor impressionism are only dark and negative movements. They are critical to their age and utilize new techniques of descriptions while they embrace the life, the world around them and call the audiences to see the world from their perspective. In this aspect, we can trace both the *Sensus Communis* and *Erlebnis* in the form of paintings. Both Impressionism and Cubism are critical expressions affected from encountering the novelties of their time. And while the paintings themselves shows how we perceive the world, a description of *Erlebnis*, the choices of techniques such as blurred or geometrical forms gives us hints about *sensus communis*, which I will delve into more in the related titles.

To be clearer, I want to emphasize the teleological, complete meaning of *Erlebnis* as it is for the phenomenology philosophers such as Husserl or Heidegger. I also do consider *Erlebnis* more than a flow of life, a philosophical *tabula* of human conscious consisting of encounters, memories and the social, cultural and individual accumulations we bear since our birth. Therefore, I am not distinguishing *Erlebnis* and *Sensus Communis* by characterizing the former as daily and individualistic, latter as historical and collective. Rather, *Erlebnis* is the intrinsic philosophical world of life

while *Sensus Communis* is the mobile accumulation of the social body of the same world of life. They both are beyond the limits of experiences and eras.

Gadamer considers the concept of *Erlebnis* as a more general element of life. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer inspects both the etymological and literature history of the concept from Simmel to Schleiermacher, Husserl, etc. After inquiring the term with German idealists and Phenomenologists' conceptions, Gadamer also comes to a definition close to *Schleiermacher*, "an element of infinite life".

*There is an element of this, in fact, in every Erlebnis. Every experience is taken out of the continuity of life and at the same time related to the whole of one's life. It is not simply that an experience remains vital only as long as it has not been fully integrated into the context of one's life consciousness, but the very way it is "preserved and dissolved" (aufgehoben) by being worked into the whole of life consciousness goes far beyond any "significance" it might be thought to have. Because it is itself within the whole of life, the whole of life is present in it too. (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 60)*

Then, Gadamer connects *Erlebnis* with art by claiming "Aesthetic experience is not just one kind of experience among others but represents the essence of experience". This is a critical connection for a hermeneutical application on art. It is important to bringing Simmel in here, as Gadamer mentions in *Truth and Method*, the thinker who made the term *Erlebnis* popular. Simmel is known as a sociological impressionist, a social commentator who is famous with his observations on the daily life. As a more interesting relationship between philosophers, Gadamer brings his conversation with Heidegger, who introduced Georg Simmel's works to him.

Heidegger is also an important name on the subjects of both *Erlebnis* and hermeneutics. As I mentioned before in both his speech *Origin of the Work of Art* Heidegger is also as a thinker of hermeneutics and has critical inputs about art. Thus, Gadamer's connection between aesthetics and *Erlebnis* is affected by his teacher's philosophical inputs. Simmel, on the other hand, the philosopher of *Erlebnis*, has his own original ideas of aesthetics, grounded in the systems of productions and the daily life around them. I will explore the potential conversation between Simmel's writings and 20<sup>th</sup> century art in the related title. Beyond that, I think the living, adventurous attribute of *Erlebnis* is an important aspect both Simmel and Gadamer emphasized.

I think it would be valuable to refer to another influential social thinker of 20<sup>th</sup> century, Johan Huizinga, the philosopher of play to emphasize the social attribute of the concept.

*Art was still an integral part of life during that age. Life was shaped by strong forms and held together and measured by the sacraments of the church, the annual sequence of festivals, and the divisions of the day. The labours and joys and life all had their fixed forms: religion, knighthood, and courtly Minne provided the most important of these forms. Art had the task of embellishing the forms in which life was lived with beauty. What was sought was not art itself, but the beautiful life. (Huizinga, 1949, pp 296)*

Therefore, Huizinga too connects the realm of the aesthetics to life in his historical and sociological investigations. Moreover, Huizinga claims a relationship between life, law and art, just like Hegel. In his theory of play, Huizinga centralizes the concept of ‘play’ into the discussions and investigations around culture, traditions and ceremonies in all kinds. Therefore, art is a critical part of the play with law. While one constitutes the norms of the play, the other builds the forms of expressions. Hegel has also similar ideas about the relationship between art and law.

*For Hegel, in classical Greece all ethical life was fully integrated with its external, aestheticised forms, so that the forms are a perfect and artful expression of the ethical substance, creating a culture when all life and law are united, when ‘hallowed custom constitutes the substance of all’. (Murray, 2016, pp. 3)*

Therefore, the study of *Erlebnis* is a study of life and aesthetics in general as much as a meditation on epistemology and phenomenology. In my study, I will utilize and open up the term *Erlebnis* as an inspection of philosophical potentials in a hermeneutical application emphasizing the political notions of the historicity.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE STILL LIFE PAINTING

The still life painting is a genre of the art which focuses on the descriptions of mostly inanimate objects from daily life, which are either natural or man-made (Langmuir, 2001).

The early examples of still life paintings can be found in the ancient civilizations such as Ancient Greek or the Roman Pompeii. The first examples of still life depictions were the Ancient Egypt tombs, where it was believed that the dead can reach the described objects in the afterlife.

However, the most famous examples of the still life painting in the ancient times were the early Italian mosaics and wall paintings on Pompeii, Herculaneum and Villa Boscoreale. According to Professor Sybille Ebert-Schifferer<sup>7</sup>, the mosaic depictions of fruit bowls and various foods were a sign of wealth and hospitality as those paintings and engravings were portrayed in the houses of the upper-class citizens of ancient cities.

It is also clear that the early examples of *trompe l'oeil* can be found in Pompeii still-life paintings. The term *trompe l'oeil* (French for 'deceive the eye') is an artistic concept in paintings, where the depiction creates the illusion of a three dimensionality of the objects to deceive the viewers. It is popular in hyper realistic paintings as well as in the examples of 16<sup>th</sup> century Italy and early European paintings. The still life paintings and mosaics in the Pompeii houses create the illusion of real objects hanging or the windows attached to walls.

Therefore, the still-life works in the ancient times have a decorative utility as well as other benefits.

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<sup>7</sup> Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, *Still Life: A History*, 1999, Harry N. Abrams.

The depictions of foods and accessories in still life paintings clearly show the wealth of society and its improvements in ancient times. We already know that the early Roman civilizations had a complex and progressed level of civic-social life where the subjects of arts and myths were often used as an instrument of politics. Kristina Minor, who studied graffiti and literature in Roman Pompeii notes that even in the insurgency of the consul against Caesar the poetic wall writings were affective.<sup>8</sup>

Then we can say that even in Ancient Rome, art is an expression of the socio-political life of society as well as a decorative tool and a *trompe l'oeil*. Then, the debate since Plato comes to mind which Gadamer also argued about; the painting is both about the painted, described objects and the objects are instruments of a political, social expression. The painting is not only about portraying the reality of what the eye sees but also mirroring how we live. Then, it might be said that the work of art does not have to be the lowest form of reality comparing the timeless form and the timely world. On the contrary, it can be timeless as we now speak of a civilization destroyed two thousand years ago by its art, and it should be concentrated on the art, even in the ancient times, was not only about portraying the physical world. It is also about portraying the realities the eye sometimes cannot catch, the physical world cannot grasp. This is where the philosophical efforts against “cold rationalism” Gadamer spoke of can bear fruit. However, it would be difficult inspecting the still life in Pompeii with Gadamer’s hermeneutics considering the destruction of the city and the ancient times the civilization lived in. However, even in the earliest examples of still-life, we can find potential for grasping the truth by Gadamer’s hermeneutics.

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<sup>8</sup> Kristina Milnor, *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape in Roman Pompeii*



Figure 2: A still life mosaic from the 2nd century Tor Marancia.

### 3.1 Dutch Still Life

The rise of the still life paintings in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Netherlands is strictly tied to the historical developments affecting both the island and the old continent. After Netherlands gained independence from Spanish Kingdom on 1648 at the end of the infamous Eighty Years' War, the economic power of the *burghers* and merchants of the country crowned with the sovereignty.<sup>9</sup> I use the concept of *burgh* and *burgher* in the thesis to highlight that the bourgeois culture came with the 17<sup>th</sup> century. After war, the bourgeois lifestyle of the country prospered, and it reflected on the art.

Also, the eighty years' war ended the conflict between the Catholicism and Protestantism in Netherlands, and with the victory of the latter in the whole Northern Europe, it also shaped the future of the art in these regions.

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<sup>9</sup> I benefited from the Geoffrey Parker's *The Dutch Revolt* (1977) for learning the details of the war.

The Protestantism started as an opposition to the traditions of Catholic churches what the followers of the Reform movement like Martin Luther or John Calvin perceived as abuses. With the political support of the influential countries of Europe starting with England, the Protestant movement separated the Northern Europe from the influence of the Catholic Church. The outlining factors behind the rise of Protestantism are the developments in science, the geographical explorations, the invention of the printing, etc. In a way, when the world of civilization exceeded the limits of the political and teleological foundations of the old both physically, scientifically and intellectually in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, with the rise of a new bourgeois class, half of the Europe embraced a new ideology and a philosophy of life. Therefore, we should consider the Protestant movement as an economic and political shift caused by the capital accumulation of the new merchant and burgher classes.<sup>10</sup> This is why a movement started in the central Europe by the effective figures of the traditional Christianity school influenced the Northern countries of Europe where the new scientific and economic developments provided and compelled a complete change in the society, the *burghs* and the class relations.

The change of the scenery in Northern Europe affected the artistic sphere too, and one of the earliest results was the change in the relationship between patrons and painters. While in the Catholic Europe, even the leading artists of the renaissance created their works by the demand of the patrons, which also affected the subjects, deadlines and even the technical details of the works of art today we consider as the nucleons of Western cultures. Famous paintings such as *The Last Supper* were made by the demand of the powerful churches in Europe. This is the main reason behind the Christian texts filling the subjects and figures of most of the Renaissance paintings and sculptures. This is an important factor that I will delve into in this chapter in detail.

*The painters of Protestant Holland who had no inclination or talent for portrait painting had to give up the idea of relying chiefly on commissions. Unlike the masters of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance, they had to paint their picture first, and then try to find a buyer. We are now so used to this state of affairs, we take it so much for granted that an artist is a man painting away in his studio, which is packed full of*

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<sup>10</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 2001, Routledge.

*pictures he is desperately trying to sell, that we can hardly imagine the change this situation brought about. In one respect, artists may possibly have been glad to be rid of patrons who interfered with their work and who may sometimes have bullied them. But this freedom was dearly bought. For, instead of a single patron, the artist had now to cope with an even more tyrannical master — the buying public. (Gombrich, 1995, pp. 416)*

After the Protestantism changed the way of life, culture and economics of Netherlands as well as England or Finland, the economy of the paintings changed drastically. The patron system remained same just for the portrait demands in paintings, which helped the new bourgeois class gaining prestige in their business, which does not bring any of it to the artists who painted those portraits comparing with the painters commissioned by the church in the South.

It should be noted that in the Eighty Years' War, the tension between Catholicism and Protestantism had a role in it. The Dutch revolt was fed by the oppression of the Catholic Spanish kingdom up to a point Calvinist insurgents started to destroy icons, which is called iconoclasm. A widespread iconoclasm became a symbol in the Dutch revolt. Therefore, it is to be expected that the catholic texts, symbols and icons were not very welcome in the daily life of the Dutch cities after the official independence of Netherlands.

The new limited space for the commissioning created new ways for the business methods in paintings. The artists started creating paintings out of commissioning model, exhibiting them in their ateliers and expecting them to be bought by the citizens. It is a model that we are more used to, rather than the 17<sup>th</sup> century artistic spheres, and that newly adapted business method arrived with its own problems, such as persuading the common customers to buy their works. This capitalist challenge gave way for seeking new methods and original approaches in more classical traditions, such as landscape paintings. This new business model is one of the key factors behind the impressionism and still life because of the subject of the paintings changed from the Bible references to the landscapes and regular objects in daily life.

The change of the subject came from two reasons I will focus on. First of all, as I mentioned before, when the patron of the commissioning system changed from church

to the new bourgeois class, the subject of the commissions naturally changed from religious texts to more personal, e.g., portraits when it comes to the paintings. Second and a more important or critical reason behind the change of subjects is about the *Zeitgeist* or rather, the *Sensus Communis* of the newly Protestant Netherland.

### **3.2 Memento Mori in Still Life**

The memento mori is the Latin for the reminder of the dead. It is a term used as a warning against a love of the folly, ephemeral pleasures and materials and reminder of the inevitability of the death. While it is rooted from the Ancient Greek and Rome civilizations, the memento mori concept is embraced by Christianity in middle age, and it is expressed itself in paintings, referred mostly with an imagery of skull in the paintings.

In the Dutch Golden Age, the era of the most famous Dutch painters lived and produced as an outcome of the mercantile life in the country, memento mori symbols were produced and derived creatively in the paintings. Decayed materials, dead animals, rotten fruits, broken glasses... A lot of metaphor of death was produced in the Dutch still life paintings in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. There are several reasons behind the obsession and derivation of memento mori symbols in paintings to a point that Vanitas paintings (comes from Vanity), a subgenre of still life was born in the country of the Protestant merchants.

Known for its application of the early capitalist social norms and lifestyles, 17<sup>th</sup> century Netherlands bear a lot of critical teleological and philosophical subjects. After the country embraced Protestantism, the teleology school in Leiden became the epicenter of the shift in the Christian school and the debates around the newly produced concepts, symbols, and ethics of the Protestantism in Europe. Also, it should be reminded that the acceptance of Protestantism and the balance between religion and politics weren't established very smoothly.

For instance, as a witness to the civil war between the religious and the secular sides, Spinoza was one of the most famous citizens of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Netherlands who suffered dearly. The reason behind the Dutch philosopher's preference of releasing his books with fake names is that the oppression he was faced from the religious

communities and places of powers from both Protestants and the Hebrew circles. Another significant philosopher of the century, Hugo Grotius, was imprisoned because of the civil war between states. He then had to flee France and wrote his books far away from his home country.

The fight for power had a price of blood, and the civil war between the liberal and strict Calvinists tired the country. The socio-political atmosphere of lasting power struggles, infightings and executions affected the Golden Age of the Dutch paintings in interesting ways. While most of the popular readings about Vanitas still life considers the effect of Leiden theology school, both the disputed shift from Catholicism to the Protestantism and the power struggle between secularist and conservatist sides seems to have an effect on the artists.

As I mentioned before, the impact of the Bible texts diminished in the Dutch painters with both the change in the supply demand model of painting and the ideological shifts in the country. It should be noted that Dutch Reformed Protestant Church was opposed to iconographies. In a way, the iconoclasm of the Eighty Years' War became a norm with the newly founded independence. Then, while the painters concentrated on their techniques and brought revolutionary innovations to art from Rembrandt to Claesz, the subject matter of the paintings shifted to more earthly figures and frames. The still life paintings benefited from this shift.

The memento mori symbols and the Vanitas style still life paintings appeared in the Golden Age of the Dutch paintings in this conflicted political atmosphere. The usages of the memento mori, decay, ephemerality and evanescence of life increased in the still life paintings in this era. However, with the Vanitas still life, we can see two crucial changes in paintings; first of all, while the Biblical depictions, portraits of aristocrats and historical figures withered from the canvases, the objects from daily life; fruits, glasses, dishes, tools started to become the center of the paintings. The artists gravitated towards the artistic depictions of 'unimportant' figures. The concentration of the daily lives of common people is an important change and it can be said that with the new class of the burghers, a new population, production relations and urban cultures deriving in the country affected this gravitation. The increase in the usage of more ordinary objects seems to be a celebration of an earthlier culture in the first place.

In the early examples of Dutch still life, especially cheese, milk and fruits are depicted in an alluring style. It can be said that the economic advances and independence of the merchant class in Netherlands brought prosperity, and the dairy products in the paintings are the symbols of it as they are kind of a matter of national pride.

However, I want to remind that as opposed to the still life in the southern and the central Europe, the still life examples of the Dutch Golden Age didn't bear a feeling of the freshness, richness or pleasure. Rather, the paintings of the North still life consisted of more ordinary, common objects and figures in sometimes a random composition. The feeling of randomness comes natural as a feature of the daily life of a common burgher. It can even be understood as an introverted depiction of an artist's life, considering neither of these painters were wealthy as an aristocrat even after becoming famous.

After the still life genre became popular, the Vanitas style followed. The memento mori in paintings were popular among the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Netherlands, too. However, the difference between the consecutive centuries is that in the classical memento mori paintings, the imagery of skulls are common, and the composition of the objects was determined by the position of the skull. The strong symbolic language is prominent in these paintings. However, in the Vanitas still life, the subgenre that was born after the popularity of the Dutch still life, the randomness in the composition is preserved and the symbols of memento mori derived from skulls to decaying, rotten, broken or waned objects. The combination of randomness and more natural memento mori variations from daily life created a more striking effect of mortality and ephemerality in our lives. These paintings create and reproduce the idea of death and end in our worlds with the objects encloses us.

Returning to the discussions around *Erlebnis*, I think it would be beneficial to try to think about how northern still life, especially the Vanitas style can be thought regarding the concept of *Erlebnis*. If we try to apply a Gadamerian hermeneutics, it will create productive questions about what life is, what consists of it, what limits it and how should we rethink our experiencing the life in regard to the perspective the Vanitas paintings opens us.



I assume that it is more than a Christian reminder, a warning to remove our attention from the earthly delights of our mortal lives. More than that, the feeling of living in a constant decay, rot and dying nourish our own experience of life and the truth we can grasp from it.

Moreover, the constant reminding of death in the midst of a civil war about in how theocratic rule people will live under is a powerful expression and a cue of the spirit of the society in Netherlands. Considering either an ordinary person living in Haarlem or the whole society, both showcasing the simplicity and mortality of the life distanced from the figures, gestures and expressions from the political and religious figures; the Vanitas still paintings weren't the bearers of the Christian messages about the importance of the afterlife, they were depictions about the earthly, mortal life around us. The truth we can grasp from these paintings is not the subtle awareness of the eternal life rather what we experience, what we have in our lives, which is our mortal, decaying, rotting, material lives. It can be said that the vanitas style has a specific argument about what life is. Or rather, what are its limits. I would argue over the Vanitas paintings are not classical memento mori examples, therefore they are neither gothic nor dark like Goya's black paintings or Spanish memento mori examples. The truth can be felt from the textures of the canvas of is the simple and mortal life. Encountering these paintings may make somebody think about what they would have apart from these lives, but in general it can be said that experiencing the feelings strike us in the imagery is both part of our own *Erlebnis* and also affect our perspective on both the things around us, the things we encounter in daily lives and the end itself. Depends on the effect that kind of work of art would create, it may be a particular of our *Sensus Communis* as it is a production of it.

### **3.3 Reading Still Life Paintings**

Pieter Claesz, the Dutch painter born in 16<sup>th</sup> century and died in 17<sup>th</sup> century is a follower of the Vanitas subgenre and created some of the most popular pieces of the genre and the era in general.

Claesz's 'signature' peeled lemons are a part of his allegorical language, as a memento mori. Claesz, just like his close friend and colleague Wilhelm Claesz Heda created

messy, randomly compositions where the depicted figures give the feeling of a crowdedness, like anything in the table could drop in another frame. Claesz and Heda's works have a highly realistic style where those allegorical objects seem very lively as much as real. In the paintings below, I want to exhibit the visual masteries of the painters in their styles, symbolic languages and reproduce the feelings coming from encountering these works while inspecting them. While the focus of this hermeneutic inspection is not texts, I consider interpreting paintings is a lot like interpreting poems, rule books or religious texts. However, understanding what we see as opposed to imagining what we read may be a challenge in the purlieu of hermeneutics and something tests our experience, *Erlebnis* encountering works of art.

In the Blackcurrant Pie (1641), Heda depicts a highly crowded table of unfinished suppers; a half-eaten pie, a half full of wine in an optimistic view, a fallen glass with fancy ornaments and a rotting lemon as a result of an act of peeling that seems to be interrupted or forgotten, all on the tulle of the table which is slipped, all depicted in a dim light and a dominant light brown color affecting all of the painting which was popular among the Dutch painters since Rembrandt.

The half-eaten, half-drunk, half-peeled, dropped and fallen objects are expressing a feeling of abortion or an interruption as none of the objects creates a feeling of satisfaction or satiation. They remind either the remains or interruption of a meal of few people. If we concentrate on the allegory of death, the painting tells us how our lives can be interrupted with a sudden death by emphasizing of the abruptness of the death as much as the inevitability of it, and how the things we enjoy become the meaningless, empty remains of us.

Another reading of the painting gives us how a real frame of our lives would be seen, half done things, the togetherness of and continuity between living and dying things and the randomly arranged positions. Another thing that I find successful about the Vanitas style is how the things, the lively and lifeless objects seem meaningless without us in the center of them. A table full of edible objects, a composition of bedroom, etc. All these arrangements and compositions are centralized in our implied existence in the painting and the actual feeling of mortality comes from the absence of our substance in it. Therefore, like the painting in subject, the Vanitas style is not just

an ordinary example of memento mori, a theological reminder in the mercantile lives of the Dutch society of the era, as the depictions of the interruptions to our lives; paintings seem to contain the truth about our lives; an everlasting cycle of producing, consuming, interacting with the things around us; but always in motion. The Vanitas paintings are depictions of what happens when suddenly our motions cut from the frame.

Another implication that we can find in the Dutch still life paintings is that just like the difference in the depictions of the objects which are not fresh or rich as in the Southern still life; the simplicity comes with the Protestant aesthetics affects the subject matter of the paintings. Unlike the Catholic Europe, the world of a man in Netherland is consist of the regular, common furnishes and tools and some of the paintings does not even give a hint about the class identification of the belongings, whereas the Renaissance men of the Italian or German painting could have everything. Michelangelo's Adam touches God, while the modern Adam in Claesz or Heda would touch dust, mold or a dry crumb of bread at best. The change of the world of humans in this case is both a subject to the concept of *Erlebnis* and *Sensus Communis*.

### **3.3.1 Lighting in Still Life**

Also, the lighting of the paintings are another characteristic attribute of the Dutch still life paintings. The dim lighting is both useful to depict a melodramatic scene and to point the simplicity of the world portrayed in the work. The room or the table that the objects placed on is lighted very narrowly. It is both natural in a way that makes the viewer feel like they are in the same room but also a brave and different approach. It is different because as opposed to the Renaissance or Baroque paintings where everything displayed in perfect angles and lightings, especially the angelic scenes, the Dutch still life paintings display the objects with very scarce lighting. The difference creates meaning, as we are used to the importance of light in Michelangelo, Da Vinci or Caravaggio. Caravaggio especially is an interesting example because while on the classical biblical scenes such as the Creation of Adam; a bright and clear picturizing is unavoidable. Or in the Last Supper, we can see every detail in a very crowded scene which created colorful speculations to date. However, Caravaggio is a distinctive artist with his way with lighting. In most of his works, the darkness and the shadows occupy

plenty of the canvas, the color black occupies sometimes more than half of the painting. However, the role of lighting is similar to Da Vinci or Michelangelo's works even if they are the opposite in tone and contrast. The Calling of Saint Matthew of Caravaggio is a good example of it. Caravaggio tells the story of Jesus calling the collector Matthew to his side by this painting. Jesus points Matthew from among four men sitting on a table. Everybody in the painting depicted in dark, while there is sun light coming to the room from possibly a window that the painter didn't choose to crammed in. This is because while we cannot see the source of light because of the chosen perspective, the light comes over Jesus' head who points Matthew with his finger.



*Figure 3 The Calling of Saint Matthew, Caravaggio, 1600*

So that in this example; the religious depiction is clear and powerful in a work portraying a chapter from Bible. I wanted to give the example to distinguish still life painters' use of lighting from the painters of different genres.

In Dutch still life examples, the lighting brings a modest, simplistic view to the things around us. The dim lighting, as opposed to the brightness in the early still life examples

also give the impression that what we should concentrate is not on the painting, actually the painting shows the lack of it.

### 3.3.2 Center of Still-Life

Another important detail in these paintings is that the focus of the paintings isn't on the inanimate or animate objects, rather they are about unseen people. With all the details about decay, abruptions, molders, crumbles; they all have traces of human touch, they imply the humans gather those things around themselves, they are the center or the watcher in the room, an invisible viewer inside the painting who is in front of us. Therefore, while the classical still life paintings from early examples to Renaissance focuses the objects on the paintings: fruits, edibles, meats, artillery, etc. and the implications of the artist concentrated on these objects themselves, the objects in the Dutch still life are signs and cues about something painting doesn't describe directly; by implication of their form (death, decay and temporality of life) and by lacking of, which are the people, the owners of these objects, the people put these objects around them, into the table side by side. As Gadamer put it on his *Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*; still life painters use their freedom of arrangement to speak loudly.

*It is not an arbitrary selection from the physical world around us. On the contrary, there is an iconography of the still-life. In contrast to all other kinds of pictorial subjects, the very arrangement itself belongs to the essence of the still-life. Naturally, I do not mean to suggest that in all other cases the painter simply represents reality as he finds it. This is no more true of the landscape or portrait than it is of the religious or historical painting, for composition is always the contribution of the artist. But the still-life enjoys a unique freedom in the arrangement of its subject matter precisely because the "objects" of composition in this case are things we can move around: fruit, flowers, everyday objects, sometimes even the spoils of the hunt – anything, in fact, that we choose to display. Compositional freedom thus begins with the subject-matter itself, and to that extent the still-life anticipates the compositional freedom of modern art, in which we find no trace of mimesis at all, and in which total speechlessness rules supreme. (Gadamer, 2002, pp. 85)*

Gadamer's comparison with modern art is something I will argue in great detail in the later chapters of the thesis, however, I wanted to show his input on the subject of still-

life. As Gadamer mentioned, the compositional freedom is an important attribute of the genre and the age, both as a development in art and an invention of expression through painting. It is also important that Gadamer sees the objects as an iconography, as its relationship with the iconoclasm of the age.

Still-life painters' choice of objects in general tells us the ideological affect Protestantism on the art and culture. However, the freedom on choosing specific symbolic objects and arranging them to create an expression is something else entirely that we should investigate. A snake or a lizard behind the flowers, a skull next to some fruit, a peeled lemon feels like falling, the crowded arrangements, etc. Artist uses the arrangements to create unease and symbolic contrasts. However, these contrasts should not be read such like Yin-Yang. The message of the works is not about the harmony or how life and death are integral, inseparable concepts. Rather, the arrangements of the subtle, symbolic memento mori concentrates on reminding death. The reminder of life is already given in the world of a 17<sup>th</sup> century Hollander whose lives are full of earthly, material things.

Another important subject is the feeling of unease in the paintings. The Dutch still-life is considered a part of the Baroque, which has a dark, uncomfortable aesthetics. The Dutch still-life expresses it in contrast with the traditional versions of the genre. It touches our collective, historical conscious. Our familiarization or instinctive on brighter, crowded portrayals evokes an alienation or an intuitive objection when we are encountering a Dutch still life example, a feeling that the artist concentrated on his efforts with dim lightings, messy settings, a feeling of interruption and the lack of individuals. The feeling of something is wrong tells us several important truths about the painting, artist, and the *Bildung*.

### **3.3.3 Dingliche Dinge in Dutch Still Life Painting**

*"We are a sign that is not read"* – Hölderlin, Hell IV, 225.

Heidegger quotes this verse from Hölderlin in his courses about thinking in 1952, published as "What is called thinking".<sup>11</sup> We can bring teacher of Gadamer into the discussion once again, to focus on the main subjects in Dutch still life paintings, the

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<sup>11</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 1968, Harper and Row.

things surround us, on the reach of our hand. The things in the casual life of the modern townsman.

My intention is not shifting from a philosopher to another in the middle of my thesis. What I am going to argue in this chapter will still be in the philosophical sphere of Gadamer. However, I want to benefit from some input from Heidegger to highlight something I consider significant about the still life genre. On a broader perspective, my analysis on the Vanitas sub-genre of Dutch still life is a Gadamerian hermeneutical inspection. However, to read the paintings from different angles, I will borrow concepts and arguments from different philosophers. Therefore, I find some of Heidegger's concepts appropriate on figures in paintings.

The things and hands are important concepts in Heideggerian philosophy. He distinguishes the things we think about utilizing and the things that we do not consider their function at the moment with his concepts of ready-to-hand and present-at-hand.

*Our fore-sight is aimed at something present-at-hand in what is ready-to-hand. Both by and for this way of looking at it [Hin-sicht], the ready-to-hand becomes veiled as ready-to-hand. Within this discovering of presence-at-hand, which is at the same time a covering-up of readiness-to-hand, something present-at-hand which we encounter is given a definite character in its Being-present-at-hand-in-such-and-such-a-manner. Only now are we given any access to properties or the like. When an assertion has given a definite character to something present-at-hand, it says something about it as a "what"; and this "what" is drawn from that which is present-at-hand as such.*  
(Being and Time, 2013, H. 158)

Heidegger's conceptualizing ready-at-hand is based on the functionality of things, while the present-at-hand is a concept he uses as a broader term to define things in being. Nevertheless, Heidegger concentrates on the things within the reach of our hands, things we think about or just consider their existence in our surroundings. I want to bring this way of thinking into the arrangements in Vanitas still life paintings.



Figure 4: Figure 4: *The Blackcurrant Pie*, W C Heda, 1641

What we see in *Blackcurrant Pie* or *Still Life with Pie* of Heda is the lack of a person or people who interact with the things on the table. The feeling of uneasiness coming from the messiness of the table results engaging of the two Heideggerian concepts, to create a whole different one. The figures in the table are depicted as used, their functionality unfolded in the world of the painting; the pie is half-eaten, a glass is emptied, and a lemon is peeled. While for the viewer, these objects evoke a familiarity at first, a table just like any other, everybody can encounter in their daily lives, unlike a Bible passage or a beautiful Italian landscape on a sunset. These objects are present-to-hand things most of the time. However, the feeling of their being used, some of them even got rotten creates the uneasiness, the messiness adds to the feeling, expresses the *Vanitas* that painting bears.

The chosen figures in the still life paintings are always things present-at-hand. Even the lighter ones, like Jan Brueghel's *Bouquet* (1599) or Josefa de Ayala's *Still-Life* (1679), the still life artists always choose to portray the things from daily life as it is stated in the genre's name. None of the paintings from the genre are about the nature itself or set in nature. They are strictly cut from any nature landscape. More than that, the figures are always affected by people and sometimes by life itself. Half-eaten breads, dead animals, peeled off or opened fruits, half empty glasses, etc. They always imply that they are in the presence of people at one point. In this way, they both the



symbolism of death, vanity and ephemerality and the touch of a person. Their being touched without any depiction of a human adds to the uneasiness the paintings evoke and empowers the feeling of a frame from daily life.

Moreover, the ready-at-hand choice in figures adds to the Vanitas emphasis while the present-at-hand approach gives us more clues about the cultural shift of the time. First of all, as Heidegger claimed in his *Being and Time*, both birth and death are also presences-at-hand that we do not consider. That is because we are moving away from one to coming closer to another.

Our touches, utilizing the things on our surroundings, on our tables and at our hands' reach are steps toward our deaths. The half-eaten meals and half-drunk beverages resembles our moving closer to the end while the lack of any part of a human in these paintings implies withdrawing from life.

On the other hand, the paintings focus solely on the daily lives of their time and both the rejection of religious figures and preferring frames from mostly consuming or producing resembles the secularist shift of the time. For the independent, mostly Protestant Netherlands, the daily life of a townsman is constituted of the materials. They are ready-to-hand things in our earthly lives.<sup>12</sup>

The closest beings to humans are hung birds, meat products or bugs in flowers. Any possibility of motion, *Anima* is not depicted or implied. There is always a feeling of intervention, something moved on to the objects in the paintings and then withdrew. The silence of withdrawal creates a very loud statement about our world and us being in the center of it.

There is neither a direct reference to a mythological (whether Greek or Judea-Christian) being nor a story. There is nothing implied about an agency towards the objects. The power of the genre comes from this attribute, or the lack of it. The still life painting speaks to us without the story, motion or a direct reference.

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<sup>12</sup> *The Public and Private in Dutch Culture of Golden Age* (2002), edited by A. F. Seeff and A. K. Wheelock has essays concentrated on a lot of aspects in the changing life in the Dutch Golden Age.

Then the figures, lighting, arrangement, perspective and the symbolism of Vanitas still life paintings tell us a lot about both artists, the period, *Bildung*, *Zeitgeist* and the *Sensus Communis*.

They are chosen frames from daily lives and the preference of the feeling of interruption on depicting the objects and the arrangement adds to the expression. Then, there are several truths we can lift the lid off these works of art.

First of all, the rejection of religion is a result of the political shift in the country which caused both new cultural pursuits and new ways for the economy of art. The emptiness of patrons in art resulted in exhibits and therefore, creating art to impress ordinary burghers. However, the change this change should not be taking into consideration as a negativity, something to suppress creativity, rather, while artists start to find new subjects and styles to attract ‘customers’, they didn’t withhold their creativity as we see in the sub genres of still life. The landscape paintings also evolved to impressionism. The main alteration was actually the change in subjects, something both the new economic conditions lead as much as the socio-political ones.

However, excluding religious texts didn’t withhold artists from expressing their philosophical or theoretical notions on the painting. The vanitas sub-genre was the result of this expression. On paintings subjecting foods, dishes or things present-at-hand, the artists of Vanitas sub-genre created art speaks loudly about mortality, life and humanly experiences. While the classical stance of Vanitas or memento mori examples on mortality seems to be a religious warning, such as “*Omnia mors aequat*” an early Roman saying means “Death makes all equal” a saying attached to some of the early examples of the genre. This fits with how the Vanitas painters of the time connected with Leiden. However, it should be taken into the account that whether religious or not, the warnings on the paintings were about the mortal, material life of the townsman of Haarlem, Leiden or Antwerp. What influenced this expression, and the choice of subject was the changing life in Netherlands, the rise of the merchant class, prosperity in towns and how the life of the low countries getting crowded with the materialistic aspects the new age brought. It was a life that you cannot trace the ‘God’ in daily life, not like in Catholic countries where the reform movement or the socio-economic shift didn’t touch. Some could argue that it is the Protestant version

of Catholic renaissance, where the theological meanings aren't carved onto Churches or chapels and rather found in the pessimist detailing of earthly, modern lives. The effects of iconoclasm and the general Protestant approach on the religious expressions should be taken into consideration, however, claiming that the artists only acted on sectarian virtues would be an underestimation of the truth of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch Vanitas. For understanding the artistic intentions and the effect of the art, we should recall Gadamer's contributions on hermeneutics and its dialectic nature. As the philosopher of 20<sup>th</sup> century claimed, hermeneutics is a never-ending process as "Not only are fresh sources of error constantly excluded, so that all kinds of things are filtered out that obscure the true meaning; but new sources of understanding are continually emerging that reveal unsuspected elements of meaning" (Gadamer, 2004).

With another characterization of Gadamer, the historically affected mind of artists in 17<sup>th</sup> century Netherlands not only observed but also lived through the changes in their country. From the independence earned from the eighty-year war to the rise of the merchant class, iconoclasm to the clashes between Calvinists and liberals, Netherlands was in a painful transformation. While the popular reading of reform movement qualifies as a progress for the Western civilization, the sectarian results of it embodied by the Calvinist Netherlands created an antithesis. Iconoclasm wasn't a movement motivated by enlightenment, rather it was a conservative censor. The liberalist movement can be seen as a positive output of the reform movement while the name of its famous follower became the flag of a new kind of oppressive religious foundation. The political atmosphere filled full of contrariety. On this atmosphere, the artists birthed some of the timeless works in the genre of still-life. However, their response to the atmosphere which created the socio-economic conditions leading them to the genre indirectly wasn't a direct stance on the side of the Protestant ethics. They didn't choose a direct opposition on iconographic Catholicism or the liberal way of life. On the opposite, they chose to portray this way of life, they chose to reproduce in their lives with a warning. On this manner, the Vanitas still-life of 17<sup>th</sup> century Netherlands is quite secular. The art appeals to the people dine on these tables portrayed in the paintings. They are also created to appeal to these burghers because of they are not only the buyers of wines and pies, but also these paintings. Then the memento mori on these paintings belongs to a secular life. When a symbol for mortality is alone with the

lively symbols of our world, it is not a call for an immortal being or a way of life above the one portrayed. Death belongs to the life in the paintings, the life of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Hollander. I am describing the time and place of the receiver, even though these works are considered universal just like the message of them. However, for the historical consciousness, the expression and its method differ. As we see in the Spanish Vanitas, on most of the cases the memento mori figure is central to the painting, sometimes it occupies most of the canvas. However, in Dutch Vanitas, the reminder of death is an ordinary part of the composition just like the lively fruits, pies and wines. It is not central nor signifying. Therefore, the sub-genre differs from Gothic and Baroque counterparts. While Baroque as a historical genre consists contrarities, the volume of theological expressions are usually powerful and impressive. However, Dutch Vanitas approaches death and decay as an ordinary part of the life. It 'lives' in our world. It is a presence-at-hand, like a peeled lemon or a moth on a grape. So that when there is not a signifier of immaterial way of living, an adversary of the material life of the Hollander or the position or volume of Memento mori does not differ by comparison; stressing the mortality in the earthly life of burghers expresses the fact that mortality belongs to this life. The 'memento' transforms into a definition. In this form, stressing mortality does not signify a religious, conservative view, rather it becomes the expression of an interpretation of mortality as it is understood in a secular view.

I am not denying the shock and unease the memento mori creates in Dutch Vanitas. Rather, I wanted to show that the reminder of death does not have to signify the existence of an adversary of earthly lives. It should be understood as partial and crucial to the life of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Hollander as the earthly delights. The specific intention of the artists of the century are debatable. We can connect some of the artists directly to Leiden if not for the school. However, the Leiden School has a radiating cultural aura affects the inhabitants of the city as much as the members of the school. Harmen Steenwyck, an artist created some of the significant examples of Dutch still life lived and worked in Leiden for the substantial period of his life. His works differs from Heda, Claesz or Rembrandt with his emphasis on symbols and their volumes in the paintings. While the works of Steenwyck have a powerful symbolism, he doesn't employ a subtle, compossible style. Steenwyck's famous *Allegory of the Vanities of Human Life* (Figure 5) is an important example of traditional Memento Mori style. A

professor of art history, Katherine A. McIver reads this work as “formulaic”, “incorporates a variety of literary and iconographic traditions”.



Figure 5: *An Allegory of the Vanities of Human Life*, Harmen Steenwijck, 1640

*Harmen Steenwijck's Allegory of the Vanities of Human Life (Figure 13.2) presents a jumble of exquisite possessions, from books to sword to lute and recorder to gleaming clock to an empty shell from tropical waters. A ray of sunlight falls directly on the right-hand side of a human skull at the center of the composition, reflecting brightly back from several surrounding objects. Each of these abandoned, hollow things receives its temporary luster from a higher source, whose origin is not merely beyond the viewer's sensory reach. It bursts from the point at which one would begin to read a verbal narrative, in direct line not with the 'sensible comforts', of human life, but with the vacant brain-pan left after death. (McIver, 2016)*

I wanted to bring another read of the painting not because of a need for a fresh eye or support for my claim but to highlight the effect the painting has on the viewer. As McIver mentioned, there are more symbols than a memento mori, which is mainly the skull in the center of the painting. The papers, a musical instrument and the centralizing and apparent depiction of skull emphasis on the death and vanity. Moreover, Steenwijck also incorporates a sun light comes from literally a higher source, a sun light from the upper left of the painting. It is similar to Caravaggio's *The Calling of*

*Saint Matthew*” I mentioned above. The light came from over Jesus’ head on Caravaggio’s opus and landed on the table Matthew sat. On this occasion, the light rays land on the table. Steenwyck employs a traditional artistic language. Therefore, the memento mori is supported by a positive religious metaphor. The implication of the painting is apparent as the skull in the center of it. McIver put it better as he mentions even the death “receives a temporary luster from a higher being.”

The arrangement, lighting, and the choice of objects creates a clear statement. I am employing the word statement because expression is not suitable for this sharp language. I brought Steenwyck’s work in this part to show how the usual examples of 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch Vanitas still life paintings differ from it. Even the impersonal depiction of the background contributes the impression Steenwyck aimed with this. There is little known about the artist’s personal life, so that we do not know whether he was a member of the Leiden school in some point of his life. However, we can certainly see the implications of the city on the artist and his works.

I intend to create an argument as much as clear from any indication of speculation on this part. What I wanted to show in comparison is that the usual example of Dutch Vanitas differs from apparent symbolisms, supporting metaphors and a centralized, distinct memento mori. While the genre employs symbolism, it is depicted in a natural, composable, indistinguishable way. This subtlety gives way of my interpretation of the genre and the truth lies behind the impression it creates, which is that in these works, mortality becomes a part of secular life. This is a powerful sentiment, because adopting death, a crucial concept of existence completes life.

### **3.4 Death and Ideology in Dutch Still Life: A secular death**

The concept of death is a critical center point for any ideology. I am employing the term ideology as a distinguishable model of understanding of and practicing in every aspect of life. Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, etc. In all of these ideologies death has a crucial and distinguishable, differing place. None of the denies it. However, when we are talking about 17<sup>th</sup> century Netherlands, we observe a clash of ideologies, religions which seemed like endless. First of all, Dutch revolts fought for their independence and sovereignty within practicing their culture in a dignified manner

against Spanish empire. Then, it was understood that there was not an ideology that most of the society agreed on. The conservative Calvinists and liberal republicans fought each other on how much religion would be the arbiter of the state. 17<sup>th</sup> century still life was born when the infight was still proceeding. The genre has consisted elements of the bourgeois culture. The subject-matter of the painting was the objects and scenes from the new burgher life in Netherlands, even the ‘theological message’ was expressed by adopting these earthly things. While Vanitas and memento mori were considered as the subjects of Christianity, the Dutch still life didn’t produce any image or visual unique to the religion. Even the usage of skull is not a usual custom in the examples of the age. Even with the skull, the imagery of still life lacked the southern pictorial stories from the reasons I mentioned above, some of the examples like Steenwyck excluded.

Let’s take a look at Pieter Claesz’s *Vanitas with Violin and Glass Ball* (1625). It is an interesting example of the genre because of several reasons. First of all, the depiction of artist is unusual in Dutch still life. The artist expressed his pertaining to the world he depicted, the world of Vanity. Another important detail is that, symbolizing of memento mori in the painting wasn’t created by the classical metaphors of the genre. There is no moth, no decaying food, emptied glass, skull or a candle. The evanescence and mortality were symbolized by a watch. The subject-matter of the painting are the belongings of the artist, which were all different kinds of

technological objects. The glass ball, watch, violin, toile, etc. It can be read in two angles. They are all ready-at-hand things for the artist who even is portrayed from the reflection in glass ball. They constitute the world of the artist, and so the people of the new age. Even memento mori is a watch, rather than a candle or a skull, therefore the imagery of evanescence is expressed through a scientific metaphor.

Using reflection to show the table is also a powerful metaphor, it expresses a denial of the natural eye. Not only the things in the reach of hand, but the world of people also changed, even the eye viewing the painting transform from the biological to a reflection of glass. I wanted to bring the painting to show how the memento mori of Dutch still life created symbols of death and mortality from the secular world and helping it to adopt the concept of inevitability.



*Figure 6: Vanitas with Violin and Glass Ball, Pieter Claesz, 162*

Therefore, the genre created an imagery for the bourgeois culture and adopting memento mori interestingly completed the new ideology. The critique of conservative approach towards to the bourgeois culture of the low countries was people lived without taking death into consideration. The concept of inevitable end became a part of this new culture with the contribution of still life painters. The paintings didn't belong to the churches or chapels, they belonged to the walls where they can be viewed from the depicted tables of dining. The depicted embraced the depiction and become one. This was economically inevitable because in a art economy without patrons, who



would be the buyer, if not for the target of the critique. With it, the new ideology became completed by adopting the death into itself. It was legitimized as much as any religious ideology.

The intentions of artists were to try to create a response to the ever-changing cultural ground. It wasn't about conserving and defending a religious ideology. They saw the ideological shift and added the missing part to the new world which was death. Again, the intentions of the artists aren't in inspection here, as we still know few about their life and ideologies and it would be unfitting to calculate the intellectual worlds of every painter contributed to the genre, even with limited time and space. Rather, I am interpreting the possible intentions of artists, their creative anxiety in the face of a great transformation and without adopting specific ethical and political measurements, asserting the implications of their art. I am trying to point how the concepts of how *Sensus communis* and *Erlebnis* in play. The communal sense was changing and transforming by the experiences of the people who lived in the community. Moreover, what artists experienced as the natural part of the community created new experiences for their contemporaries who encountered their art, influenced from the same experiences. Then the art had a dialectical process progressed the culture around the people, both artists and viewers. It created a synthesis for the newly experienced culture. A culture was founded by those early experiences. And the Dutch still life had an important place in it. Without exaggerating the role of the genre too much and leading into misjudgments about who favored the works and who bought them, I wanted to employ a hermeneutical inspection, about the political, economic, social and ideological historicity of the Dutch still life painting and the truths the art bear. The Vanitas sub-genre of 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch still life was a signifier of what was missing on the culture, and the signal became the missing part itself. The genre was both a witness and an instrument of the culture, created an imagery that the newly welcomed burgher culture didn't have a hold of; the mortality, vanity, ephemerality and death itself. Even if it came from a Protestant critique, it became a secular imagery of death. It wasn't a celebration or sanctifying of death, and there is no ideology that could adopt it with blessing. Rather, imagining life as a process of evanescence in delight created an adoption of the mortality and death in secularism.

## CHAPTER 4

### RUSSIAN AVANT GARDE

#### 4.1 A Background of the Experiments on Art

For the second genre that I intend to inspect with Gadamer hermeneutics, I chose the Russian Avant Garde. However, before going in great detail about the movement, I want to show the flow of change in art that started in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. By capturing the transformation with the reasons behind it, I feel it is deeply interconnected with the Russian Avant Garde movement. Moreover, I assume that every movement, experiment and tendency in art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are strictly bound with the developments of 19<sup>th</sup> century art, specifically Paul Cézanne.

The economic changes in the form of supply-demand relationship in art on 17<sup>th</sup> century Netherlands became mainstream on 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. The lack of patronage system brought exhibitions. However, even in 17<sup>th</sup> century, there were still guilds, apprenticeship, and commissioning that the aristocrats sponsored for personal needs, such as the design of their own houses. However, with the vanishing aristocracy, the patronage system completely disappeared on the art scene. (Gombrich, 1995)

Moreover, for the great part of 18<sup>th</sup> century, the impressionism had risen as a new genre, after centuries of Biblical paintings, still life, portraits, etc. The importance of impressionist art is that it was an impactful innovation in both coloring and perspective. The colorful shadowing, renunciation of drawing sharp, concrete forms in favor of lucid drawings created an opposition to the progressive accumulation of Renaissance tradition on both technique, sight and narrative.

Classical examples of impressionist paintings are lucid landscape paintings. However, the genre also celebrated the newly transformed burghs. Spectacles on the city sights

on night lights joined landscape paintings, which has a long history full of natural depictions, the drawings of mountains, fountains, hills, etc.

The celebration of the new elements in the cities; the crowded public consists of most of the popular examples of impressionist painting. However, aside from the subject matter, impressionism is the rejection of the perfect eye developed in Renaissance. The paintings are depicted from a flawed, humanly eye; dazzled by bright lights, unable to observe every small detail, cannot perceive contrasts of colors or shapes very clearly. The lucid drawings of impressionism reject the perfect human eye, which is central in the revolutionary Renaissance painting. By rejection, the artists of the genre chose a more natural and critical position. The subject-matter and scenery of the genre transformed into public space. The new population of cities were the subject-matter in a lot of the examples of the genre. Frames from the lives of ordinary people and streets became more significant.

The techniques of depictions changed along with the interest of the artists. The economic nature of art in the 19th century should be taken into consideration as the exhibitions become prominent. With the guilds were weakened, and the patrons vanishing, the subjects became the buyers. And so is the artist. Exhibitions became part of the city scenery that impressionist artists subjected in their paintings. The genre in general was full of new experiments which helped charming buyers and contributed to the characterization of new artists.

With the change in technique of depiction, shadowing and lighting, the form and composition transformed, too. When the lucid, soft depictions replaced hyper realistic forms of the classical era, it created a feeling of unity. With the detailed texture layers distinguishable from each other were replaced by a wholistic style that covered all of the canvas with same lines resulted the painting becoming one whole texture, a wholistic fabric consisting different colors and shadow lines. This wholistic approach added to the natural eye in impressionism, which cannot separate every detailed texture.

Impressionism leans on the physical limitations of the human eye, as opposed to Renaissance and Baroque, in which famous painters like Caravaggio tried to carve out every observable detail into the canvas. The lucidity in the new genre created a

wholistic impression in different ways with its unique colors, textures, and lines. In compositional sense, the subject-matters in the canvas became more harmonic. Claude Monet's *Le Grand Canal* (1908) is a beautiful example of it. The dominance of the light tones of a few colors (turquoise, ice blue, lilac and green) contributed to a very pale and simplistic depiction of a very crowded scene, consisting of ships on the canal, buildings on the shore, and two grand layers of textures; sea and the sky. All of the subjects were drawn and colored in a harmonious and coherent style.

The simplicity and coherency of the paintings is another significant attribute of the genre which is a mirroring of the age. With the critical inventions, the cities built in new technologies, where the mass production replaced craftsmanship that affected the architecture deeply, shaping the visage of cities. While the subject-matter choice of impressionism usually celebrates the beauty of the world, whether natural landscapes or city views, some could say that the simplicity and coherency of the paintings coming from the mass production technology shaping the cities which also incapsulates these attributes as a mechanical output. However, neither the paintings nor the artists were repetitive, they experimented on different styles of coloring, lighting, shadowing, lining; different views and subject-matters. The artists differed by their answer to what should be the subject; and the genre was rich with the answers in comparison with its predecessors.

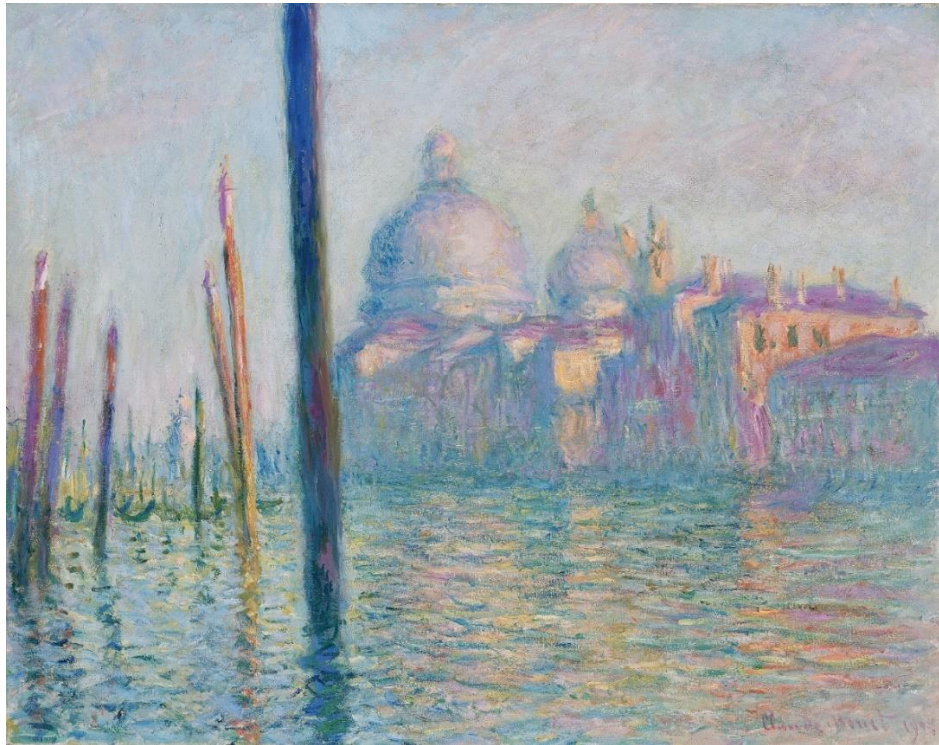


Figure 7 *Le Grand Canal*, Claude Monet, 1908

#### **4.1.1 The Cezanne Shift**

After long experiments, trying different subject matters and colorings, Cezanne started to alter with a critical mechanics of painting consciously. The Dutch painter started to break perspective. From today, this change seems inevitable. After centuries of experimenting and altering different variables and constants of the art; from subject-matter to depiction, the turn of perspective came with Cezanne. Of course, the artist made countless different contribution to art and several genres. However, Cezanne's altering with perspective as a famous, impactful painter is an important step in the history of art that I will utilize on my reading of the Avant Garde.

Cezanne's alteration came from necessity, a creative stalemate he encountered. While the impressionist lucidity, the wholistic textures, stylish lines and characteristic tones created a powerful coherency in the whole of the impressionist painting; a problem of an aesthetic perspective in composition arose. Leoine Gombrich summarizes the motivations behind Cezanne's intervention clearly.

*In his tremendous effort to achieve a sense of depth without sacrificing the brightness of colours, to achieve an orderly arrangement without sacrificing the sense of depth — in all the struggles and gropings there was one thing he was prepared to sacrifice if need be: the conventional ‘correctness’ of outline. He was not out to distort nature; but he did not mind very much if it became distorted in some minor detail provided this helped him to obtain the desired effect. Brunelleschi’s invention of ‘linear perspective’, did not interest him overmuch. He threw it overboard when he found that it hampered him in his work. After all, this scientific perspective had been invented to help painters create the illusion of space — as Masaccio had done in his fresco in Sta Maria Novella, did not aim at creating an illusion. He wanted rather to convey the feeling of solidity and depth, and he found he could do that without conventional draughtsmanship. He hardly realized that this example of indifference to ‘correct drawing’ would start a landslide in art. (Gombrich, 1995, pp. 543-544)*

We can understand that Cezanne saw what the linear perspective benefits to and how it started to conflict with his intentions. Gombrich interprets that Cezanne could convey the feeling of depth without the scientific perspective. The contribution Cezanne brought to the progress of art with altering perspective is that he adopted an original language, a mechanics unique to art, rather than employing the scientific method. The technique of art obtained an artistic essence.

It should be noted that the intention behind distorting perspective became a stance against the hyper realism by Cezanne. The Dutch painter rejected the idea of depicting a three-dimensional vision on a two-dimensional canvas. Therefore, he started to depict the subject matters as if they are geometrical figures. Adding it to Cezanne’s distorting perspective in paintings, where the objects have all different shadowing and lighting from different angles, the objects in the paintings feel like they are patchworks from different paintings or objects and landscapes from different times and spaces arranged in the painting. The rejection of linear perspective was one of the last bricks of the wall in front of the 20<sup>th</sup> century art. More than that, in an age that the world of science started to separate itself from the *Bildung*, artists started to reject scientific attributes and contributions celebrated in Renaissance, creating a structure that is unique to the nature of art for the sake of art itself.

Cezanne was famous for his experiments, unique style and the radical changes he introduced on painting which would radically affect the art of upcoming century. Gadamer also speaks about the Dutch artist highly. What is interesting is that, on his critical application of mimesis, Gadamer uses a Cezanne painting to prove his point. Cezanne's nearly thirty famous landscape paintings of the Sainte Victoire Mountain, which are painted with different perspectives of the same landscape is a favorable example for Gadamer's approach on mimesis and repetition. As for the German philosopher, the mimesis is not something negative, a lowest form of truth Plato claimed, rather the art bears the truth which can be grasped through true understanding of the Greek concept. I wanted to show in the still life painting that how art can be a powerful form of truth; and mimesis is a concept that can be useful for the genre. It can explain how the repetitions of the same genre constructed the truth of the age I described above. However, the artistic contributions of Cezanne should be inspected from a perspective of historicity that I will inspect on the chapters about Avant Garde.



*Figure 8: Mont Sainte-Victoire and the Viaduct of the Arc River Valley, Paul Cezanne, 1885*



Figure 9: *Mont Sainte-Victoire with Large Pine*, Paul Cezanne, 1887

#### 4.2 The Historical Scene the Avant Garde Arrived

20<sup>th</sup> century painting was one of the most colorful ages of the art; as every year brought a new style, movement or genre especially in the first two decade. First of all, the birth of Cubism with Cezanne's contributions encouraged new experiments on art. Different movements focusing perspective, coloring and figuring followed. Cubism, however, became the central movement of the first quarter of the century, because of its brave examples, famous creators and the influence on the newer movements.

Cubism was the natural outcome of the Impressionist movement. The emphasis on lucidity, disoriented perspective, texturized compositions led the new artists to challenge the form of the figure. Cezanne started the trend of depicting figures in geometric forms, then the founders of Cubism emphasized the geometrical forms more than the integrity of the figures, in fact, they separated the perspective and introduced fragmented forms. Picasso's *Violin and Grapes* (1912) is a famous example of this fragmentation. A lot of Cubist artists, especially Picasso used musical instruments a lot in their paintings, a ready-at-hand thing that the Dutch still life painters also adopted as a main figure in their arrangements. On the Spanish painter's work dated 1912, the



instrument is scattered into the canvas in geometrical forms, piece by piece, meddled with the grape figure depicted on a wooden background. The painting evokes a feeling of blur and anxiety on the surroundings, something Cubist artists focused on when they portray a specific subject-matter. The feeling of blur and anxiety on deconstructed forms expresses the *Geist* of the times, where life became more rushed and mechanical. The expression was popular among the art of 20<sup>th</sup> century art. It was also an implication of how the human eye could not view the world in stills, that it cannot stop to observe the world in clear frames. This is a continuation of Impressionists' critique of the natural eye, where the lights, lines and colors appear more lucid. However, there are a lot of works the Cubists made by without touching the integrity of the subject-matter by using the geometrical forms intertwining each other to build a shape, like *The Weeping Woman (1937)*, *Mother and Child (1943)* of Pablo Picasso. These examples showcase a different adoption of the genre, while the general depiction differs from the likes of violin and guitar paintings. The ones depicting a conserved form of figures, the paintings create a caricaturized impression of them.

The caricaturizing was another trend in the 20<sup>th</sup> century art that the viewers are exposed through several different movements. The expressionist movement which was rebranded with different names in different times and places since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was famous for its caricaturizing depictions. As a critical figure in impressionism, Van Gogh, adopted the style in his portraits. However, according to Gombrich, the 'members' of the expressionist movement usually tried to portray the ugliness of the age with the caricaturizing forms, such as the social problems the modern cities face; poverty, inequalities, violence, etc.

Friedrich Engels, on his famous 'The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844' described the horrific conditions the working class faced in their daily lives:

*What is true of London, is true of Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, is true of all great towns. Everywhere barbarous indifference, hard egotism on one hand, and nameless misery on the other, everywhere social warfare, every man's house in a state of siege, everywhere reciprocal plundering under the protection of the law, and all so shameless, so openly avowed that one shrinks before the consequences of our social state as they manifest themselves here undisguised, and can only wonder that the whole crazy fabric still hangs together. (Engels, 2010, pp. 107)*



Figure 10: Violin and Grapes, Pablo Picasso, 1912

Another significant intellectual, famous with his observations on modern urban life, George Simmel summarized the rush and the pressure of the cities on the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century in his *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1950).

*Punctuality, calculability, exactness are forced upon life by the complexity and extension of metropolitan existence and are not only most intimately connected with its money economy and intellectualist character. These traits must also color the*

*contents of life and favor the exclusion of those irrational, instinctive, sovereign traits and impulses which aim at determining the mode of life from within, instead of receiving the general and precisely schematized form of life from without. Even though sovereign types of personality {13}, characterized by irrational impulses, are by no means impossible in the city, they are nevertheless, opposed to typical city life.*  
(Simmel, 1950, pp. 3)

However, philosophers emphasized on different angles and problems of the modern urban culture, however there is a shared similarity on their observations; the urban is no more the space Romanticists idealized building the bourgeois culture, it is a machine working by the daily efforts of thousands of people from different classes and backgrounds every day. The shared, collective culture is a mechanical, rational hastiness which creates all kinds of ugliness for the disadvantageous. It is not a culture that recreates and reproduces citizens, rather it is a war zone inside a clock.

I wanted to include the observations of Simmel and Engels to describe the historicity behind the 20th century art better. To understand Cubism, Expressionism, Avant Garde and other movements of the time, we should take into account the atmosphere these paintings were made. This is important for a hermeneutical inspection, and understanding the truths the art bears, the *sensus communis* and the historical *Erlebnis*.

The cities of the late 19th century and early 20th century offers a different atmosphere than the secluded urban life of Netherlands in 17th century. We can no longer observe the fruits of a newly ascended bourgeois life, rather industrialization changed the shape of the great cities of Europe. London, Berlin, Paris, Moscow; in all over the Europe a new, heterogenous population rose, and the class struggle was introduced. The tension on the streets Engels mentioned intertwined with the calculated mechanics of the industry as Simmel pointed. The new art was created as a result and a respond to the change. This is the main reason behind why I wanted to compare two genres from 17th century Netherlands and early 20th century Europe. The art was both an output of the change and input trough the culture with its dialectic relationship with the truth. This is what we encounter interpreting the experiments and their purposes of the movements in 20th century art, the feeling of rush and blur, the need for caricaturizing... They are both the causes and the addresses of the works.

Industrial modernization was one of the biggest subjects for centuries. The process created its biggest critiques from Marx to Nietzsche. Wassily Kandinsky, one of the most influential artists on abstract painting, also wrote a book about his critique of the modernization and how the art should be shaped as a response, a resolution to the problems at hand. The Russian artist builds his arguments as a reaction to the developments and the culture of his time, however I found them valuable in this chapter to illustrate the powerful relationship connection between the artists and the time they lived in.

*When religion, science and morality are shaken, the two last by the strong hand of Nietzsche, and when the outer supports threaten to fall, man turns his gaze from externals in on to himself. Literature, music and art are the first and most sensitive spheres in which this spiritual revolution makes itself felt. They reflect the dark Picture of the present time and show the importance of what at first was only a little point of light noticed by few and for the great majority non-existent. Perhaps they even grow dark in their turn, but on the other hand they turn away from the soulless life of the present towards those substances and ideas which give free scope to the nonmaterial strivings of the soul. (Kandinsky, 2009, pp. 44)*

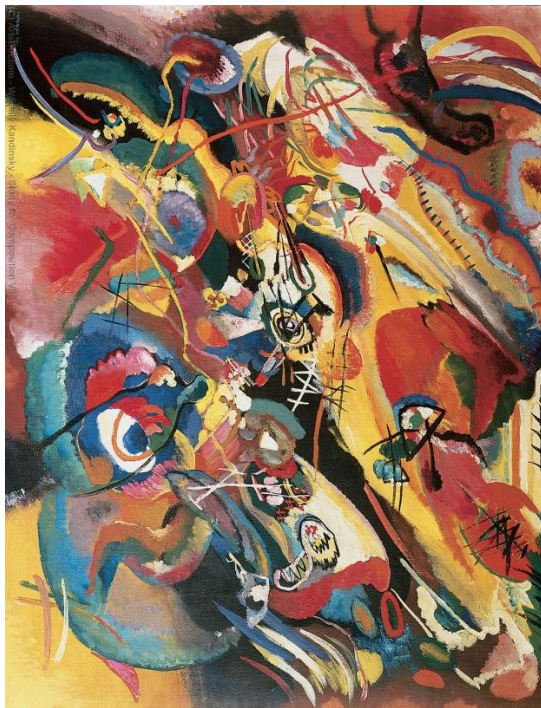


Figure 11: Composition VII, Wassily Kandinsky, 1913

On his book, Kandinsky introduced a spiritual philosophy in a strong relationship with art, as a reaction to the “dark picture of the present time”. Kandinsky started as an impressionist, who painted beautiful landscapes, filling the canvas with shining colors and soft lines. As his artistic life continues, he began a search for new artistic experiences and as a result, the Russian painter created the first examples of abstract paintings. He became one of the pioneers of the change in art. Kandinsky’s of bright and powerful coloring stayed same as his art evolved, however he adopted geometrical forms and fluid lines in his compositions. The music is one of the main influences on his art and it could be nearly heard the notes motivated his creativity through the brushes on his works. As a result, Kandinsky created emotionally powerful compositions filled with radical abstractions and shapes.

### **4.3 Russian Non-Figurative Painting**

Wassily Kandinsky’s evolution from an impressionist to an abstract painter is a good example of how contemporary art transformed. It is even explanatory how the painter himself understood the times he lived and created his art as a response to these times. However, the relationship between history and the artist is a dialectical progress, which we can observe how the age changed the artists. However, another important development in play here is that the art itself was evolving.

Gadamer pondered on the change in art in 20<sup>th</sup> century on his respected *Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. The German philosopher argued in defense of a unity between the so-called classical art and the contemporary art. Gadamer claimed that even when we observe the classics of Renaissance and Baroque painting, we appreciate the art by our historical conscious. We understand the references and what artist intend. He then states the same for the contemporary art, while asking this important question; “*why art of today makes us think?*”

Historical consciousness, then, is not a particularly scholarly method of approach, nor one that is determined by a particular worldview. It is simply the fact that our senses are spiritually organized in such a way as to determine in advance our perception and experience of art. Clearly connected with this is the fact – and this too is a form of self-conscious reflection – that we do not require a naïve recognition in which our own world is merely reproduced for us in a timelessly valid form. On the contrary, we are

self-consciously aware of both our own great historical tradition as a whole and, in their otherness, even the traditions and forms of quite different cultural worlds that have not fundamentally affected Western history. And we can thereby appropriate them for ourselves. This high level of self-conscious reflection which we all bring with us helps the contemporary artist in his creative activity. (Gadamer, 2002, pp. 11).

Another critical artist pioneered the 20<sup>th</sup> century art was Kazimir Malevich. The Ukrainian painter is known for his magnum opus *Black Square* (2015), which is actually just a black square as the name describes. Malevich was considered the founder of Suprematism; a movement focuses on geometrical forms in painting and rejects the natural figures. Suprematism naturally emerged from Cubism and Fauvism; a subgenre of Impressionism emphasizes on strong colors. In Fauvism, most of the times colors have their own volumes and forms exceeds the figures they are meant to fill.

#### **4.4 Malevich: A Platonic Stand Against Classical Art**

Malevich was also a loud figure in the art circles, wrote a manifesto called *From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Realism in Painting* in 1915, the same year the artist introduced his *Black Square*. In this manifesto, Malevich explained the reasons of introducing this new movement, basing it on a philosophical layer. Malevich rejects the idea of portraying nature, and the nature consists of everything our world has. There is a part where Malevich chose to reject portraying nature I found interesting as a correspondence with Gadamerian hermeneutics;

*“Only dull and impotent artists screen their work with sincerity.*

*In art there is a need for truth, not sincerity.” (Malevich, 2003)*

It is an interesting point Malevich makes, which also gives a hint about the mentality of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century art circles. The artists were brave with their experiments and pursuits as they seek new ways to depict the truth, rather than the nature itself. It was also similar for their predecessors in past centuries, from Michelangelo to Heda, every artist intended to find and express truth in their works. The technique was a way of this expression, as well as the subject-matter. Renaissance painters’ recreating Biblia

Pauperum, Cubists' fragmenting perspective, still life painters' memento mori, impressionists' lucid depictions... Even the trompe l'oeil of Ancient Roman painters' can be interpreted as an expression related with truth. So that Malevich's declaring his rejection of the figures of nature for the sake of creating art bearing truth is neither new nor shocking. However, the reasoning he based his rejection deserves an inspection.

Malevich mentions the history of art and claims that from the first cave paintings to renaissance, the paintings were the reproductions of the reflections of nature. Malevich deny the artistic essence of these reflections of the reproductions. Mirroring of nature was a savage's idea, which kept going with the developing brilliance on technique. This is a very arguable claim, which brings Gadamer's approach on mimesis once again. Gadamer argued that the repetition of this reproduction bear the truth, as art itself is a higher form of truth as opposed to Plato's hierarchy. Therefore, on this point, we can see Malevich and Gadamer are at the opposite sides. Malevich denies the truth on the reproduction of nature, while Gadamer built his hermeneutical approach on a mechanism that can grasp the truth of *Geisteswissenschaften* from art.

However, Malevich's stance on the truth and art introduced a different kind of reproduction. His rejection is not based on devaluing mimesis. Rather, it is about what the artist 'mime'.

And between the art of creating and the art of copying there is a great difference. The artist can be a creator only when the firms in his picture have nothing in common with nature.

[...]

*And this is possible when we free all our art from vulgar subject-matter and teach our consciousness to see everything in nature not as real forms and objects, but as material masses from which forms must be made, which have nothing in common with nature.*

[...]

*Color and texture in painting are ends in themselves. They are the essence of painting, but this essence has always been destroyed by the subject. (Malevich, *The Manifesto of Suprematism*, 2003)*

Malevich's claims on what is art and what is reproduction becomes clearer. According to the Ukrainian painter, the subject enslaves the art, while creating the forms these subjects created frees it. The art is depicting the essences of the figurative world in creative forms. Malevich focuses on painting what the figurative world consists of rather than the figures. However, as we see in his manifesto, it is not a mere preference, rather a philosophical statement.

This is the second time Malevich has introduced Plato on the subject; knowingly or unknowingly. Seeing the essences of the nature in geometrical forms, focusing on the foundations that figures formed seems like an artistic challenge on Plato's world of forms. However, Malevich never mentions of Plato or refers anything related his philosophy, therefore it is only my approach to connect the views of the Greek philosopher and Ukrainian artist. Then, the debate on mimesis evolved to a more interesting level between Gadamer, Malevich and Plato himself. On Platonic terms, Malevich suggested creating art based on the actual forms, the truth as he stated that the art bears, instead of sincerity that base, savage reproduction intends to create. This is of course impossible in Platonic terms, there is no mention of recreating the forms in art, something necessitates enormous intellectual effort to grasp. Also, it would be impossible as Plato strictly speaking of the forms are the perfect shapes such as triangles, squares, circles that we cannot encounter their perfect forms in nature, rather they are reflected as the imperfect figures in the physical world. And the art imitates nature, according to Plato. Then art imitates the imperfect, as a result producing lesser perfect forms than the nature. Malevich transcends this hierarchy by stating that the intention of his movement is creating the essence bases the figurative world on geometrical forms in canvas. It is also ironic that the essentials Malevich refers to are velocity, volume, speed and movement, the concepts that Plato bases the physical, lower form of the world. As opposed to the Greek philosopher, Malevich celebrates the speed, the developments of the temporal world and even criticize the artists focusing the classical art in a satirical way:

*"Their bodies fly in airplanes, but art and life are covered with the old robes of Nero and Titians. Thus they are unable to see the new beauty of our modern life. For they live be the beauty of past ages."* (Malevich, 2003)



However, as the inspection develops, we can see that Malevich's standpoint seems closer to Gadamer's on mimesis. Gadamer claimed that art conforms a higher form of truth through mimesis. On Platonic terms, Malevich intends to create art based on the abstractions of physical concepts of the world, which he also defends as the bearer of truth. Moreover, as I stated above, the philosophical ambition of Malevich is similar to his predecessors, so that the unity between the old and contemporary art continues, as Gadamer argued.



*Figure 12: Black Square, Kazimir Malevich, 1915*

What more can be said about the new art, especially the non-figurative abstract art? Malevich states his purpose clearly. Can we say the same for the ones before and after him? I think the better evaluation will be putting plainly the historicity, the socio-political and economic conditions paves the way for the art of 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is also interesting that the fact that as two members of abstract school, Kandinsky and

Malevich have opposite views on science and technology. Kandinsky tries to distance himself, his spirit and art from the new world while Malevich celebrates it as a whole. Celebration of technology was a common intellectual behavior in the Russian intellectual circles, especially on poets, as well as painters. It is no surprise the futurist poet Mayakovski is a close friend of Malevich. Another distinguishable fact about the supremacist movement is that its fundamental difference from constructivism, a contemporary of the movement which has similar aesthetics and consisting famous Russian artists.

Constructivism was a broader movement comparing to suprematism, which became a genre of several branches of art: cinema, architecture, painting, photography. It was founded by Russian artists Vladimir Tatlin and Alexander Rodchenko and influenced tens of other Russian artists on different fields. Constructivism in painting employed geometrical forms similar to Suprematism. However, the movement did not rejected figures, rather the constructivist artists reproduced the figurative imagery in geometrical forms. Constructivism was focused on the industrialized world and celebrated it rather than become a critique of it. The difference of Suprematism comparing constructivism was the figurative imagery that the former rejected while the latter reproduced with same motivation, reimagining the world of technology. Constructivism focused on the industrialist angle and viewed the world in a more mechanical way even in covering the socio-political issues. El Lissitzky's famous *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* (1919) is a depiction of the victory of the Red Army over the White Army in geometrical forms. It was a celebration of the triumph of the revolutionary forces in a creative artistry.

#### **4.5 The Problem of Figure**

The contrast between Constructivism and Suprematism is clear. The suprematism focused on the imagery of the forms shaping the world in 20<sup>th</sup> century; such as speed. Constructivism subjected the forms this world created. It should be noted that Malevich's intentions weren't spiritualist like Kandinsky. He wanted to grasp the essence of the concrete reality. It was an abstraction. However, his denial of figure is the issue I stress over and intend to open up with Gadamerian hermeneutics.

Problematizing figures is an interesting way of expressing the truth artist believed about the historical world he lived in and experienced. In a world where everything around the artist is constructing and deconstructing, searching for an original, unchanged and untouched form is something inevitable. However, doing it as a celebration of the world as it is, rather than reacting as Kandinsky did is the unusual part. However, in one way or another, the situation stays same. The Dutch painter of 17<sup>th</sup> century sat on his table and created his art bearing his truth with the symbolism of the things present-at-hand. The Russian artist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century sat on his table and created his art bearing his truth with the essence of the things present-at-hand. The tools on the table of Claesz transformed the world three centuries later and Malevich tried to recreate the forces behind this transformation with the tools in his studio.

Problematizing of the objects at hand is the shared situation both artists experienced. They were experiencing a world changing fast and the traditional culture falls faster, human practices life in different ways every day. The change is observed in opposite views in the society; the conservatives and liberals of Netherlands were replaced by the spiritualist reactionaries and mesmerized futurists both with creative potentials. Moreover, the creative expression revolved around the object. Dutch painters of 17<sup>th</sup> century depicted the symbols of the new society in absurd ways. On the other hand, the modern artists first deconstructed the perspective of the figure, than the integrity of it, and at last, rejected it, completely wipe it out to portray directly the creative forces behind it.

It is an interesting fact that, the illusion behind impressionist experiments was to illustrate the result of same forces on human view. Cubism focused on illustrating the same speed Malevich tried to portray directly as an effect on how we experience the world in modern day by disintegrating the form. Constructivism depicted the transformative essence of the figure in relation with the same forces. Malevich tried to depict the abstraction of these forces; the speed, the velocity; by getting rid of the figure completely. I am using the terms rejection and denial since the beginning because it is a philosophical statement as well as an artistic choice. The object in question in Malevich's art is the object itself, rather than its different formations. Another interesting coincidence is that the Dutch painters used the changed, decayed

forms of the objects to express fundamental, metaphysical concepts such as death and evanescence.

Then, rejecting the figure as the subject-matter of art comes from an experience similar to other contemporary artists and maybe their 17<sup>th</sup> century predecessors.

The motivation behind Malevich's movement is experiencing a world being constantly constructed and deconstructed, transformed, disappeared and reappeared every millisecond. Rather than depicting the formation of the world in a sectioned frame; Malevich intended to grasp the forces changing the world, since the 'savages' in the early days of homosapien. Since the technique of depiction evolved to a point of abstraction itself, the abstraction of the subject matter is also an inevitable situation that would be experimented one way or another. A philosophical pondering over the inevitable makes it more valuable.

Moreover, the pursuit for picturing the driving forces of the world is an artistic ambition that we can observe in both 17<sup>th</sup> century Vanitas still life and Suprematism. The Dutch painters created the imagery of the evanescence with powerful symbolism and creative arrangements. Malevich created the imagery of the driving forces makes the world round by abstraction. Still life used figure as symbol, a metaphor, embodying of the metaphysical concepts. Suprematism removed the figure in order to reveal these physical concepts.

It is clear that Suprematism is a direct outcome of the socio-political and cultural shifts of the time. It is evident that the art was the expression of the *Erlebnis* the artist and his contemporaries lives through. The historicity of the art bears the truth about the *sensus communis* of the European civilization of early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As well as the 17<sup>th</sup> century Hollander; by embracing the industrial developments and the everchanging towns of different classes, the 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian artist didn't only depict what he experience creatively. Moreover, the contemporary form of the *Mimesis* directly concentrated on recreating the truth they lived in an aesthetic form.



Figure 13: Beat the Whites with the Red Wedges, El Lissitzky, 1919

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY

My thesis presents firstly the conditions and historical conflicts that paved the way for Gadamer's hermeneutics. Classical metaphysics were weakened after Hume's critique and Kant's response to him. The substance of soul in philosophy stuck in a limited space in modern rationalism. The rise of hermeneutics was a response that Romanticists came with to this problem.

However, the hermeneutics philosophers such as Schleiermacher and Dilthey were inefficient to utilize hermeneutics to create an original method for social sciences. Gadamer argued that a method for social sciences should be unique, rather than a different version natural science uses. Gadamer based his argument to the historical nature of social sciences and claimed that the method of *Geisteswissenschaften* should be historical. This is how he structured his hermeneutics, a search for historical truth. Moreover, Gadamer shifted the subject of hermeneutics from theological texts to art. By relating the truth to art, Gadamer presented an original method in hermeneutics which challenged the classical approach to art in epistemology. Gadamer opposed the Platonic argument of how art is the lowest form of the truth; an argument Hegel also accepted. Gadamer presented a method of hermeneutics, which searched the truth through the works of art and therefore changed the hierarchical position of the area.

After presenting the historical developments in philosophy created the conditions for Gadamer's hermeneutics and interpreting the possibilities the method creates, I introduced two different painting genres and studied Gadamer's hermeneutics into the works of them. I intended to disclose the truth art bear. However, I also emphasized the socio-political nature of historicity. So that I demonstrated a more social and political truth the artworks of 17<sup>th</sup> century still life and 20<sup>th</sup> century Avant Garde bears.

To do that, I specifically chose two eras and countries in Western civilization where the society is in the middle of great changes. Both of the eras are from the modernization, therefore I also subjected the changes in the cities and their effects on the people of the time. The artists of the chosen era were understood as a part of the changing society. I utilized the concepts of Erlebnis and Sensus Communis to philosophize both the personal and social experiences of the artists. I argued that the artworks of the eras were both the expressions of these experiences and parts of the factors of change. In a dialectical way, the artworks were both the outputs of the social conditions and the inputs that the cultural changes were based on. Therefore, the historical and universal truth the art bears in these centuries were disclosed as more social and political.

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## A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKE ÖZET

Tezimde, ilk olarak Gadamer'in hermenötüğünün yolunu açan tarihsel şartları, felsefi tartışma ve kırılmaları anlatmaya çalıştım. Kökleri Antik Yunancadan gelen hermenötüğün, yorumlama sanatı olarak modern dönemde nasıl bir hakikat metodu olarak yeniden kavramsallaştırıldığını ve araçsallaştırıldığını, tarihsel gelişmeler ışığında anlattım. 17. Yüzyılda Metafizik tarihinin kırılma noktası sayılabilecek Descartes-Hume-Kant arasındaki tartışmanın, yeni hakikat metotlarının yolunu nasıl açtığını göstermeye çalıştım. Descartes'in hakikatin temel metodu olarak saf akı koyan rasyonalizminin, Hume'un empirist yöntemi tarafından çeliştirilmesinin ardından, Kant'ın epistemolojik metodu içeren yeni bir rasyonalizminin, metafiziği mekanikleştirdiği iddiasının, romantikleri nasıl yeni bir metot bulmaya ittiğini ve modern hermenötiğe yol açtığını gösterdim.

Ruhu olan, Kant'ın saf akı yalnızca bir düşünebilme mekanizmasına indirgeyen metafiziğinden başka bir hakikat metodu; önce Ast tarafından yeniden keşfedildikten sonra, Schleiermacher ve Dilthey gibi isimlerin elinde, sosyal bilimlere özgü bir metot olarak geliştirildi. Fakat her iki filozofun kullandıkları metot, empirist doğa bilimleri metotlarına yapısal olarak benzemekten kaçamadı. Gadamer, bu eleştiri dahilinde kendi hermenötik metodunu geliştirdi. İlk olarak, Geisteswissenschaften olarak tanımladığı sosyal bilimler alanının, kendisine özgün bir hakikati bulma metodu olması gerektiği, hermenötüğün de buna göre yeniden düşünülmesi gerektiğini iddia eden Gadamer, Schleiermacher ve Dilthey'de fazlaca psikolojik olan metodun, sosyal bilimlerin ruhuna özgü tarihsellik özelliğinden mahrum olduğu tespitini yaptı. Sosyal bilimlerin, doğa bilimlerine kıyasla özünün tarihsel olduğu, bu yüzden metodunun da tarihselci olması gerektiği iddiasından hareket eden Gadamer'in bir diğer katkısı da hermenötüğün alanını dini ya da hukuki metinlerden çıkarıp odağına sanatı koymasını oldu. Sosyal bilimlerin metodu kadar konusunun da özgün olması gerektiği iddiasıyla, geliştirdiği tarihselci hermenötik metot ile hakikati sanatta aradı.

Hakikatin sanatta aranmasının nasıl özgün bir yorum olarak anlaşılabilceğini gösterebilmek için, Picasso'nun Guernica tablosunun okuması ve ressamın kendi

hayatının karşılaştırması ile örnek verdim. Sanatçının, kendi tecrübe ettiği toplumsal tarihsel gelişmeleri anlama ve sanatı ile dışa vurma biçiminin, konu, teknik ve ifade şekillerini öne çıkararak açıkladım. Guernica tablosunun, kübist tarzda parçalanmış bir perspektif ve kompozisyonla resmedilmesinin, gerçekçi bir tarza oranla nasıl daha vurucu hale geldiğinin, renk kullanımındaki tercihlerin resmin duygusunu anlatmadaki etkisinin önemini göstererek, basit bir resim okuması üzerinden sanatın nasıl bir hakikat yönteminin konusu olabildiğini örneklendirmek istedim.

Gadamer'in kendi hermenötik metodunu geliştirmesinin temelinde, esinlendiği filozofları ve bu filozofların etkilerini tezimde gösterdim. Kendisi de bir Hegel uzmanı olan Gadamer'in, hakikat hakkındaki bir tartışma ve felsefi araçsallaştırmaya tarihselliği eklemesinin, Hegel'deki tarihsel ruh ile bağını ortaya koydum. Hegel'in, Kant'taki sistem sorununa yönelik olarak ortaya koyduğu, ilk sebebi içermeyen, sistematik olmayan tarihselci yöntemin, Gadamer'in hermenötik yöneme katkısına benzeştiğini gösterdim. Bunun yanında, Gadamer'in aynı zamanda hocalığını yapmış olan Heidegger'den de esinlendiğini, en başta hermenötik yöneme eğilmesinin temellerinde de Heidegger'in kendi felsefesinde hermenötiği varoluşun temeline koyuşunun etkisi olduğunu açıkladım.

Gadamer'in, kendi geliştirdiği hermenötik yöntemde, belli başlı kavramları yeniden düşünerek araçsallaştırdığını açıkladım. Oyun, jest, Erlebnis, Erfahrung ve sağ duyu gibi kavramların, Gadamer hermenötiğinin sanat üzerinden bir hakikat arayışındaki fayda ve felsefi açılımları gösterdim. Tezimde, Erlebnis ve Sensus Communis kavramlarını kullanarak Gadamer hermenötiğinin siyasal açılımında yararlandım. Her iki kavramın da tarihsel kökenlerini ve felsefi yorumlamasını yaparken, sanatçının, sanatı alımlayanın ve toplumun, içinden geçtiği toplumsal değişim ve tarihsel şartların yaşam tecrübesini felsefi düzlemde açıklamak için kullandım.

Erlebnis kavramını yalnızca kişisel ve açıklanmamış bir tecrübe olarak değil; aslında bireyin alımladığı şekliyle tüm dünyası olarak anlaşılması gerektiği iddiasının felsefi temellerini ortaya koydum. İnsan tecrübesinin, yaşadığı toplumsal ve tarihsel gerçeklikler bağlamındaki değişiminin, sanat üzerinden dışa vurumunu sanatçının tecrübesinin somutlanması olarak açıkladım. Dahası, bu sanat eserini üreten değil aynı zamanda alımlayan, tecrübe eden bireylerin de birer toplumsal ve tarihsel varlık olarak

tecrübelerinin toplumsal olanı dönüştürmesi bağlamında da iki taraflı bir etkileşim içerisinde tarihsel hakikati oluşturduğuna işaret ettim.

Erlebnis dışında yararlandığım diğer kavram Sensus Communis kavramı oldu. Bu kavramın da Antik Yunan'dan bu yana farklı felsefi gelenekler için farklı biçimlerde kullanılıp yorumlandığına işaret ettim. Örneğin, başlangıçta Antik Yunan'da rasyonel olanın zıttı olarak görülen bu kavramın, Roma medeniyetinde, toplum ve birlikte yaşam sevgisinin açığa çıktığı bir kavram olduğunu açıkladım. Anti felsefi bir yerden, tarihsel ve sosyal düşünmeyi açıklayan bir yere gelişinde, Gadamer'in işaret ettiği gibi Vico'nun da katkılarını ekledim. Vico'nun alımladığı şekilde, olumlu bir kavram olarak Sensus Communis'i, sanat akımlarının doğduğu tarihsel şartların, bu şartların düşünme biçimlerimizi, ideolojileri ve en nihayetinde sanatı nasıl şekillendirdiğini ortaya koydum. Sanat eserlerinin, bu toplumsal duyunun bir dışı vurumu olarak görülebilecek bir ifade biçimi olarak hem toplumsal hakikati açığa çıkarmasının hem de yine bu duyuya farklı bir katkı olarak nasıl zenginleştirdiğini açıkladım.

Son olarak, kavramsallaştırma kısmında Heidegger'de Sensus Communis'in nasıl kavramsallaştırıldığını, filozofun kendi pasajları üzerinden açıkladım. Heidegger'in, sanatın şeylerin şeyliklerini gösterebilme yetisinin onu başka herhangi bir şeyden ayırışının ardındaki toplumsal, tarihsel duyuya işaret ettim. Heidegger'in hakikatin açılması olarak tanımladığı sanat eseri ile sanat eserinin öznesi olan şeyler arasındaki metafizik farkın, sanatın etrafımızdaki dünyaya dair yarattığı farkındalık ve hakikat çabası olduğunu gösterdim.

Gadamer hermenötiğinin kavram setlerinin açıklaması ve yorumlamasının ardından, tezimde kullandığım ilk sanat akımı olan 17. Yüzyıl Vanitas natürmort resminin kökenlerini, 17. Yüzyıl Hollanda'sını ve genel olarak o dönem ve coğrafyada resmin durumunu anlattım. Natürmort resmin tanım gereği, etrafımızdaki canlı ve cansız şeylerin resmedilmesi olduğunu ortaya koydum. Bu biçimin, felsefi katkısının, örneğin Heidegger'deki el-altında-varolan kavramını nasıl zenginleştirebileceğine ilişkin de bir tartışma açtım. Varlığının farkında olduğumuz ancak üzerine düşünmediğimiz, yorumlamadığımız bu yüzden de varoluşunu bize açmayan şeylerin resmin öznesi olduğu takdirde nasıl yeniden düşünülebileceğini, bize ve şeylere dair nasıl bir varlık alanı açtığına dair bir tartışma yürüttüm.

Natürmort resmin bilinen ilk örneklerinin, Pompeii'deki duvar resimleri olduğunu örneklerle ortaya koydum. Bu duvar resimlerinin, genelde evlerin duvarlarında, ev sahibinin statüsünü gösteren resimler olarak nasıl antik çağda dahi toplumsal bir işlev yerine getirdiğini gösterdim. Bunun yanında bu resimlerin trompe l'oeil denilen göz yanıltması amacıyla kullanılmasının, basit bir resim tecrübesine olan katkısına örnek verdim.

Natürmort resmin, 17. Yüzyıl Hollanda'sına gelene kadar, İtalyan ve Alman rönesans resmindeki biçimlerine de değindim. Bu örneklerde Natürmort resmin, dönemin şaşasını ve bereketini ifade eden, özellikle bereketli bir biçimde resmedilen gıdalar, meyveler ve içecekler kompozisyonu olarak kullanılmasının, farklı coğrafyalarda, aynı dönemlerdeki toplumsal duyu açısından farklarını ortaya koydum. Ardından, 17. Yüzyıl Hollanda'sının özgün tarihsel koşullarını açıkladım.

17. Yüzyıl'da Hollanda'nın, İspanyol Krallığına karşı seksen yıl savaşı sonucunda bağımsızlığını kazanmış olmasının yarattığı atmosferden bahsettim. On yıllar süren milliyetçi ayaklanmaların ardından egemenliğine resmen kavuşan Hollanda'da oluşan ulusal birlikteliği ve bu egemenliğin getirdiği refah seviyesindeki değişimi gösterdim. Coğrafi keşifler sonucu uzun yıllardır farklı kıtalardan ülkeye ithal edilen yeni, özgün ürünlerin, toplumu ve refah seviyesini nasıl değiştirdiğinin, kazanılan egemenliğin bu refah seviyesini, toplumsal bilinci ve değişimleri nasıl etkilediğini açıkladım. Egemenlik ve milli bilinç meselesinin, aynı zamanda mezhepsel ayırım ve çatışmalarla ilgisini gösterdim. Hollanda'nın Protestanlığı yeni benimsemiş bir ülke olarak, Katolik İspanyol Krallığından egemenliğini kazanmasının ardındaki mezhepsel çatışma ve gerilimleri örneklerle gösterdim. Özellikle bu süreçte Hollanda isyanları sırasında ortaya çıkan İkonoklazm eylemlerinin, Katolik kilise ve yapılarının, simgelerinin yıkılmasının, Hollanda'nın bağımsızlık mücadelesi ile paralellliğini gösterdim. İkonoklazmın bağımsızlık sürecindeki yerinin, toplumsal sembol ve estetiğinde ileri dönemlerdeki etkilerini de farklı bölümlerde açıkladım.

Protestanlığın Kalvinizm yorumunun yaygın olduğu Hollanda'da, bağımsızlık sonrası seküler liberaller ve muhafazakar Kalvinistler arasında yaşanan çatışmaların, 17. Yüzyıl Hollanda resminin ortaya çıktığı atmosfer konusunda belirleyici olduğunu gösterdim. Yeni ortaya çıkan modern Hollanda toplumu ve aslında bu toplumun dini

olan Kalvinist Protestanlığın arasında ortaya çıkan çatışmaya ışık tuttum. Yeni kazanılan egemenlik, coğrafi keşiflerden ve sömürge kolonilerinden gelen zenginlik ile yeni şehirlerin ve şehirli yaşamının girdiği dönüşümün, dinsel bir dünya anlatısı ile nasıl ters düştüğünü gösterdim. Bu çelişkinin de yer yer Hollanda resminin ifade ettiği toplumsal gerçeklik üzerindeki etkisini göstermeye çalıştım. Bu çelişkileri resimler ve ressamlar üzerinden derinleştirmeden önce, Kalvinist Hollanda'da ressamların yaşadığı temel sorun ve farklılıklara değindim.

Rönesans resmine damga vuran patron sisteminin, ressamların sipariş üzerine resim yaparak geçindiği bir biçim olarak Hollanda'da neden sona erdiğini açıkladım. Orta çağ ve Rönesans Güney Avrupa'sında kiliselerin toplumun en yetkin kurumu olarak ressamlarla sipariş usulü ilişki kurduğunu, birçok ünlü resmin bu siparişin eseri olduğunu gösterdim. Fakat 17. Yüzyıl Hollanda'sında Kalvinist Protestanlığın, ikonoklazm ile dinsel figürlere ve resmedişlere duyulan düşmanlığın, böyle bir kilise-ressam, patron-sipariş ilişkisini dışladığını açıkladım. Resimlerde çoğu Biblia Paperum'a dayanan dini figür, tasfir ve hikayeletirmelerin reddedildiği bir çağda da sipariş üzeri resimlerin yalnızca zengin kişilerin portreleri üzerinden sınırlı bir talep ve arz oluşturması da ressamları yeni bir ekonomik yönetime itti. Ressamlar sergiler açarak, resimlerini bir kuruma veya zengine değil, şehrin sakinlerine satmaya başladılar. Bu yöntem değişimi de resmin konusunda, tekniğinde ve ifadesinde yeni biçimler oluşturdu. Doğan yeni rekabet dünyası, ressamları farklı deneylere yönlendirdi. Bunun yanında resmin konusu da hem siyasal hem de ekonomik gerekçelerle dini olandan dünyevi olana evrildi. Hollanda'da Natürmort resme 17. Yüzyılda doğan ilgide dolayısıyla hem ikonoklazm gibi siyasal-dinsel gelişmeler, hem de patron kilise eksikliği gibi ekonomik gelişmeler etkili oldu.

Bu koşullarda yaratılan Hollanda Natürmort resminde, ölüm, ölümlülük, sonluluk gibi kavramlar öne çıktı. Güney ve Batı Avrupa'daki örneklerinde dünyevi yaşam ve nesnelere olumlu nitelemelerinin yanında, Hollanda Natürmordundaki karamsar havanın temelinde de bahsettiğim siyasal ve toplumsal gelişmeler etkili oldu. Özellikle yeni açılan Protestan teoloji okulları, bu bölgelerde yetişen ressamların hayat görüşleri ve yaşadıkları toplumları yorumlamalarında ciddi etkiye sahipti. Bir yandan artan refah seviyesi, gündelik hayata eklenen yeni teknoloji ve ithalat ile dünyevi bir yaşam

tarzının şehirlerde öne çıkması, yeni benimsenen Kalvinist Protestanlığın dinsel anlayışı ile çelişki halindeydi. Bu çelişki, Hollanda Natürmordunda kendisini dünyevi nesnelerin ölümlülük imgeleri ile resmedilmesiyle dışa vurulmuş oldu. Bir yandan resimlerin öznesi modern anlamda şekillenen şehirlerin ve şehrli insanların etrafındaki dünya olurken, bir yandan bu dünyaya dair bir tartışma, herhangi bir soyut imge kullanılmadan yapılmıştı.

İtalyan ve Alman rönesansının aksine, dinsel imgelerden kaçınılan resimlerde, dünyevi nesnelerin ölüm ve sonlulukla nitelenmesi, basit, gündelik sembollerle başarılmıştı. Çürüyen meyveler, kullanılmış bardak-tabaklar, yarısı yenmiş yiyecekler, ışığı zayıf yanan mumlar ve kafa tası imgelemleri, Hollanda Natürmordunda ölümlülüğün, geçiciliğın ve sonluluğın simgesi oldu.

Tezimde, bu sembolleştirmenin kaynağı olan Memento Mori ve Vanitas tarzından da bahsettim. Ölüm andacı olarak nitelendirilebilecek Memento Mori imgelerinin, özellikle Avrupa Gotik resminde çokça bulunduğunu ifade ettim. Özellikle İspanyol Gotik resminde sıkça karşılaşılan kafatası imgesinin resmedilişi ile 17. Yüzyıl Hollanda Natürmordundaki Vanitas imgeleri arasındaki farkı açıklayarak, zamanın ruhunu vurgulamaya çalıştım. Kafatası imgeleminin birçok örnekte yerini çürüme, bitme, yenme gibi basit, gündelik hayattan şeylere dair değişimlere yerini bırakmasının, kafatası kullanılan resimlerde bu imgenin Gotik resimdeki merkezi yerinin ortadan kalkmasının, dönem Hollanda'sının gündelik dünyevi yaşamının resmedilmesini güçlendiren, açığa vuran bir tercih olduğunu açıkladım. Kafataslarının da tezimde verdiğim örneklerde görüldüğü gibi bir bardak, elma ya da pasta gibi masa kompozisyonundaki sıradan bir nesneye dönüşümü, ölümün de nihilist bir vurgu yerine hayatın sıradan bir parçası olarak anlatımında yarattığı gücü belirttim. Bu anlamda, Hollanda Vanitas Natürmordunun, aslında ilk başta anlaşılacağı gibi muhafazakar bir resim olmadığını, konusunun dünyevi hayatı yok saymak değil, ona ölümü de ekleyen bir senteze dönüştüğünü gösterdim.

Aynı zamanda, masa kompozisyonlarının neredeyse her örnekte başvurulduğu resimlerde, insan izinin hep öne çıktığı ancak asla bir özne olarak bulunmadığını da gösterdim. Bu sayede hem aslında insan tecrübesi ve gördüğü dünya resmediliyor, hem de insanın eksikliği vurgulanarak ölüm ve sonluluk pekiştiriliyor yorumunu yaptım.

Resmin nesnelindeki kesintiye uğramışlık, yarıda bırakılmış hissini (çürümeye terk edilmiş meyve ve yiyecekler, yarısı bitmiş içecekler, dağınık bırakılmış masalar) bireyin kendi dünyasının kendisi hariç resmedilmesiyle de güçlendirilerek, sonluluk vurgusunun artırıldığı bir imge ortaya çıkardığını ifade ettim.

Fakat tüm ölüm ve sonluluk imgelerinin, kesintiye uğrama hissiyatının, loş ışıklandırma ve buna uygun renklendirmeyle de birleşerek, son derece dünyevi bir dünyayı anlattığını da ortaya koyarak özgün bir yorumda bulundum. Sanatçının, toplumsal duyuyu, yaşadığı, içinden geçtiği tarihsel ve siyasal koşulları tecrübe edişinin dışı vurumunda, sanatı ile ortaya çıkardığı hakikatin aslında doğrudan bir dünyevi hayatın eleştirisi değil, bu hayatın düşünülüş biçimine de bir katkı olduğunu iddia ettim. Ölüm imgesinin, Caravaggio'nun realist imgelemlerinde dahi başvurduğu araçlardan kaçınılarak, tamamen dünyevi biçimlerde ifade edilmiş olmasının, bu dünyaya dinsel bir dokunuş değil, ölüme dünyevi bir dokunuş yarattığının, ölümün dünyevi bir biçimini imgeleştirdiğini açıkladım. Bu imgelem ile yalnızca egzotik gıdalar, lüks bardak çanaklar ve teknolojik aletler ile imgeleştirilen dünyevi, sonlu hayatın artık bir ölüm yani son imgesine de sahip olarak tamamlandığını ifade ettim. Ressamın katkısı, dini resimlerde olan, dünyanın doğrudan resimleştirilişinde bulunmayan doğal bir ölüm-son imgesinin kendini açığa çıkarmasıyla, 17. Yüzyıl Hollanda'sının şehirli hayatının düşünsel dünyasına da bir katkı olduğunu ifade ettim. Böylece, ölüm yalnızca bir dini uyarı olarak değil, dünyevi hayatımızın bir parçası olarak doğal ve estetik şekilde 17. Yüzyıl Hollandalısının hayatına yerleşmiş oldu. Bu ifade, Sensus Communis ile düşünüldüğünde toplumsal duyudan hem yararlanan hem de ona katkı yapan bir resim olarak Hollanda Natürmordunu yeniden düşünmeye yaradığı gibi, Erlebnis'i, 17. Yüzyıl Hollandalının tecrübe ettiği şekliyle hayatının doğrudan ve felsefi bir ifadesine dönüşmüş oldu. Bu anlamıyla, 17. Yüzyıl Hollanda Natürmort resminin taşıdığı tarihsel hakikat hem dönemin siyasal, tarihsel ve toplumsal gerçekliğine hem de bireyin tecrübe ettiği dünyaya dair olduğu gibi, aynı zamanda bir düşünsel katkı olarak da ele alınması gerektiği iddiasında bulundum.

Ardından ikinci örneğime geçmeden, arada geçen sürede farklı resim akımlarında yaşanan teknik değişimleri ve akımları da kısaca özetleyerek, özellikle Avrupa'da yaşanan siyasal ve toplumsal gelişmelerin resimdeki ifadelerini de ortaya çıkarmak



istedim. Özellikle Empresyonist resmin, öznesini modern Avrupa şehirlerinin kalabalık insan manzaralarına çevirmelerinin, sanatçının etrafında değişen dünyayı ifade ederken ortaya çıkan yönelimini vurguladım. Bunun yanında Empresyonist resimle başlayan mükemmel, matematiksel perspektiften ve gözden kaçışı, ışığın etkisiyle eksik, ışıldayarak gören bir gözden resmedilmenin ardındaki amacı açıkladım. Değişen teknikle birlikte Rönesans'ta mükemmelleşen matematiksel gözün yerini, kalabalık ve hareketli yeni bir yaşam içerisinde, şehrin artan ışıklarından etrafı onun izin verdiği ölçüde gören, hatta bu ışıkları ve göz yanılısalarını da tecrübenin dışı vurumu olarak ifade eden resim yöntemi, Empresyonizmle birlikte modern resmin içerisine yerleşti. Ardından yalnızca gözde değil, perspektifte de farklı deneyler yapılması, resim nesnelere birbirinden ayrı perspektiflerle resmedilmesi, bu şekilde resmin doğayı, dünyayı resmetmesi değil de resim olduğunun bilinciyle, resim nesnesi olarak ele alınması bir başka kritik gelişme oldu. Önce göz, ardından nesnedeki bozulmayı da Kübist resimle birlikte perspektifte bozulmayı izlediğini göstererek, arkasındaki toplumsal değişim ve sebepleri ortaya çıkardım. Kübist resimde perspektifin parçalanması ve empresyonizmden beri gelen karikatürize resim nesnesinin geometrik şekillerle resmedilmesinin, değişmekte olan dünyaya dair bir ifade olduğunu açıkladım. Sürekli hareket halinde olan insanın, etrafındaki hiçbir nesneyi ve manzarayı bir bütünsel form halinde tecrübe edememesinin yarattığı rahatsız hissin, Kübist resimde kendisini dışı vurduğunu, mekanikleşen dünyanın bu bütünlüğünü kaybeden formun geometrik biçimlerde kendisini gösterdiğini ifade ettim.

20. yüzyıl başında ortaya çıkan Kübizm, Nonfigüratif resim, Fütürizm ve Konstrüktivizm gibi akımların, bu hızlanan gündelik yaşamı, yeni teknolojik gelişmeleri ve mekanikleşmeyi resimde yeni deneylerle aktarma biçimleri olarak ortaya çıkardığını gösterdim. Fütürizm genel olarak tamamiyle mekanik bir dünyayı resmederken, Konstrüktivizm bunun bir alt akımı olarak, mekanikleşmiş figürlerle ortaya çıkan bir dünya hayalini ifade ediyor. Kübizm, yaşadığımız dünyanın, artık tek bir kesitte algılanabilmesinin, doğal, fiziksel formlarla görülebilmesinin imkansızlığına dair bir iddiada bulunurken, Nonfigüratif resim ise resim nesnesinden gözlemediğimiz dünyayı tamamen çıkarıyor.

Nonfigüratif resme dair bir örnek olarak, Vasili Kandinsky'nin sanatını ve düşüncelerini de teze ekledim. Kandinsky, yaşadığı dünyaya, yaşanan toplumsal, teknik ve siyasal gelişmelere karşı reaksiyon vererek, Nonfigüratif resmi, bu dünyadan gözünü çekmek olarak görüyor, insanın ruhani dünyaya yeniden dönüşü için figüratif olmayan resme dönüyor. Kandinsky'nin kendi kitabında da bunu nasıl açıkladığını teze ekleyerek, özellikle Nietzsche gibi modernizme reaksiyon veren filozoflardan yararlanmış olmasını da not düştim.

Fakat benim tezimde ikinci örnek olarak kullandığım Kazimir Maleviç'in Süpermatizm akımı, Nonfigüratif resmi, Kandinsky'den tamamıyla zıt sebeplerle benimsiyor. Resmin konusunun, yalnızca yaşadığımız dünya değil, bu dünyanın özü, onu harekete geçirenleri olan hız, enerji gibi kavramları resmetmek gerektiğini, empirik olarak gözlemlediğimiz dünyanın, yaşamımızın hakikatini gölgelediğini iddia eden, neredeyse Platoncu bir tezden hareketle, hızı, şiddeti, gücü, enerjiyi soyut olarak ifade eden resimler yapıyordu. Burada, Platon, Gadamer ve Maleviç arasında bir diyalog kurarak, mimesis kavramının Gadamerci anlamda yeniden düşünülmesi gerektiğini Maleviç üzerinden anlatmak istedim. Platon, tezde de bahsettiğim üzere resmi hakikatin en düşük formu olarak, ideal ve fiziksel dünyadan sonraki hal olarak belirlemişti. Mimesis, idealin de değil idealin mükemmel olmayan görüntüsü olan fiziksel dünyanın tıpatıp olamayacak bir taklidi idi. Sanata yönelik bu negatif metafizik yönelimi, Gadamer tersine çevirmiş, sanatın hakikatin mimesisi olarak, fiziksel dünyanın değil, hakikatimizin mimesisi olarak anlamıştı. Hollanda natürmordunda örneğin taklit edilen meyveler ya da tabaklar değil, 17. Yüzyıl Hollanda'sının hakikatiydi. Maleviç de kendi yaşadığı dünyanın, fiziksel olanın gölgesinden çıkarıldığı, neredeyse Platon'cu bir mağaradan çıkışı işaret ederken, aynı zamanda Gadamer'in siyasal, tarihsel hakikatin mimesisine örnek oluşturuyordu. Ben tezimde ikinci bir akım olarak Maleviç'in Süpermatizm akımını, dönemin teknolojik, siyasal ve toplumsal hayatının hem bireysel hem toplumsal bir tecrübe olarak dışa vurumunda ortaya çıkan bir hakikat yöntemine örnek olarak aldım. Sürekli olarak değişimde olan, fiziksel gelişmelerin insan hayatını doğrudan etkilediği, artık yalnızca yürüyen ve yüzen değil aynı zamanda uçan bir canlı olarak insanın yaşadığı dünya ile hem kurduğu Erlebnis ilişkisinin, hem de teknolojiye dair olumlu ve olumsuz reaksiyonlardan oluşan toplumsal duyunun dışa vurumu olarak sanat, aynı zamanda

bu toplumsal duyuya ve tecrübeye de eser olarak katkı yapıyordu. Hayatımızdaki ters yüz oluş, resimde de göz, perspektif ve nesnenin alt üst oluşuyla imgelerini soyut olanda buluyor, hem de insan tecrübesinin devamlı olarak yeniden düşünülmesine katkı sağlıyordu. Bir örnek olarak; ünlü Siyah Kare ile başlayan Süpermatizm, geometrik formların kendilerinin resmin nesnesine dönüşmesiyle, yaşadığımız dünyayı doğrudan bir soyutlama olarak algılanmasına olanak veriyordu. Bu sayede de hem Maleviç'in hem de diğer erken 20. Yüzyıl sanatçılarının, takipsiz bir hızla akan ve değişen, heterojen bir hayata katkısını göstermek istedim.

Erken 20. Yüzyıl Avrupa'sını anlatırken, Simmel ve Engels'in yazılarından yararlandım. Bu sayede hem gündelik yaşantının artık kontrolü ekonomik araçlarda ve kentin iç mekanizmalarında olan bir hız ve yönle akmasını, bunun insanların ruh halinde yarattığı karmaşaları, hem de büyüyen bir nüfus olarak işçi sınıfının, kent ve akış karakterinde yarattığı değişimi aktardım. Kitlese olarak işçi sınıfının kentlerin yeni öznesi olarak girişi yalnızca 17. Yüzyıla kıyasla bir heterojenlik yaratmadığını, aynı zamanda gündelik olarak yaşadıkları trajedilerin de gündelik hayatın algılanma ve tecrübe edilme şeklinin, hayatın kendisine dair duygulanımları nasıl değiştirdiğini ifade etmek istedim. Resimde 20. Yüzyılın devamında farklı akımlarla da kendini gösterecek olan karikatürleştirme, aslında temelde bu trajedilerin vurucu duygu ifadeleri olarak kendisini göstermesinden yola çıkmıştı. Geometrik, bozulmuş, abartılı resmedilmiş formlara geçişin temelinde bu sınıfsal trajedilerin yattığını da göstermek istedim. Dolayısıyla erken 20. Yüzyıl Avangart resminin bir kümülatif olarak Empresyonizmden beri bozularak değişen tekniğin ve resmin öznelinin, Süpermatizm akımında nasıl bir reddedişle çağın sahiplenilişine dönüştüğünü açıkladım. Toplumsal duyunun değişime ve toplumsal, siyasal gelişmelere verdiği heterojen reaksiyonların, kişinin kalabalık metropollerde yaşadığı hayatı tecrübe edişinin sanatsal dışı vurumundaki radikalliğin, zamanın ruhu ile paralellliğini göstermek istedim. Devrimler çağı da denebilecek erken 20. Yüzyılın, sanatta da reddedişler, deneyimler ve devrimlerle ilerlemesinin, hem devrimlerden hem devrimlere bir etki olarak görülmesi gerektiğini açıkladım. Gadamer hermenötiğinin siyasal bir açılımının, 17. Yüzyıl Hollanda'sında olduğu gibi 20. Yüzyıl Avrupa metropollerinde de böyle bir tarihsel, toplumsal hakikati açığa vurduğunu bu incelemeyle göstermek istedim.

Aynı zamanda, yeniden Heidegger'in el-altında-varolan kavramı ile bu kez etrafımızdaki şeylerin yaşadığı değişimler üzerinden deęiş şeylerin tamamen reddedilişı ve soyutlanarak düşünülmesi ile yeni bir tecrübenin, etrafımızı düşünmemize yeni bir katkı oluşturduęunu da göstermek istedim.

Gadamer'in Erlebnis ve Sensus Communis kavramlarını, 17. Yüzyıl Hollanda Natürmordu ve 20. Yüzyıl Avangart resminin hermenötik bir metotla incelenmesinde kullandım. Dönem tarihlerinin, siyasal ve toplumsal gelişmelerin incelenmesinde, sanat eserlerinde saklı olan tarihsel hakikatlerin anlaşılabilmesine dair bir araştırma ortaya çıkardım. Resimlerin okunmasından da tarihsel, siyasal ve felsefi kaygılarla yararlandım. Bu anlamda, resim okumalarında özgün olmamakla birlikte, okumanın ortaya çıkardığı doneleri felsefi bir bakışla ele aldım.

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Political Disclosure of Gadamer Hermeneutics by Comparison with Painting Genres

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