

A RESEARCH ON THE POSSIBILITY OF
DISTINGUISHING KITSCH AND ART
USING PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis tries to distinguish kitsch and art with the help of philosophical hermeneutics by reading it in the light of Derrida's interpretation of *Hamlet* in *Specters of Marx*. It defines kitsch as experience in order to go beyond both of the two main approaches, namely, the one that sees kitsch as an object and the one that reduces it to the behaviour of the subject. It tries to show that kitsch is not just an aesthetic problem, but also, a political one.

Keywords: Kitsch, Art, Philosophical Hermeneutics, Avant-garde, Specter.

ÖZ

FELSEFİ HERMENEUTİĞİ KULLANARAK KITSCH'İ VE SANATI BİRBİRİNDEN AYIRMANIN OLANAKLILIĞI ÜSTÜNE BİR ARAŞTIRMA

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Bu tez, Derrida'nın *Marx'ın Hayaletleri* adlı kitabındaki *Hamlet* yorumu ışığında okuduğu felsefi hermeneutikten yardım alarak kitsch'i ve sanatı birbirinden ayırmayı denemektedir. Hem, kitsch'i nesne olarak gören, hem de onu öznenin davranışına indirgeyen temel yaklaşımların ikisinin de ötesine geçebilmek için kitsch'i deneyim olarak tanımlar. Kitsch'in yalnızca estetik bir problem değil, aynı zamanda politik bir problem olduğunu göstermeye çalışır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kitsch, Sanat, Felsefi Hermeneutik, Avangard, Hayalet.

To the Memory of My Mother

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This research is on one of the things that make our time “out of joint¹.” It is something dangerous not because it attacks us, but because it is so sweet that it makes us surrender to it. What makes it more dangerous is that we never see it as a danger. How can we do? How can we suspect of a danger in a picture of a baby smiling joyfully? Is not the innocence one of the most valuable things in the world? Is not it taught all of us in this way?

It is true that innocence is valuable, but not only from an ethical perspective, but also from an economic one. Because, innocence sells. But of course, it can not be sold like ordinary merchandise. It has to be packed differently: in a way that when someone touches it, he/she will have to buy it. It has to be so charming and if it is, we buy it without any feeling of being deceived and even with a feeling of an increase in our self-belief. We feel and think that we have, once again, showed –to ourselves but also and more importantly to others- our sensibility. In fact, what we buy is not the object itself, but this feeling or this mode that emerges in our relation with that object. And this is the experience of kitsch.

To detect these kind of kitsch is a minor aim of this research. We will certainly learn a lot from these. But our research is mainly on kitsch that claims

¹ Hamlet. Act I. Scene 5.

that it is art, and on kitsch that uses/consumes artistic inventions for its own purposes, which are mainly to earn over us and/or to have a domination on us.

Kitsch has various strategies to reach these purposes. One of them is approval. Unlike art, kitsch is never transformative. It tries to please us by approving us for being what we are, so that, it makes us believe that we do not need any change. Unlike art, it never causes questioning. There is, in fact, no question in kitsch, but only a definite answer, which is generally a cliché. With these clichés, this toady, which also means that it is a liar, takes us into a new world where effort is meaningless. There, everything is wanted to happen at once. No one has the intention and the patience to get into a “dialogue.” In that world, sloth is a god. So, kitsch is a place to escape from questions and effort. Here we will have to ask this question: why do we want to escape from them? In our research, following this question, we will find that kitsch is a much more political and ideological concept than it is seen. Its relation with the mass is another political and ideological dimension of it. As we agree with Gadamer’s opinion that all interpretation is a creation, which necessitates effort, we can say that, in the world of kitsch, there is no interpretation, or a single interpretation is accepted by/imposed to everyone. This is because, the world of kitsch is based on consumption/mass-consumption, not creation. Kitsch sells art to the mass; but of course, only after changing it into merchandise. In our research, we will see that kitsch and mass are so merged into each other that one can not survive without the other.

We want to find a way to differentiate art and this kind of kitsch, and for that purpose, we will get help from philosophical hermeneutics, which, we believe, will give us the necessary insight and possibility.

In order to use Gadamer's philosophy of art, first of all, we need to explain its basis, its roots. This is what we will try to do in chapter 2. We will try to make an analysis of the philosophers, namely Kant, Schiller and Heidegger, who have a main effect on Gadamer's construction of his philosophy, only at a length that is necessary for our research.

In the following two chapters, we will try to explain the basic notions of philosophical hermeneutics. While doing that, we will try to make a different reading, namely, reading Gadamer with the help of Derrida's reading of *Hamlet* in *Specters of Marx*, which, we think and hope, will make our explanations more easily and effectively understood.

In the fifth chapter, we will deal with some of the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde movements that are, for us, mostly related to our research. We will examine Dada in order to show that even such a radical movement could be swallowed by what it had opposed to. Then we will examine Surrealism as its trust in unconscious could sometimes lead it to the realm of kitsch; and Pop Art, to show the dangers of using kitsch as an element. Lastly we will deal with Fluxus in order to find a way to resist to its challenge to philosophical hermeneutics.

In the next chapter, we will examine kitsch. We will define it as an experience so that we will be able to get beyond the approach that sees kitsch as an object and the approach that sees it as behaviour of a subject. Then we will try

to show the differences between the experience of art and the experience of kitsch with the help of the notions of philosophical hermeneutics.

In conclusion we will have to face with the fact that kitsch is not destroyable as it is immanent in our time's "out of joint"ness and as a complete refusal of kitsch is itself already kitschified. However, we will try to find a way to stop its spread, and even, to force it to regress.

CHAPTER 2

SETTING OUT: KANT, SCHILLER AND HEIDEGGER

2.1 Kant

In this part, we will not try to make a complete analysis of the aesthetic theory of Kant, but try to give a brief one that will let us understand the basic points in Gadamer's dialogue with Kant: namely, what he inherits from Kant, and why he criticises him.

Kant starts to *Critique of Judgment* with an analysis of taste. For Kant, taste is "the ability to judge the beautiful." (38, pp. 43) Here, on the first page, a question arises: On what basis do we call something beautiful? Kant answers in this way:

[A] judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment and so is not a logical judgment but an aesthetic one, by which we mean a judgment whose determining basis cannot but be other than *subjective*. (38, pp. 44)

This is where Gadamer's first criticism comes. Gadamer claims that, Kant "denies taste any significance as knowledge" (23, pp. 43) and reduces it to a feeling of pleasure so that he makes it impossible to claim that there is truth also in beauty.

Kant's critique goes on with a differentiation of the liking that determines the judgment of taste from the liking for the agreeable and from the liking of the good. While both the agreeable (by producing an inclination) and the good² is

² Good it is "the object of the will" and is related to "the concept of a purpose". (38, 52)

“connected to interest”, “the liking involved in taste for beautiful is disinterested” (“devoid of all interest”) (38, 52) and “merely contemplative”. While the agreeable is related to sense³ and the good is related to reason, taste is completely free.

Kant says that we are willing to accept that the agreeable can be different from person to person, as there is no basis for its universality, and that we claim universality for something we call good, as it “depend[s] on concepts”. However, judgment of taste is something that claims universality without “depending on any concepts.” For Kant, when we call something beautiful, we want the approval of everyone depending on this, as he names it, “subjective universality”. Kant’s goes further to construct his terminology: as he postulates “subjective universality”, he also postulates “purposiveness without a purpose” (38, 65).

[W]e do call objects, states of mind, or acts purposive even if their possibility does not necessarily presuppose the presentation of purpose; we do this merely because we can explain and grasp them only if we assume that they are based on a causality (that operates) according to a purposes. (38, 65)

So, the judgment of taste is defined in accordance with the concept of purpose as “the subjective purposiveness in the presentation of an object, without any purpose ... and hence the mere form of purposiveness” (38, 66). And purposiveness is “the causality that a concept has with regard to its object” for Kant. Although concepts do not work in the judgment of taste, it still “does have a causality in it, namely to keep (us in) the state of (having) the presentation itself, and (to keep) the cognitive powers engaged (in their occupation) without

³ “[A]greeable is what the senses like in sensation.” (38, 47)

any further claim” (38, 68). This is very similar to Gadamer’s understanding of the work of art. For him, an artwork only points to itself, we “linger over” it and experience an increase in being. And for Kant “ we linger in our contemplation of the beautiful, because this contemplation reinforces and reproduces itself” (38, 68). This similarity collapses in these philosophers’ understanding of the relation between beauty and truth. While Kant sees no relation between them⁴, Gadamer, following Heidegger, defends that beauty is one of the appearances of truth.

We have seen that Kant is insistent on the interest-free character of judgment of taste. This makes him also say that “any taste remains barbaric if its liking requires ... charms and emotions be mingled in, let alone if this makes the standards of its approval” (38, 69). This sentence is important for our investigation of kitsch, as kitsch has both of these qualities that Kant throws out of the boundaries of the pure judgment of taste, which can only be related to “the purposiveness of the form” (38, 69). However Kant accepts that “charms may be added to beauty as a supplement” as long as “they do not interfere with the beautiful form”. But if “they draw the attention to themselves”, they “do actually impair the judgment of taste” (38, 71).

Kant’s another opinion that Gadamer also agrees is that “there can be no objective rule of taste, no rule of taste that determines by concepts what is beautiful” (38, 79). However it does not mean that there is no principle and that everyone can claim anything to be beautiful. There is a “subjective principle, which determines only by feeling rather than concepts, though nonetheless with universal validity, what is liked or disliked” (38, 87). This is “common sense”,

⁴ “[A]n aesthetic judgment is unique in kind and provides absolutely no cognition (not even a

but not in the meaning of the common understanding (*sensus communis logicus*) which “judges by concepts” - even though they are generally obscure ones. Kant’s common sense (*sensus communis aestheticus*) merely depends on feeling. Without this “presupposition of such a common sense”, no judgment of taste can be made (38, 87). Gadamer opposes Kant’s understanding of *sensus communis*. He says that Kant “reduces *sensus communis* to a subjective principle. In taste nothing is known of the objects judged to be beautiful, but it is stated only that there is a feeling of pleasure connected with them a priori in the subjective consciousness” (23, 43). Gadamer uses the concept of *tradition*⁵ instead of common sense in order to overcome this subjectivity.

Kant defines enlightenment as “liberation from prejudices” (38, 161). Gadamer refuses this idea, as for him, there would be no understanding possible if we had had no prejudices at all. He names this hatred of Enlightenment about prejudices as *prejudice about prejudices*⁶.

Kant’s thoughts about genius are another target of Gadamer’s criticisms. Kant defines genius as “the innate mental predisposition through which nature gives rule to art” (38, 174). For him “fine arts must be necessarily considered arts of genius” (38, 175). He explains the reason of this idea accordingly:

[T]he concept of fine art does not permit a judgment about the beauty of its product to be derived from any rule whatsoever that has a concept as its determining basis. ... Since, however a product can never be called art unless it is preceded by a rule, it must be nature in the subject ... that gives the rule to art; in other words, fine art is possible only as the product of genius. (38, 175)

confused one) of the object; only a logical judgment does that.” (38, 75)

⁵ See part 4.1.

⁶ See part 4.1.

So, genius, which is “a talent for art, not for science” (38, 186), produces following no rule except the rule of the nature. However, even the genius himself/herself is unable to explain or formulate this rule, because even he/she does not know how he/she has done his/her work. Art can not be taught, consequently, can not be learned.

In Gadamer’s opinion, Kant unjustly narrows “the concept of genius to artistic creation” (23, 54) only. He thinks that, “wherever there is *inventio*, where something is due to inspiration and not to methodical calculation- the important thing is ingenium, genius” (23, 54). Moreover, Gadamer criticizes Kant’s giving priority to nature. “We must be able to regard art as if it were nature. Through genius, nature gives art its rules. In all this phrases the concept of nature is the uncontested criterion” (23, 55). For Gadamer, if the priority should be given to one of them, it would be art.

2.2 Schiller

Our examination of Schiller is only limited with Gadamer’s criticism of aesthetic consciousness and the autonomy of art⁷.

Gadamer condemns the tendency ... to make the realm of art an autonomous, idealized sphere purged of the reality of artwork’s “original context of life”. He terms this sovereign utopia of artistic sublimation the “aesthetic consciousness.” Its adherents are inevitably subject to disappointment when they return to quotidian existence from the world of art because their

⁷ Casey Haskins disagrees with the idea that Kant is an autonomist. For him “ Kant thinks of a work of art as a kind of thing which is valuable both for what it does and what it is. He thinks ... that a work of art does a number of things. It provides a motive for communication and so promotes a feeling of moral community within society. It provides a quasi-cognitive insights into aspects of human existence which are beyond the means of ordinary discursive thought. (33, 51) Because of these reasons, Haskins thinks that Critique of judgment is of the “instrumental autonomist type.” (33, 43) But even though we accept that Kant is an instrumental autonomist, it does not change the fact that Kant denies any possibility for art to provide us with knowledge.

experience of the artwork represents an escape⁸ from, rather than a challenging engagement with, concrete historical reality. ... Gadamer condemns aesthetic consciousness as “the imaginary museum of a self-enjoying subjectivity.” (47, 63)

Art is not just a “perceptual enjoyment.” And the experience of art is not an inferior kind of experience as if it is nothing but only an expression of feelings, having no relation with knowledge. “All ... understanding is ... self-understanding” (23, 260), and the experience of art can not be thrown away from this realm. The experience of art is not a “discontinuous”, “punctual” experience (*Erlebnis*) “which can not withstand the claim of human existence of continuity and unity of self-understanding” (23, 97), but a “transformative” one (*Erfahrung*), after which we can not stay the same.

What we call a work of art and experience (*erleben*) aesthetically depends on a process of abstraction. By disregarding everything in which a work is rooted (its original context of life, and the religious or secular function that gave it significance), it becomes visible as the “pure work of art.” In performing this abstraction, aesthetic consciousness ... allows [the work of art] to exist in its own right. I call this “aesthetic differentiation.” (23, 85)

So, aesthetic consciousness runs after the impossible: for Gadamer, there is no “pure seeing” or “pure hearing”, these are only “dogmatic abstractions.” But these are not easy to cope with. “Aesthetic consciousness has unlimited sovereignty over everything” (23, 88) and it gets this sovereignty from its ability to make “aesthetic differentiation everywhere and to see everything “aesthetically”” (23, 86).

By doing these, aesthetic differentiation creates its own world, but to create it, it ruins the world of the artwork. It does this by creating museums for

⁸ Gadamer strongly disagrees with Shiller’s opposition of art and reality. It is the reason why he thinks that aesthetic consciousness is an “alienation from reality”.

example. Museums are sterile places in which you can see the great works of art, hundreds of them, in a few hours. If the experience of art is really transformative as Gadamer claims, then you have to experience hundreds of transformations in this short period after which you will most probably change as much as *Gregor Samsa*. But this does not happen. Because, for any transformation to happen, we have to get into a dialogue with the work of art. But how can we get into a dialogue with all of these works? We can not and we do not. We just wear our aesthetic consciousness and enjoy their forms or examine the brush strokes. In fact, the reason for a great mass to go there is only for the sake of being there and for the sake of being able to tell it; not, in the real sense, to see the works of art and to get into a dialogue with them⁹. Museums create the illusion that we can have sovereignty over an artwork. A dialogue with an artwork is an infinite dialogue, but in a museum, it even hardly starts¹⁰.

Aesthetic consciousness takes the experience of art into the realm of subjectivity. To deal with it, Gadamer uses the concept of *play*¹¹.

2.3 Heidegger

The question “What is art?” has been answered by philosophers in two ways: “either by focusing on the creator of art (Nietzsche’s approach) or on the

⁹ This is just an example of how an artwork can be *kitschified*.

¹⁰ There can be individuals who can succeed in getting into a dialogue with an artwork in a museum, but here, we are trying to draw the general atmosphere, with the help of Baudelaire: “The world –and even the world of artists- is full of people who can go to Louvre, walk rapidly, without so much as a glance, past rows of very interesting, though secondary pictures, to come to a rapturous halt in front of a Titian or Raphael – one of those that would have been most popularized by the engraver’s art; then they will go home happy, not a few saying to themselves, “I know my Museum.” (45)

receiver (Kant's approach)." (59, 16) But Heidegger had to choose another way in order to save the essence of art to "turn out to be a psychological state," so, he focused on the work itself. (59, 16) His follower, Gadamer will explain the reason like this:

[T]he mediation must be thought of as total. Neither the being that the creating artist is for himself -call it his biography- nor that of whoever is performing the work, nor that of the spectator watching the play, has any legitimacy of its own in the face of the being of the artwork itself. (23, 128)

"The initial definition, Heidegger's Hegelian *Grundgedanke* (founding idea), is that art is the "happening of truth."" (59, 16) The artwork is that in and through which "truth happens." (59, 17)

Heidegger defines art as "the truth of beings setting itself to work." (34, 263) For him, "to set up a world" (34, 269) is the nature of the work of art; but, at the same time, what a work of art is what sets "forth of earth." These two are "essential features in the work-being of the work. They belong together, however, in the unity of work-being." (34, 272)

It is clear that the concepts of "world" and "earth" are at the core of Heidegger's philosophy of art, so here, we will try to explain them.

World is "truth"- "the "truth of beings" or "being of beings."" (59, 22)

The world is not the mere collection of the countable or uncountable, familiar and unfamiliar things that are just there. But neither is it a merely imagined framework added by our representation to the sum of given things. The world worlds, and is more fully in being than the tangible and perceptive realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home. World is never an object that stands before us and can be seen. World is the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being. (34, 269)

The sentence “World is never an object that stands before us and can be seen” in this paragraph, will be one of the main theses of Gadamer. As we have seen, to criticize the concept of aesthetic consciousness and to construct his philosophy, he uses this idea as a starting point.

“By the opening up a world, all things gain their lingering and hastening, their remoteness and nearness, their scope and their limits.” (34, 270) says Heidegger. This is how Gadamer could say “[i]f we really have had a genuine experience of art, then the world has become both brighter and less burdensome.” (27, 26) But setting up a world is not enough for the work: “a setting forth is needed because the work-being of the work of art itself has the character of setting forth. The work as work, in its presenting, is a setting forth, a making.” (34, 270)

The material is all the better and more suitable the less it resists perishing in the equipmental being of the equipment. By contrast, the temple-work, in setting up a world, does not cause the material to disappear, but rather causes it to come forth for the very first time and to come into the Open of the work’s world. The rock comes to bear and rest and so first becomes rock; metals come to glitter and shimmer, colors to glow, tones to sing, the word to speak. All this comes forth as the work sets itself back into the massiveness and heaviness of stone, into the firmness and pliancy of wood, into the hardness and luster of metal, into the lighting and darkening of color, into the clang of tone, and into the naming power of the world.

That into which the work sets itself back and which it causes to come forth in this setting back of itself we called the earth. Earth is that which comes forth and shelters. Earth, self-dependent, effortless and untiring. Upon the earth and in it, historical man grounds his dwelling in the world. This setting forth must be thought here in the strict sense of the world. The work moves the earth itself into the Open of a world and keeps it there. The work lets the earth be and earth. (34, 270-271)

Earth is, for Heidegger, something which we can not analyze. It is a “counterconcept to world”: while the world is always “self-opening”, the earth is

always “self concealing”¹² (19, 222), and because of this, earth resists to rationality. If we insist on trying, “it is gone. It shows itself only when it remains undisclosed and unexplained. Earth thus shatters every attempt to penetrate into it. It causes every merely calculating importunity upon it to turn into a destruction.” (34, 271) These are the roots of Gadamer’s idea that art resists to conceptualization. This idea is also one of the reasons why Gadamer does not give priority to philosophy: as art has its unique “manifestation of truth”, “philosophy cannot subsume” it. (41, 499)

Heidegger explains the difference between world and earth, and their relation in this way:

The earth is the spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continually self-secluding and to that extent sheltering and concealing. World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated. The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth just through world. ... The world, in resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it. [The world] cannot endure anything closed. The earth, however ... tends always to draw the world into itself and keep in there. The opposition of world and earth is a striving. (34, 272)

For Heidegger, this striving is not something that causes disorder or destruction.

In essential striving, rather, the opponents raise each other into the self-assertion of their natures. ... In the struggle, each opponent carries the other beyond itself. Thus the striving becomes even more intense as striving, and more authentically what it is. (34, 272)

So, where do all these lead us? What is the meaning of telling all these things about the world, the earth and their struggle? Where does the work of art occur: in the world or in the earth? Heidegger answers: “The work being of the

¹² This is why both Heidegger and Gadamer think that “[e]very genuine work of art carries with it an “incomplete history”” (41, 500). The experience of art is an “infinite dialogue.”

work of art consists in the fighting of the battle between world and earth.” (34, 273)

The world of the work is not something which, once set up, stays forever.

Worlds come and go The Greek and medieval worlds both succumbed to a process of decline and fall, have “decayed” and “perished.” This means that “is a great artwork” is a predicate which comes and goes too. Since their worlds have disappeared, neither the temple nor the cathedral can do its “work” of “opening up” anymore. They have, rather, passed over into “the realm of tradition and conservation”, have become, in a word, museum pieces. A work, then, can lose its greatness through “world-withdrawal.” But it can lose it, too, by, not world being withdrawn from it, but rather the reverse, its being withdrawn from the world. Thus, for example, in the nineteenth century, an American Indian totem might have lost its world-disclosing power through being removed from its site and placed in a New York museum, an African fertility symbol by being relocated on the living-room sideboard.” (59, 19-20)

Gadamer’s criticism of museums is based on this idea. Firstly, considering the artwork, taking it from its world makes it dumb. This destroys the dialogue “in which the work claims place in the world we inhabit the work claims a piece of us and insists on belonging to our lives.” (8, 65) Secondly, considering the spectator, here, we face with the limiting character of seeing artworks as objects. This behaviour makes the artwork close its doors. So, this way, the world of the work can only be described: it can not be lived, so, can not be understood. As also in commercial transactions the work of art becomes an object, Heidegger reaches to the conclusion that, this makes the work “worldless and homeless” (19, 222) For Heidegger art should not belong to the museums or market but to the “marketplace as a public “happening of truth”. In this regard, Heidegger’s revision of the notion of the art looks to be quiet prescient, an anticipation of aspects of the current avant-garde.” (59, 19)

CHAPTER 3

GADAMER'S PHILOSOPHY OF ART

What happens when we encounter with the work of art? For Gadamer, the most certain answer is: we change. The work of art whispers us the words which we can not ignore or pretend as unheard: "You must change your life." (Rilke) (27, 34) And after hearing it, nothing stays the same. Our secure way in which we proceed suddenly disappears or becomes insecure. We are left alone in a place where we do not know even any directions. "To see ourselves in the perspective of the work of art is to be conscious both of being compelled to respond and of the lack of norms that might serve as a guide or justify our decision." (8, 60) This is how the change happens: we do not have any other alternatives but to find a new way. Not only us, the world also changes. But his change is not because of a change in the subjectivity of the beholder. It is an ontological change for the world also, because "the work of art signifies an increase in being." (RB 35) In Gadamer's view, reality is the untransformed form of truth; art rises up this reality "into its truth." (23, 113)

Gadamer tries to show that art possesses truth. Accordingly, he criticizes the aesthetic consciousness harshly, as it, by subjectivising aesthetics, makes it impossible to claim any truth in art. And on the other side of his criticism, stands the thought that the only possible truth is the scientific truth.

Is there to be no knowledge in art? Does not the experience of art contain a claim to truth which is certainly different from that of science, but just as

certainly is not inferior to it? And is not the task of aesthetics precisely to ground the fact that the experience (Erfahrung) of art is a mode of knowledge of a unique kind, certainly different from that sensory knowledge which provides science with the ultimate data from which it constructs the knowledge of nature, and certainly different from all moral rational knowledge, and indeed from all conceptual knowledge – but still knowledge, i.e., conveying truth? (23, 97-98)

The answer will be a rejection of any kind of knowledge in art if, “with Kant, one measures the truth of knowledge by the scientific concept of knowledge and the scientific concept of reality.” (23, 98) To solve the problem Gadamer offers “to take the experience (Erfahrung) more broadly than Kant did” until the experience of the work of art is also accepted as experience. (23, 98)

What kind of experience is the experience of art then? It is certainly not a “contemplative” one. It is something which “deprive[s] us of our aesthetic concepts.” (8, 66) It is “an experience of play in which we are caught up and carried away in the self-presentation of the work.” (8, 62) This is why play is “the clue to ontological explanation” for Gadamer. Art is not something we can observe from outside. We have to get in, we have to “participate.”

As we know from Wittgenstein, it is not enough to learn rules or follow explanations; one has to enter a form of life. What is required in this event is something like phronesis, the more so since clearly here is a game without rules and precedent and whose end or return can not be calculated in advance.” (8, 62)

If compared, this experience

stands in an ineluctable opposition to knowledge and to the kind of instruction that follows from general theoretical or technical knowledge. The truth of experience always implies an orientation toward new experience. ... The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfilment not in definitive knowledge but in openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself.” (23, 355)

So, can we say that experience only leads to other experiences but not to truth? This would be a Derridean view (trace). What Gadamer says is that

experience can not be a method that will take us to truth. But he certainly thinks that truth will emerge through/during these infinite experiences. He says “what we experience in a work of art and what invites our attention is how true it is - i.e., to what extent one knows and recognizes something and oneself.” (23, 114) Here, recognition is not used in the meaning of remembering something that we have already known. For Gadamer, in recognition what we know “is grasped in its essence.” (23, 114)

The work of art is not an object, but an “event.” So, the question that we should ask is not “what is a work of art?”, but “how does it occur?” (8, 61)

Gadamer uses three concepts to explain this occurrence: Play, symbol, and festival.

3.1 Play

The concept of play is “so elementary a function of human life that culture is quite inconceivable without this element.” (27, 22) With this concept, Gadamer is not referring to the creator’s or the enjoyer’s behavior, but to “the mode of being of the work of art itself.” (23, 101)

For Gadamer aesthetic consciousness is something that confronts an object. This is the alienation that the Enlightenment causes: “It sets a distance between the subject and object and then makes that distance a problem.” (36, 16) For it, the work of art is an object of understanding. In Gadamer’s view, this is, before all, not just. To show this, he uses the concept of play; because “[t]he mode of being of play does not allow the player to behave toward play as if toward an object”(23, 102): “the structure of play absorbs the player into itself.”

(23, 105) So Gadamer shows us where to focus on: the experience (Erfahrung) of art.

“The work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it.” (23, 102) This is why the work of art can not be an object: for a work of art, to be is to be experienced. And this experience has nothing to do with the subjectivity of the person who experiences the work of art, its “subject” is “the work itself.” (23, 102) This is why the concept of the play is crucial: “play has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of those who play. ...The players are not the subjects of the play; instead play merely reaches presentation through the players.” (23, 103) This is what Gadamer calls as “the primacy of the play over the consciousness of the player.” (23, 104)

In a play what we want is, only, to play. [“Every game presents the man who plays it with a task. ... such tasks are playful ones because the purpose of the game is not really solving the task, but ordering and shaping the movement of the game itself.” (23, 107)] And the only aim we can have is to continue to play. Aiming anything else will result in being out of the play; because it does not let us to do so. Whenever we try, it will whisper us the hidden rule: -‘You can not use me, you can not but live.’ Play can not be used because it is not an object. It is something ontological, it is a “world”, it is a way that leads us to being. It is the place where truth lives. (It is one of its houses.)

Gadamer claims that his words about play are true in all kinds of play. For example, in theatre, where there seems to be a separation between the players and the spectators. He says, “play ... does not really acknowledge the

distance separating the one who plays and the one who watches the play. The spectator is manifestly more than just an observer who sees what is happening in front of him, but rather one who is part of it insofar as he literally “takes part.” (27, 24) This taking part, or, “playing along with”, is the most essential element in the act of playing. (27, 23) But this does not mean that plays are represented for the spectators. Gadamer gives the children’s play as an example and claims that they “play for themselves” whether they represent their play or not.

And not even those games (e.g., sports) that are played before spectators are aimed at them. Indeed, contests are in danger of losing their real play character precisely by becoming shows. ... a drama is a kind of playing that, by its nature, calls for an audience. ... it is not really the absence of a fourth wall that turns the play into a show. Rather, openness toward the spectator is part of the closedness of the play. The audience only completes what the play as such is. This point shows the importance of defining play as a process that takes place “in between.” ... [P]lay does not have its being in the player’s consciousness or attitude, but on the contrary, play draws him into its dominion and fills him with its spirit. The player experiences the game as a reality that surpasses him.” (23, 109)

As audience is a part of the play, “[a]rtistic presentation, by its nature, exists for someone, even if there is no one there who merely listens or watches.” (23, 110)

While all plays are ways that can lead us to truth, the play of art has superiority above all. “Human play comes to its true consummation in being art.” Gadamer calls this change as “transformation into structure.” (23, 110)

Transformation is not alteration. ... transformation into structure means that what existed previously exists no longer. But also what now exists, what represents itself in the play of art, is the lasting and true. ... What no longer exists is the player – with the poet or the composer being considered as one of the players. (23, 111) ... [P]lay itself is a transformation of such a kind that the identity of the player does not continue to exist for anybody. ... The players (or playwright) no longer exist, only what they are playing. But above all what no longer exists is the world in which live as our own. Transformation into structure is not simply transposition into another world. ... The transformation is a transformation into the true. (23, 112)

This is why we can understand neither art nor spectators in terms of subjectivity, “as a way that aesthetic consciousness conducts itself.” (23, 125) The separation of the work of art and the spectators is an illusion because they are united in the being of the play, as if there is nothing left, but the play, the play of art. The spectator can not be pulled away from the work as if taking out an object from somewhere, because the work of art reaches its being through the spectator. (23, 109-110) The experience of art is a dialogue, so, they are both essential for the play to be a real play. Separation will be destruction of both.

With this use of the concept of play, Gadamer also brings a solution to the problem of universality. “[T]he virtue of the model of play is that it emancipates the work of art ... from universal concepts and ready-to-wear experiences; it has a hermeneutical application of universality.” (8, 62)

Another point to discuss about the concept play is the chance effect on it. For a play to be a real play, it is not necessary for everything to happen just as it is planned. On the contrary, if the play is forced to be so, the result will be “an abstraction that reduces the actual being of the work.” (23, 116) These contingencies are also the parts of the world of the play.

3.2 Symbol

“The essence of [the work of art] is situated, as it were, halfway between two extremes” of representation: sign and symbol. (23, 152)

For Gadamer, the essence of the sign is pure indication. A sign is, in fact, a function. It indicates something. “It point[s] away from itself.” We do not look

at it really, but we hear what it says. It says to us where to go. It can be anywhere, except itself, “for it is there only to make present something that is absent and to do so in such a way that the absent thing, and that alone, comes to mind.” (23, 152) So, the sign should disappear, and make the thing it presents appear. Then, can we say that an artwork is a sign? Or not a sign?

An artwork certainly points to something: to what it represents. But it is not something “away from itself”, on the contrary, as an artwork houses what it represents, what it points to can not but be itself. This is why we “linger over” an artwork but not a sign, because in an artwork “what is represented comes to its own. ... It experiences an increase in being. [It] does not disappear in pointing to something else but, in its own being, shares in what it represents.” (23, 153)

The second extreme, the symbol, seems closer to the artwork. While sign points to “what is not present”, both symbol and artwork points to something present; something present in them. This does not mean that they carry a meaning in them as if meaning is a statue in a rock waiting to be freed by a sculptor. They allow “the meaning to present itself” (27, 34), through the play, the play of art. For Gadamer, the essence of the symbol is pure substitution. The crucial difference between the sign and the symbol lies here: while sign disappears behind what it points forward, the symbol turns into it. The symbol represents what it points forward “by taking its place.” (23, 154) Let’s take flag as an example. What is the source of its meaning? Is it in its material? In its shape or in its color? If yes, then what is the source of their meaning? Or would choosing a flag in a different shape and color decrease or increase this meaning? Why is this piece of fabric so important? Gadamer’s explanation is very

persuasive. The flag of a country becomes a land in that country, and it is seen accordingly, not as a piece of fabric any more. But what happens if we see a flag without knowing that it is a flag and which country it belongs to? Does it or can it say anything to us? Here the difference between a work of art, and a symbol or a sign comes out. In both the sign and the symbol, we must be already “familiar with them” (23, 154), otherwise it is not possible to understand what they mean, because “they say nothing about what they symbolize” or point to. But in art, things change.

The symbolic representation accomplished in art does not have to depend on directly what is already given. On the contrary, it is characteristic of art that what is represented ... calls us to dwell upon it and give our assent in an act of recognition. We shall have to show how this characteristic defines the task that the art of past and present lays upon each of us. And this means learning how to listen to what art has to say. (27, 36)

“Specters of Marx” starts with a meditation on the sentence “I would like to learn to live finally.” If we read this sentence in a different way, adopting it to our discussion by changing it to “I would like to learn to listen to art”, then Derrida will suddenly become Gadamer’s mouth.

To live, by definition, is not something one learns. Not from oneself, it is not learned from life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death. In any case from the other edge of life. ... If it –learning to live– remains to be done, it can happen only between life and death. Neither in life nor in death alone. (14, xviii)

These words not only help us understanding the concepts of play and symbol, but even the word hermeneutics. In fact, Derrida’s words can be read as a praise to Hermes. (That will of course really annoy him, but, however, his text lets us to do so.)

The term "hermeneutics" seems to be related etymologically to the Greek god Hermes. Hermes ... was the messenger of the gods. He carried messages from Zeus to everybody else, especially from the divine realm and level down to the human level. In doing so, he had to bridge an ontological gap, a gap between the thinking of the gods and that of humans. According to legend, he had (1) a mysterious helmet which could make him invisible and then suddenly reappear, (2) magical wings on his sandals to carry him swiftly over long distances, and (3) a magical wand that could put you to sleep or wake you up. So he not only bridged physical distances and the ontological gap between divine and human being, he bridged the difference between the visible and the invisible, and between dreams and waking, between the unconscious and the conscious. He is the quicksilver god ["Mercury" in Latin] of sudden insights, ideas, inspirations. And he is also the trickster god of thefts, highway robbery, and of sudden windfalls of good luck. Hermes is the god of crossroads and boundaries, where piles of rocks (Herms) were placed to honor him. As psychopomp, Hermes led the dead into the underworld, so he "crossed the line" between the living and the dead, between the living human world and the underworld of Hades. Hermes is truly the "god of the gaps," of the margins, the boundaries, the limens of many things. He is a "liminal" phenomenon. (Richard E. Palmer)

We saw that Gadamer defines play as a process that takes place "in between". When we think of his philosophy and the word hermeneutics, we can see that they coincide. The phrase, in between, is very crucial in understanding philosophical hermeneutics. It prevents both sides from surpassing the other. This is why Gadamer does not focus on either the artist or the spectator. This is why he does not accept the subject-object conceptualization. This is how he could say that "all understanding is misunderstanding" but still think that understanding is possible.

Derrida makes an extraordinary reading of Hamlet in *Specters of Marx*. He interprets Horatio, as a scholar, someone unable to speak to the specters.

[T]here has never been a scholar capable of speaking anything and everything while addressing himself to everyone and anyone, and especially to ghosts. There has never been a scholar who really, and as a scholar, deals with ghosts. A traditional scholar does not believe in ghosts-nor in all that could be called the virtual space of spectrality. There has never been a scholar who, as such, does not believe in the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being, ("to be or not to be," in the conventional reading), in the opposition between what is present and what is not. ... Beyond this opposition, there is, for the scholar, only the hypothesis of a school of thought, theatrical fiction, literature, and speculation. (14, 11)

But Hamlet is not a scholar. He can speak to the specter, and can make the specter speak. Although Derrida would consider Gadamer as Horatio, I think that he is more close to Hamlet, *or Hermes*, who can talk with specters, *with the ones between life and death*. Gadamer's criticism of method is in fact the same criticism of scholars. And Gadamer's thought that art can not be understood through the concepts shows not only that he is not one of the scholars mentioned above, but also that, he is, just like Derrida, against them. This is how he could say

[w]e must realize that every work of art only begins to speak when we have already learned to decipher and read it. The case of modern art supplies an effective warning against the idea that we can appreciate the previous language of art without first learning how to read it. (27, 48)

As it is seen, Gadamer is also someone who knows "how to address himself to spirits", he is "someone mad enough to hope to unlock the possibility of such an address." (14, 12) So that Derrida's question of "[w]hat does it mean to follow a ghost?" can be answered: "Everything is a symbol."

Everything points to another thing. This everything is not an assertion about each being, indicating what it is, but an assertion as to how it encounters man's understanding. There is nothing that cannot mean something to it. But the statement implies something else as well: nothing comes forth in the one meaning that is simply offered to us. (21, 103)

So we have to follow the specters, in order to hear their words, in order to learn "how to read" them. They are not as they are told/ "offered" us in the fear stories. To reach the truth, to make them reveal their secret, there is nothing we can do but speak with them. Here a little word game will help us to express it: Gadamer had said "[t]he spectator is an essential element in the kind of play we

call aesthetic.” (23, 128) If he had made this analogy, he could say “specter” as well, instead of spectator.

The analogy of specter continues to help us. Gadamer says:

Art is only encountered in a form that resists pure conceptualization. Great art shakes us because we are always unprepared and defenseless when exposed to the overpowering impact of compelling work. Thus the essence of the symbolic lies precisely in the fact that it is not related to an ultimate meaning that could be recuperated in intellectual terms. The symbolic preserves its meaning within itself. (27, 37)

Who can understand a specter by the help of rational analysis? Who can be prepared for coming of a ghost? Who can describe it? Ghost stories are nonsense for most of us, like it is for Horatio¹³. But if it comes, what becomes nonsense is telling it that it is nonsense: how can it be otherwise? The unconceptualizability of art does not mean that there is no truth in art.

We will give the last words to Gadamer: This passage of his, about the symbolic in art and his criticism of Hegel, leaves negligible necessity to say anything more:

[I]n any encounter with art, it is not the particular, but rather the totality of the experienceable world, man's ontological place in it, and above all his finitude before that which transcends him, that is brought to experience. But it does not mean that the indeterminate anticipation of sense that makes a work of art significant for us can ever be fulfilled for completely that we could appropriate it for knowledge and understanding all its meaning. This was what Hegel taught when in a profound statement he defined the beautiful in arts as “the sensuous showing of the Idea.” The Idea, which normally can only be glimpsed from afar, presents itself in a sensuous appearance of the beautiful. Nevertheless, this seems to me to be an idealistic temptation that fails to do justice to the fact that the work speaks to us as a work and not as the bearer of the message. To expect that we can recuperate within the concept the meaningful content that addresses

¹³ Reading Derrida and Gadamer together: We accept that it might be considered as impudence but still, can not be as impudent* as reading Hegel and Genet together as Derrida did in Glas. This reading is only naive when considered to that. If Hegel and Genet could be read together, we have to say, it is really hard to find any couples that can not be read together, any more.

*We are not using this word in a criticizing manner, just on the contrary, even this reading of ours is written with the inspiration of, and in admiration to it.

us in art is already to have overtaken art in a very dangerous manner. Yet this was exactly Hegel's guiding conviction, which led him to the problem of art as a thing of the past. We have interpreted this as a fundamental Hegelian claim, since everything that addresses us obscurely and non-conceptually in the particular sensuous language of art was to be recuperated by philosophy in the form of the concept. However this is an idealistic temptation which is rejected by all artistic experience. Contemporary art in particular explicitly forbids us to expect from the creative art of our own time any meaningful orientation that could be grasped the form of the concept. In opposition to this, therefore, I propose that the symbolic in general, and especially the symbolic in art, rests upon an intricate interplay of showing and concealing. In its irreplaceability, the work of art is no mere bearer of meaning – as if the meaning could be transferred to another bearer. Rather the meaning of the work of art lies in the fact that it is there." (27, 33)

3.3 Festival

Gadamer defines festival as an experience of community which represents it in its most perfect form. Festival, in its nature, consists in this experience. There is no discrimination in a festival, it "is meant for everyone." (27, 39) Even more than that, "it is a community in which we are gathered together for something." (27, 40) This "something" may not be expressible, but it still exists. Because "[t]he celebration of a festival is, in technical terms, an intentional activity. We celebrate inasmuch as we are gathered for something, and this is particularly clear in the case of the experience of art." (27, 40) In fact, for Gadamer celebrating itself is also an art.

Festival takes us into a different temporality. In festival, time is not something that is spent (as if it is something -an object, we have) as it is in the case of "boredom" where we feel that we have to fill it, because filling it will mean that we are living 'well'. And in festival, time is also not something we always have scarcely, as in the case of "bustle" in which (just like when we are short of money -a material, an object) we are always short of time. What is this

different temporality? Gadamer calls it “fulfilled” of “autonomous” time. (27, 42)

[T]he festival fulfills every moment of its duration. This fulfillment does not come about because someone had empty time to fill. On the contrary, the time only becomes festive with the arrival of the festival. The manner in which festival is enacted directly relates to this. We are all familiar with this autonomous time, as we may call it, from our own experience of life: childhood, youth, maturity, old age, and death are all basic forms of such autonomous time. We do not calculate here, nor do we simply add up a gradual sequence of empty moments to arrive at a totality of time. (27, 42)

So, this is the place where clocks are useless. But this does not mean that time is not passing. There is also a flow, a change, but it is different. It can not be estimated, it can not be standardized. One day we understand that we are young, and one day, that we are not, any more. So, another festival begins, and we start to live that one. In it, again, time becomes uncountable. This is the time experience we live when we encounter with a work of art. Gadamer uses the tempo markings of a piece of music to exemplify his claim. These marks do not indicate a certain quantity of time, but only determine it in a “vague” way. “We must find the right time as it is demanded by the work.” (27, 43)

Why does Gadamer say “time ... demanded by the work”? and moreover that “[e]very work of art imposes its own temporality on us”? Does he mean that a work of art has a unique, unchangeable temporality, which is waiting to be found, or which comes to us in a certain way? Does not this will mean that there can only be one true interpretation? This will be a misunderstanding. An interpreter, mathematically, can interpret anyway he/she likes, but however, he/she chooses one of these ways. Why does the interpreter choose that way? Because he/she thinks that, that way is better than others, and that, it suits the work more, but who can evaluate this claim? In the end, nothing, but time. Time

shows us that we can not interpret a work of art in any way we like. This makes Gadamer to say those words. Gadamer thinks that a work of art resists to some interpretations, and those ones can not survive, but the ones (not necessarily only one) that survive are the ones which can speak with the work, the specter, who can listen to it and let it speak. If these are done, the temporality explained becomes real.

[I]n the experience of the work of art we must learn how to dwell upon the work in a specific way. When we dwell upon the work, there is no tedium involved, for the longer we allow ourselves, the more it displays its manifold riches to us. The essence of our temporal experience of art is in learning how to tarry in this way. And perhaps it is the only way that is granted to us finite beings to relate what we call eternity. (27, 45)

The repetitive character of festival is another clue that helps us in understanding the work of art. A festival is something “to be repeated”. (Even if it is not repeated, the festival houses this intention.) It goes, and comes again. “[T]he festival that comes round again is neither another festival nor a mere remembrance of the one that was originally celebrated.” (23, 122-123) It is the same festival, but it is new. It is a repetition but it is original. Its temporality lies in the repetition of these tides.

From its inception... the nature of the festival is to be celebrated regularly. Thus its own original essence is always to be something different (even when celebrated in exactly the same way). An entity that exists only in always being something else is temporal in a radical sense than everything that belongs to history. It has its being only in becoming and return. (23, 123)

These words of Gadamer echo in Derrida: “a specter is always a revenant. One can not control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back.” (14, 11) A specter does not come at a specific time. On the contrary, its comings determine the time. That time is named after it. It is said “the night when the

specter came”, not “on the 15th March”. Everyone knows that time, there is no need, or no possibility, to specify it. Time is its time. And after it goes, time changes into a waiting. It is being waited to come again, and again. Time is being waited to start from the beginning.

The play of art has this festive character. “[I]t renews itself in constant repetition.” (23, 103) It is best seen in the art of theatre. Every time a play is played, there is a different play, and there should be. Gadamer criticizes the effort to put on a play in the same way as the original one. This may have a “documentary value”, but certainly hinders the art value of it. Anyway, Gadamer does not think that it is possible to stage it that way even though the same text etc. is used to the letter. Because “‘contemporaneity’ belongs to the being of the work of art.” (23, 127) We will explain this in detail while explaining his idea of “fusion of horizons” in 4.2.

If the festival does not come differently, it does not come at all. Repetition is so important but we still have to free the meaning of the word “repeat” from its daily use. Derrida, again, comes to help Gadamer: “Repetition and first time, but also repetition and last time. ... Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time.” (14, 10) Every repetition is, in fact, only once. If we go further, we will reach to an inevitable conclusion: there is no repetition, but a constant re-creation.

One more important point about festival is that it “unites everyone. It is characteristic of festive celebration that it is meaningful only for those actually taking part.” (27, 49)

A festival exists only in being celebrated. ...The same is true for drama: it must be presented for the spectator, and yet its being is by no means just the point of intersection of the spectators' experience. Rather, the contrary is true: the being of the spectator is determined by his "being there present". Being there does not simply mean being there along with something else that is there at the same time. To be present means to participate. (23, 124)

Who really believes in/understands specters? The ones who see it? In the example of Horatio, we saw that, even seeing it, is not enough to do that. It is something which can be done only by the ones who speak to it and who it speaks to. For the rest, there always remains a suspicion. They were not shocked with the "you have to change your life" experience. They were not changed. So, they do not know the language of the specter, or unable to speak it. To do that, to understand the specter, you have to do much more than shouting or begging to it: you have to go after it, till it speaks to you, till you can speak to it: till, there is a dialogue.

3.4 "Hermeneutics Includes Aesthetics" (21, 100)

These three concepts help us a lot in understanding Gadamer's philosophy of art, but they are not enough to grasp it fully. Here, we will explain some crucial points about his philosophy of art.

For Gadamer, beauty is not something "opposed to reality". It is the messenger of the truth. When we see beauty, we know that truth is close to us and that we can reach it, although we encounter it "in the disorder of reality with all its imperfections, evils, errors, extremes and fateful confusions." (27, 15) Following Hegel, he also thinks that artistic beauty determines natural beauty. So, we learn what beauty is by the help of the artworks, not from the nature.

Another point that we should emphasize is Gadamer's main difference from his predecessors: namely Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Schleiermacher thinks that to understand a work of art, we have to understand the creator of it. And Dilthey tries to put himself into the artwork in order to live it again by which he thinks he can reach to the truth of the work (55, 62). Gadamer criticizes both on the basis of historicity. First of all, it is impossible for us to get out of our present horizon, and secondly, "the work of art always has its own present. Only in a limited way does it retain its historical origin within itself. The work of art is the expression of truth that can not be reduced to what its creator actually thought in it." (21, 96) An artwork tells us much more than its creator can, why? Because

[f]or of all the things that confront us in the nature and history, it is the work of art that speaks to us most directly. It possesses a mysterious intimacy that grips our entire being, as if there were no distance at all and every encounter with it were an encounter with ourselves. (21, 95)

We discover a world in the artwork which was before concealed. It talks to us, and this talk happens in us. So, its words are not about something general, but just targeted to us, to our own particular being, just as in its first and most certain 'injunction' ("You must change your life"), it says "you" to us.

Our relation with the work of art is a relation of I and You, but here, otherness is not "unsublatable":

"Hermeneutics bridges the distance between minds and reveals the foreignness of the other mind. But revealing what is unfamiliar does not mean merely reconstructing historically "the world" in which the work had its original meaning and function. It also means apprehending what is said to us, which is always more than the declared and comprehended meaning." (21, 101)

As all works of art, including the non-linguistic ones, “says something to [us] ... as if it were said especially to [us] ... as something present and contemporaneous, ... our task is to understand the meaning of what it says and to make it clear to ourselves and others.” So all works of art “falls within the province of the proper task of hermeneutics. It must be integrated into the self-understanding of each person. In this comprehensive sense, hermeneutics includes aesthetics” (21, 100).

One more point is about “the end”s. Derrida derides with Fukuyama for claiming the end of the history. He says “a ghost never dies, it remains always to come back and to come back.” (14, 99) Just like him, Gadamer also sees no end in an artwork. For him, “[t]he work that is merely over and done is no longer art.” (8, 66) So, paradoxically, this finite thing, the work, has to be infinite to be itself.

CHAPTER 4

UNDERSTANDING IN PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS

Understanding is not one of the number of things we do: it is the main “*mode of*” our “*being*.”

In understanding we do not try to reconstruct an original meaning. Because understanding is rather a “mediation. We are the conveyors of the past into the present”. Past can not be understood as it was. Understanding is always a “translation of past meaning into the present situation”. But it does not mean that an autonomous interpreter exists and understands subjectively. Understanding is “entering into an event of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated” (42, xvi).

So, understanding a text is not understanding its author’s thoughts. “All ... understanding is ultimately self understanding” (23, 260). And this happens in “a kind of dialogue” (20, 57). We do not reproduce but produce a meaning. This is why Gadamer says, “one understands differently when one understands at all” (42, xxv). Modification of what is said or written is necessary for them to “remain the same” (42, xxvi).

According to Grondin, these do not mean that Gadamer completely rejects the author’s intentions. For him, what Gadamer says is that, reaching the author’s intentions should not be the main goal of interpretation. “[T]he primary focus of understanding” should be “guided by the subject matter” (31, 41). But here, the emphasize is not on “the subject matter” itself, just as the emphasize is

not on the subject in *all understanding is self-understanding*. [Gadamer thinks just the reverse: “understanding involves a “loss of self””(20, 51) which happens in game. But the “absorption into the game is an ecstatic self-forgetting that is experienced not as a loss of self-possession, but as the free buoyancy of an elevation above oneself.” (20, 55)] Rather, the relation between the one who understands and the thing which is understood, has the main importance.

The priority of the “thing at stake over the mens auctoris” only becomes reverse “when the basic agreement on the subject matter is disturbed.” (31, 40). Grondin gives the example of the book *Mein Kampf*. We will certainly not read it as we read a poem of Rimbaud in which we do not necessarily relate the subject matter with the author. While we are reading *Mein Kampf*, we only hear Hitler, not ourselves or anything else.

Understanding is also beyond the limits of any method. Gadamer explains it in this way:

The real event of understanding goes beyond what we can bring to understanding of the other person’s words through methodical effort and critical self-control. Indeed it goes far beyond what we ourselves can become aware of. Through every dialogue something different comes to be. ... It is not really we ourselves who understand: it is always a past that allows us to say, “I have understood.” (20, 58)

This is why for philosophical hermeneutics “the question is not what we do or what we should do, but what happens beyond our willing and doing” (42, xi).

Another point that we should discuss in “Gadamer’s understanding of understanding” is the concept of application. For Gadamer “to understand is to apply” (31, 38). Its roots go back to Aristotle’s notion of *phronesis*. For

Aristotle, to be good means to do good acts, not to think about the abstract concept of good. Taking this idea from Aristotle, Gadamer comes to this point: “to understand ... is to articulate (a meaning, a thing, an event) into words. ... The words we use are ... applications” (31, 41-43). But how can we articulate, for example, a painting of Kandinsky into words? Can we do that even if we try?

Gadamer’s answer would most probably be this: We may attempt to explain the truth of a work of art with words but can not claim that we have expressed the exact meaning of it. But to understand it, we have to try to articulate it into words. Understanding emerges in this “search for words or articulation” (31, 42) Whether we can do that or we can not is a problem about our horizons. But even if we can articulate it into words, we can not say that we have understood it completely. Understanding never ends. As we can always find a “better articulation”, we can always reach a better understanding.

To explain what this *better understanding*, we have to say some words about the “hermeneutical circle.”

While we are trying to understand a text, we “project a meaning for the text as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because” we are reading it “with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning” (23, 267). New parts bring new meanings and we revise our projection again and again. This dialectic relation between the whole and the parts is an infinite process, and for Gadamer the “criterion of correct understanding” lies here: “in this coherence of the whole and the parts” (31, 47).

A certain question emerges here: on what basis Gadamer claims that we always project a meaning to a text, even before reading it? To find an answer to

it, we need to understand Gadamer's understanding of the concepts of prejudice and tradition.

4.1 Prejudice and Tradition

When we use the word prejudice, generally, some negative meanings accompany it. These negative meanings have their roots in the Enlightenment. It was Kant's "enduring injunction" that carries them to our time: "Have the courage to make use of your own understanding." Who can oppose to this injunction? For a human being, what can be better than this? Is not it the freedom we all want? But, there are two counter-questions we have to ask. The first one is a deadly one: Is it possible?

According to Gadamer, we do not have such a freedom of being out of all prejudices. It is not because we do not have enough courage to do that, but because we are historical beings. In his view, history is not something belonging to us, but is something which "we belong to."

Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being." (23, 277)

This necessitates that we should all be nihilistic about removing all the prejudices from our life. Here our second question comes to the help: Does all the prejudices lead us to un-truth? Gadamer gives an answer which is more than a simple no: If prejudices had not been, we would have no possibility to reach the truth. But it is clear that there are some prejudices that lead us to falsity.

Gadamer calls them as illegitimate or “unjustified” prejudices, and differentiates them from the “legitimate” or “justified” ones on the basis of their relation to authority.

Authority ... has nothing to do with blind obedience to commands. Indeed, authority has to do not with obedience but rather with knowledge. ... [A]cknowledging authority is always connected with the idea that what the authority says is not irrational and arbitrary but can, in principle be discovered to be true. This is the essence of the authority claimed by the teacher, the superior, the expert. The prejudices that they implant are legitimized by the person who present them. But in this way they become prejudices not just in favor of a person but a content, since they effect the same disposition to believe something that can be brought about other ways –e.g., by good reason. Thus the essence of the authority belongs in the context of a theory of prejudices. (23, 279-280)

When we think of a dictator as an example to authority, it seems that Gadamer’s words on authority can lead to some inconvenient, even dangerous interpretations. But Gadamer insists on that he is not defending the authority which is unquestionable and adds that “[t]rue authority does not have to be authoritarian.” (23, 280) The most powerful form of this authority is tradition.

Tradition, like prejudices, is also attacked by the Enlightenment. It is also seen as an obstacle in front of the freedom of reason. Gadamer thinks that this view about tradition and prejudices is itself a prejudice. For him (again by changing Derrida’s words a little) *there is nothing outside tradition*. We are born in it, and because of this, we can not see it as an object. It is even impossible to criticize it without having any prejudice. The Enlightenment had tried and failed to do this, because tradition is not “something other”, on the contrary, “it is always part of us.” (23, 282)

Tradition is essentially “preservation”. But still, Gadamer argues that there is also freedom in tradition. For him, in all historical changes, even in the

most revolutionary ones, preservation is more active than renewal. “Our historical consciousness is always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is heard.” (23, 284) Derrida’s words again can express Gadamer’s thoughts more sharply: “To be ... means ...to inherit. ... The being of what we are is first of all inheritance, whether we like it or know it or not.” (14, 54)

What is the relation between this tradition and the work of art or the artist then? If we want to find out how an artwork is created, we have to refer to this tradition. Since the Enlightenment, the artist is being seen as a genius who creates amazingly by the help of his/her free imagination, which ordinary people do not have. But is it really possible to think, to dream or to imagine, even for geniuses, in a complete freedom? Gadamer answers:

For the writer, free invention is always only one side of a mediation conditioned by values already given. He does not freely invent his plot, however much he imagines that he does. ... The writer’s free invention is the presentation of a common truth that is binding on the writer also. It is the same with other arts, especially the plastic arts. The aesthetic myth of freely creative imagination that transforms experience into literature, and the cult of genius belonging to that myth ... is an exaggeration that does not stand up to reality. (23, 133)

[T]he artist ... himself stands in the same tradition as the public that he is addressing and which he gathers around him. In this sense it is true that as an individual, a thinking consciousness, he does not need to know explicitly what he is doing and what his work says. The player, sculptor, or viewer is never swept away into a strange world of magic, of intoxication, of dream; rather, it is always his own world, and he comes to belong to it more fully by recognizing himself more profoundly in it. There remains a continuity of meaning which links the work of art with the existing world and from which even the alienated consciousness of a cultured society never quite detaches itself. (23, 133-134)

So, the genius of the Enlightenment is a fictitious hero. With him/her, also the reason, that the Enlightenment trusted fully, is dethroned. Rationality

can not be justified by claiming that it depends on pure logic any more. It is also historical, even, the claim that it is ahistorical, is itself historical too.

Tradition is not something fixed, and the meaning of preservation is not, for Gadamer, keeping the old in its old form.

The task involved in bringing together the petrified remnants of yesterday and the life today provides a vivid illustration of what tradition always means: not just the careful preservation of monuments, but the constant interaction between our aims in the present and the past to which we still belong. (RB 49)

Tradition is an old mirror. However much we try to understand its own time, what we see can only be this time, and however much it shows us this time, we still know that it is old. To see, so, to know ourselves, we can not but look at it.

4.2 Fusion of Horizons

We said that we know ourselves in tradition. But, can we know ourselves completely? In tradition or in somewhere else? If yes, what are the conditions for that?

There can be only one condition for human beings to know themselves completely: to be ahistorical (or over historical), which some metaphysical doctrines may assume to be true. But this survey has nothing to do with these doctrines, and walks on a secular basis, even though specters¹⁴ are “haunting” all over it.

¹⁴ Just remember the first sentence of the Communist Manifesto: “A specter is haunting Europe: the specter of communism.” That is to say, our use of spectrality is of this kind; its relation to belief etc. is no more than of Marx’s.

We are historical beings. We inevitably have a “horizon” because of this. Although we can not get outside of it, so to see it objectively, we can still see “beyond”. That is what horizon means: “not being limited to what is nearby.” To understand tradition, we need a historical horizon.

But it is not the case that we acquire this horizon by transposing ourselves into a historical situation. Rather, we must have already have a horizon in order to be able to transpose ourselves into a situation ... Transposing ourselves consists neither in the empathy of one individual for another nor in subordinating another person to our own standards; rather, it always involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also of the other. (23, 305)

But the historical horizon is not a given thing. What is, as if, given, is our present horizon, which consists of our prejudices (55, 85). This present horizon is not something fixed; it is always in a re-formation process. We test our prejudices, change or decide to preserve them. These tests can not be done without the help of the past. So, present horizon is not, and can not be purely present. But this does not mean that we automatically have a historical horizon.

It requires a special effort to acquire a historical horizon. We are always affected, in hope and fear, by what is nearest to us, and hence we approach the testimony of the past under its influence. Thus it is constantly necessary to guard against overhastily assimilating the past to our own expectations of meaning. Only then we can listen to tradition in a way that permits it to make its own meaning heard. (23, 305)

Although it may seem like as if we are talking about two different horizons, in fact, there are not two, but still not one. “[U]nderstanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.” (23, 306) In a real fusion of horizons “the historical horizon is projected” and “simultaneously superseded.”(23, 307)

The idea fusion of horizons, again, shows us the difference between Schleiermacher and Gadamer. While Schleiermacher tries to reach to the creator's thoughts to understand the work of art, so, only tries to understand the historical horizon and neglects the effects of the present horizon on us, for Gadamer understanding an artwork is itself a creation, which inevitably necessitates this fusion of horizons. While Schleiermacher is waiting for the rebirth of the dead King Hamlet, and shaking his dead body to make him speak, Gadamer is at a heated conversation with its specter.

4.3 Poetry and Language

All understanding is verbal (23, 403). Thought and language is inseparable. But these do not mean that language is our tool for understanding. We can not see it as an object¹⁵. Rather it "comprehends everything that can ever be an object" (23, 404). If we have a *world*, this is because there is language. We have said that we are born into tradition: language is where tradition lives, language is the road by which tradition reaches us¹⁶. But without tradition, there is also no language.

So, our world is verbal. But is it a prevention of knowledge? The answer is both yes and no. Yes, because as we always see the world from inside of a tradition, a language, we can never have the knowledge about it from a language-free standpoint, that is to say, we can not get off our language, it is what we are. And no, because in every tradition a common thing, a human world which is

¹⁵ This is why Gadamer does not consider invented systems of artificial communications as languages.

¹⁶ [T]he essence of tradition is to exist in the medium of language. (23, 389)

necessarily “verbally constituted”, exists and “presents itself to us. As verbally constituted, every such world is of itself always open to every possible insight and hence to every expansion of its world picture, and is accordingly available to others” (23, 447). Language is not an inclusion to the human world after this world was established. It is the place where this world is constructed.

While language is the condition of our being, its resistance to change should not be ignored. Gadamer says that “the sun has not ceased to set for us.” Although we know that the sun does not turn around the world, we still use this phrase. And every child born in our language constructs his/her worldview depending on this knowledge(!). Considering this, language seems like a barrier in front of the truth. But we know that language also changes. How does it happen than? As “all human thought about the world is historically conditioned” (23, 448) and as language is also a living thing in this history, inevitably, it also changes, even though not as fast as individuals using(!)¹⁷ that language. This is because language is “beyond every individual consciousness” (23, 449).

All understanding, and all thinking, including what we are doing now, namely thinking on language, can only be done in a language, and this is the “real mark of our finitude” (22, 64). As language is also human, it is also finite, but it allows “an infinity of meaning to be represented ... while remaining finite” (36, 52)

For Gadamer, there are three things “peculiar to” language:

The first one is the essential self-forgetfulness that belongs to language. The structure, grammar, syntax of a language –all those factors which linguistic science makes thematic- are not at all conscious to living speaking. (22, 65)

¹⁷ “[L]anguage speaks us, rather than we speak it. (23, 463)

We are not really aware of what we are saying at the moment of speaking. Rather, the subject matter speaks through us. This is the play¹⁸ we are in. There, both the grammar and the player “vanish” (22, 65). This leads us the second peculiarity of language.

Language is “I-less”, it is never completely *mine* but always *ours*. Even when talking to ourselves we speak as if we are talking to someone else. Without *you*, *I* can not be. This is the reason why Gadamer says “language has its true being in dialogue”. Every sentence can be thought as an answer to a question, and for Gadamer, it is so. (22, 67; 25, 106)

The third peculiarity is *the universality of language*:

Language is not a delimited realm of the speakable, over against which other realms that are unspeakable might stand. Rather language is all-encompassing. There is nothing that is fundamentally excluded from being said. (22, 67)

In short, human world is in fact, language: Language is the condition for our existence, language is what forms our existence, and language is the only place where and the only thing¹⁹ by which we can change our existence.

Gadamer defines poetry as “language in a pre-eminent sense”. What is the basis of this claim? Gadamer explains it in two different places²⁰ in the same way, referring to Paul Valery:

[E]veryday language, as well as the language of science and philosophy, points to something beyond itself and disappears behind it. The language of poetry, on the other hand, shows itself even as it points, so that it comes to stand in its own right. Ordinary language resembles a coin that we pass around among ourselves in the place of something else, whereas poetic language is like gold itself. (24, 67)

¹⁸ the language.

¹⁹ Not in the meaning of a tool.

²⁰ *Composition and Interpretation* (24) and *Philosophy and Poetry* (26).

Poetic language only represents itself. When we read a poem, we do not read it as if it is a word of someone said to us for a certain purpose. The word itself has a claim on us. Our relation with the poem is a pure dialogue: only the word speaks, and both the author and the reader disappear behind it. It is not the poet's superior intentions that make a poem special: it is "the fact that what is intended and what is said is there in the poem". In this sense "all poetry is mythical": "it requires no confirmation beyond itself" (24, 70-72).

The language of poetry is ambiguous, just like human life (24, 71). "It is the characteristic of the language of poetry that it speaks both truth and untruth and points to the open realm of interpretation" (24, 73). These words are said especially against the Platonic claim that "poets often lie". For Gadamer poetical speech is out of the consideration of true and false "for there is no external standard against which they can be measured and to which they might correspond" (26, 139). But still, poetic word fails when it is less of itself: this happens when it is proved to be "empty". When a poem smells like the everyday language or resembles like a copy of some other poetry, it is emptied and so, degenerated. These ideas of Gadamer will help us to explain why a kitsch poem is an inferior poem: it never creates anything new, but only uses the old "new"s. So it always points to somewhere else, but not only itself as a poem should do²¹. "The truth of poetry consists in creating a "hold upon nearness"". When there is something "conventional or stale" in it, "it jars" (25, 113).

²¹ Further examinations will be done in chapter 6.

“[L]anguage gives all of us access to a world in which certain special forms of human experience arise,” however, the language of poetry is the golden key: “the poetic word... bears witness to our own being” (25, 115).

CHAPTER 5

AVANT-GARDE AND NEO-AVANT-GARDE

Baudelaire ridicules with the term avant-garde:

On Frenchman's passionate predilection for military metaphors. In this country every metaphor wears a moustache. The militant school of literature. Holding the fort. Carrying the flag high... More military metaphors: the poets of combat. The litterateurs of the avant-garde. This weakness for military metaphors is a sign of natures that are not themselves militarist, but are made for discipline-that is to say for conformity. (12, 110-111)

Although avant-garde was not the avant-garde yet when he had said these words, as Calinescu indicates, they have a "prophetic quality". He asks: "[I]s it not the case that the systematic nonconformism of the avant-garde generates a new type of conformity (however iconoclastic)?" (12, 111) We will try to find the answer.

Avant-garde was born in the first years of the 20th Century, and ended in the end of 1930s. In as early as 1940s, it had "already" become a "nostalgic" "adventure": "During [1949-1960], the avant-garde found its way into museums, scholarly papers, educational series, and as the final stage, the avant-garde got commercialized, became, al in all, a commodity." But in 1960s, it was born again as neo-avant-garde. (54, pp. 53, 64).

There are lots of movements in both of these avant-gardes. But we will here only examine the ones that will help us most in our survey. Our aim is not to explain them in detail, but to highlight the essential elements of them that we need to develop our research.

5.1 Dada(ism)

Dada was an iconoclast. It was against every kind of conservatism, traditionalism, holiness and everything that was or that could be an obstacle for individual freedom, even including Dada itself. “Do not trust Dada” had said Tristan Tzara. “Dada is everything. Dada doubts everything. But real Dadas are against DADA.” (7, 7)

Dada does not believe in absolutes. It does not accept any kind of system²². It ridicules with every kind of methodology. Tzara’s recipe²³ to write a Dadaist poem is a proof of it. But more importantly, it is, in fact, an attack on art itself:

Dada, the most radical movement within the European avant-garde, no longer criticizes the individual aesthetic fashions and schools that preceded it, but criticizes art as an institution: in other words, with the historical avant-garde art enters the stage of ‘self-criticism’ (46, 7).

Dada trusts no values. It also does not trust language. For it, language is a “barrier”, not a “bridge.” Breton’s claim is this:

[L]anguage is “the worst of conventions” because it imposes upon us the use of formulas and verbal associations which do not belong to us, which embody next to nothing of our true natures; the very meanings of words are fixed and unchangeable only because of an abuse of our power by the collectivity.” (7, 26)

A possible answer of Gadamer to him can be this: “our true nature” is not something standing outside the language independently, as if it is overshadowed

²² “[T]he most acceptable system is on principle to have none.” (Tzara) (7, 6)

²³ “Take one newspaper. Take one pair of scissors. Choose from that newspaper an article of the length desired for the poem you intend to write. Cut out the article. Next cut out with care each of the words forming that article. Next put them in a bag. Mix gently. Take out one by one each excision in the order they fall from the bag. Copy carefully. The poem will resemble you. Voila,

by it; rather, if we really have a “true nature”, it is in language, or even, the language itself.

Dada is anti-dogmatic in its strict sense. However, its anti-dogmatism turns into dogmatism. It can be seen in these words of Andre Breton: “Peace at any price is the slogan of DADA in the time of war, while in the time of peace the slogan of DADA is: War at any price.” (7, 33) From these words, we can figure a definition of Dada and can even claim that there exists a Dadaism, such as, Dadaism is being anti at any price. And this is the end of the road: because, the birth of *Dadaism* is surely the death of Dada.

Dada claims to be anti-art. Like Futurists, they also want to “burn the museums.” But one day, they see that their works are, somehow, put into museums. Their anti-art is accepted as art. They are “absorbed into the surrounding culture” (12, 121). When Fountain is “celebrated” as a work of art, Marcel Duchamp says; “I threw an urinal to their faces and now they come and admire it for its beauty” (39, 117). We can interpret these words in two different ways: firstly and positively, work overcomes its creator’s intentions, or secondly and negatively, world overcomes Dada.

Dada wants the “abolition of memory” (56, 253). For it, old means bad, dangerous, imprisoning, deadly... It denies the past totally and so also “the achievements of the past” (7, 43). However, memory does not abolish, and Dada becomes memory.

Did all these happen because Dada was wrong? Is the death of Dada a suicide or a murder? Some of Dada’s words are still valid for today and although

there you are, an infinitely original poet of a seductive sensibility, even if still not understood by

Dada's acts can be considered as "suicidal", it is hard to believe that it collapsed only because of its own contradictions.

5.2 Surrealism

According to Calas, Surrealism starts with automatic writing and aims

to reduce and finally to dispose altogether of the flagrant contradictions that exists between dream and waking life, the 'unreal' and the 'real', the unconscious and the conscious, and thus to make what has hitherto been regarded as the special domain of poets the acknowledged common property of all^{24,25} (10, 7)

Surrealism praises "madness", "childhood" and "abnormal" and it hates conformism and "clericalism". Whatever the "repressed society" refuses, is welcomed by it. "Free association", "stream of consciousness" (43, 9), "trance narrations, poets and paintings created as a result of random influences" (7, 39) are its tools that it uses to show us "what hollow ground [we] have built our shaking houses" (7, 37) and so "to change our perception of the world" (7, 39). Because to do this means to "transform the world" itself. (11, 31)

Although Dada had challenged almost everything, it was incapable of "liberating imagination". But Surrealists gave it the "central role". (7, 56) "Dada was limited to denial. The surrealists went further ... to try to express 'the real functioning of thought.'" (2, 78) In order to do that they seek the unconscious. They want to free their thoughts from "any control exercised by reason" and want to be "exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern" (43, 20). For them, reason can not produce art (29). It is not possible to plan a work of art; it can

the vulgar." (Tzara) (48, 190)

²⁴ "Poetry done by all." (Lautreamont) (10, 7)

²⁵ Calas quotes from David Gascoyne.

only emerge itself, and from the unconscious. What an artist should do is just to let it flow. (29, 592).

Surrealism is not as anti as Dada was. It searches for a place where the contradictions “ceases” to be so. But, as a child of Dada, Surrealism is as fiery as provocative and as aggressive as it was:

The simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd. Anyone who, at least once in his life, has not dreamed of thus putting an end to the petty system of debasement and cretinization in effect has a well-defined place in that crowd, with his belly at barrel level.” (5, 29).

Being “striking”, “irrational” and “dream-like”: these are the golden rules of the Surrealist “method”. But they are not wanted for their own sake. What Surrealists really want to do is, besides “liberating imagination”, to “[expand] the definition of reality” (7, 78). They claim that “Surrealism is ‘more reality’” (43, 4).

Surrealism is against talent²⁶. Surrealists want to destroy the categories of “artist” and “non-artist.” They are also against “perfection” and “simplicity”. They want Surrealism “to be a way of life”, “a state of mind”. (43, pp. 5, 27) However, just like Dada, Surrealism also fades away. “Striking” becomes ordinary. “Dream-like” becomes a marketing strategy. Moreover, Surrealism’s trust in unconscious is subject to question: in a time like ours, in which our sub-consciousness is also heavily bombed by kitsch, how can we be sure that unconscious can take us to freedom? Some works of the Surrealists are accepted as kitsch, and this increases our distrust in Surrealist “glorification” of the unconscious.

5.3 Pop Art

Pop Art was born in England in 1950s but it gets its real avant-garde character in 1960s in the United States. Duchamp's "influence" on Pop Art is so much that it can be called as a child of him. But John Cage is also considered as one of "primary source[s]" of it.

As an avant-garde movement Pop Art is also "an attempt to establish norms in opposition to those esteemed by the umpires of taste" (51, 549). But its opposition is very different from its ancestor Dada:

Pop art is anti-social without being anti-cultural in the overwhelming sense that Dada was. ... Pop is an artistic program of total rejection of the values of the so-called Establishment. It amounts to a rejection of the aristocratic, Apollonian, rationalized conception of Art that has dominated education since the Renaissance with notions of coherence, integrity, and excellence. Dada had resisted concessions to that aesthetic in the same way that it challenges the viability of all Occidental culture. But Dada's own intellectual consistency and imaginativeness made it easily accommodated by the very system of thought that it opposed. Pop art presents a very different problem because, unlike Dada, it openly accepts the morbidities of mass society. It discriminates against the best in order to purify and commemorate the worse. (51, 557)

Lichtenstein defines Pop Art as "an involvement with ... the most brazen and threatening characteristics of our culture, things we hate²⁷, but which are also powerful in their impingement on us." These things consist of all kind of commercial advertisements, "comic strips", "magazine illustrations" and

²⁶ But because of this, they will be subject to some derisive comments, such as Sidney Tillim's: "The Surrealists had nightmares because they couldn't paint too well." (43, 2)

²⁷ Richardson's words explain the reason of this hate: "Precious developments in the direction of a highly naturalistic art form have ... entailed a commitment to the values of some social class or sub-class. What sets Pop art off from such socially responsive styles is the emotional tone peculiar to it. Disgust is at the root of the feeling, genuine disgust to with a society permeated by the ideological outlook and moral standards of a vastly expanded middle class." (51, 550)

“photography”, in short, of “the existing imagery [of the] mass culture” which is generally full of kitsch. (49)

Pop Art is against elitism. It wants to “remove the difference between fine arts and the commercial arts” and wants to be the art of the mass. Because of this, it uses the techniques of advertising. With the use of “stark simplicity, immensity of scale, repetition and bright colors” Pop artists try to “direct attention to ordinary things” (50). They try to change our view about these things. For Warhol “[w]hen you think about it, department stores are kind of like museums.”

Brecht had said, “The needs of the population need to be satisfied. But only by fighting at the same time against its need for trash.” (58, 154) Is it what Pop Art does? Richardson doubts about that: “Pop has an audience of millions, but it reaches them through the commodity form. Critical and alternative values have been kept out of the top ten, except rare occasions.”

Can the works of Pop Art be interpreted as a refusal to the kitschification of art or is it itself a kitschification of it? Does using kitsch have to result in being kitsch?

We will try to deal with these questions after examining kitsch.

5.4 Fluxus

Fluxus²⁸ is a movement that was founded in 1962 with the influence and the inspiration of John Cage (18). Here, we will only deal with a certain part of

²⁸ A Latin word which means fluid, in flux.

it, namely, the Fluxus “happenings” which we consider as attempts to go one step further than the “historical avant-garde”:

Whereas the Dadaist and Surrealist worked through shock and scandal to ... change the society mentally, today’s artist works with actions that challenge participation by the whole person, body mind and senses. That is the basic difference between contemporary Happenings and Dadaist and Surrealist thinking and action. ... The artist is no longer working cut off from society, he is looking for ways to act within it. His goal is to unify his work with society. Esoteric brusqueness and contempt for his audience is no longer part of the show. (40, 107)

Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece*²⁹ performance is an example of these Fluxus happenings. But here, we will, examine another work, which was done before Fluxus, as a messenger of it, by John Cage: 4’33”.

The pianist gets onto the stage, for four minutes and thirty-three seconds, “plays nothing”. (52)

This is the right place where we should start questioning philosophical hermeneutics itself. We will start this questioning from 4’33””: Is philosophical hermeneutics capable of interpreting this piece (or in general, the neo-avant-garde happenings)? This question has a problem in itself. In order to interpret, there must *be* something to be interpreted. But there is no work to be interpreted but still something claiming to be art. It certainly shocks us. We certainly live a “you have to change your life” experience. But there is, in fact, no music, not even a note. It is like air: we do not see it but feel that it exists. So, can hermeneutics deal with that?

If it is still a “play” as Gadamer thinks, then, someone seems to be cheating. Dialogue collapses: you are forced to talk with yourself. Can this be

called as a different kind of play? Is this the postmodern way of dialogue? Is it an advanced or a primitive one? Examining Holderlin etc. and appreciating them for their greatness: is it all hermeneutics can do? Inspecting creations and trying to differentiate art from non-art... Can it say something about an art without creation? An art which is not created? Or about an art which is created without a creator? An art which does not exist? An art, which rejects existing or an art that claims that it is everywhere?

“Everything is a symbol.” We can agree with Goethe, but what would he say about “nothing”? Can “nothing” be a symbol? A certain denial is “silence is not nothing” or as Cage himself says “There is no such thing as silence.” But what we mean with “nothing” is not no voice at all. With “nothing”, we mean that there exists “nothing” that can be accepted to have a historical horizon, and that, there is “nothing” that only “points to itself” which a symbol and an artwork should do in Gadamer’s consideration. Let’s think of other possible examples. Some other person can write poems without using words and publish a poet book with empty pages³⁰. Another one can construct a statue that is made of air, air in the air. Shall we also accept these as art? If yes, shall we call them as poems and statues or find other names for them? A poem without a word, a song without a note: it is a real shock, but what then? “Is it art” or just a refusal of a time? Will they survive or fade away?

²⁹ “Ono sits impassively on the stage ... while the audience is invited to come and cut away a piece of her clothing. One by one, they mound in mound the stage ... and cut a part of what she is wearing. ... Ideally the cutting continues until she is stripped bare.” (18, 6)

³⁰ In fact, a Dadaist, Hugo Ball, had come close to this. “His “abstract poetry” [had] abandoned the word” (7, 29)

Let's look from a different point of view. May be for all this time, we needed *something* to light the fire: to start the dialogue which carries us to a higher understanding of the "truth". May be, Cage and others want to take this *something* out, in order to start a "real", "genuine" dialogue. Art object is taken out from the midway between the truth and its seeker. Instead of being interpreters, the listeners become composers, the reader becomes poets. Art disappears and everyone becomes artist. The "genuine" thing still lives but is invisible. Can hermeneutics show it to us? Can we see the air? Listen, read or see "nothing"?

Is it an ultimate success for philosophical hermeneutics, proving its thesis that all interpretation is a creation? Or is it its falling down?

Can hermeneutics still help us? Or did the "play" end?

Let's look at another case where something exists, but is not irreplaceable. We can consider Duchamp's "Fountain" as an example. Is it really the urinal that is art? Can we understand it without considering the context? "Someone who wishes to understand a poem intends only the poem itself." (25, 107) says Gadamer. For him, the same should be true for all of the artworks. But here, the work of art is not understandable in itself. We could get nothing from the "Fountain" if the context did not exist. A Van Gogh painting is a Van Gogh painting everywhere, and we may understand something from it even though we do not know anything about him or about the time it is created. But "Fountain" is just a urinal outside the museum or the gallery. The creation itself has nothing

special. Then, will philosophical hermeneutics deny that it is art? Also considering Andy Warhol, let's listen to him:

The work of art ... is irreplaceable. This remains true even now in the age of reproduction where we can encounter the greatest works of art in reproductions of exceptionally fine quality. For photography and recording are forms of reproduction rather than of representation. The unique event that characterizes the work of art is not present in the reproduction as such (even if it is a question of a recording of a particular interpretation as a unique event, itself a reproduction). (27, 36)

Following Aristotle (who “says that a thing is beautiful “if nothing can be added and nothing can be taken away.”” (27, 42)), Gadamer also says that “it is the nature of the poetic word to be unique and irreplaceable. Only then we call something a poem. If this is not our impression and the words seem to have been arbitrarily chosen, then we judge the poem a failure.” (25, 107) So, how would Gadamer interpret the Dadaist experiment of creating poems with words “picked out of a hat”? (7, 28)

Both of the meditations above are done for a definite purpose: to show that we can not take a single step forward without questioning the boundaries between the different disciplines of fine arts and that, if it is not done, philosophical hermeneutics is in danger of being useless.

In fact, It is not the urinal which is art: it is in the ACT of claiming that a urinal can be art. And it is the same for 4'33" also. The debate of whether 4'33" is a music piece or not can take us nowhere: it is a theatrical performance, a *play*, an ACT, in which Cage is also playing as an ACTor, just as Duchamp is playing in the play, “the Fountain”. This is the reason why we can not separate Duchamp

and “the Fountain”, and Cage and 4’33”. The separation between the work and the creator is collapsed: the creator becomes a part of the work.

Both of them force the boundaries of the fine art disciplines. They challenge this categorization of arts. They easily jump from one of them to another³¹. And if we can not follow them, no understanding, but only rejection or even, despise, can occur.

³¹ In a more radical manner, 4’33” can also be accepted as a literal work. The reason is this: most of us are affected by it not by listening to it, but by reading it somewhere. For most us, it was a shocking *story*, something literal. When we read it, we lived the same experience that we lived while reading a literal work which says to us, “you have to change your life”. This is not possible when we read something about a work of Bach for example. We have to listen to it. But here, the work, by being free of the strict boundaries, is able to use other ways to speak with us.

CHAPTER 6

KITSCH AS EXPERIENCE

We have learned from Gadamer that we can not understand an artwork unless we give up seeing it as an object. The artwork has its being in dialogue as art is always a process *in-between* (23). The efforts to define it only on the basis of the artwork's qualities will have to fail soon or later. We will take this approach and use it to understand kitsch as well. In our view, just like art, kitsch is also an experience. But why is it so?

Changing Adorno's saying that "kitsch is the parody of catharsis", we can explain our starting point in this way: kitsch is the parody of aesthetic experience. What we experience in kitsch is very similar of our experience of art, but still, it is not that. It can be resembled to a shadow, the shadow of art: in accordance with the angle of the incidence of the light, it may not exist (we can call this stage as the pure awareness of kitsch, which is, in this age, very close to impossible³² to have) or it may be seen far more bigger than the real work –which we can name as the blindness of kitsch (we can not say the pure blindness of kitsch because if we think of our analogy, we can see that there is no pure end in this blindness even in theory: shadow can be infinitely long). But where does the awareness end and where does the blindness start? Using our analogy, we can say that, the bigger the shadow, the blinder we are. But we may still have some

³² We unwillingly agree with Milan Kundera: "None of us is superman enough to escape kitsch completely." (39, 21)

awareness. After the shadow becomes bigger than the work of art, meaning, when we like the kitsch-works more than we like the artworks, we are in danger of losing our sight.

We will try to understand what causes the similarities and the differences between art and kitsch. Before explaining our thesis that kitsch is also a process in-between, we will explain the approaches which see kitsch as an object³³ and the approaches that see it as a behaviour of a subject. While trying to show their inability to draw us a sufficient broad picture, we will also try to learn from them.

What happens when we face with a kitsch-work? How do we notice it? It is generally the case that, we can not not notice it. Why? Tomas Kulka's analysis of kitsch can help us to find an answer.

For Kulka, there are three conditions of kitsch. The first one is this: "Kitsch depicts objects or themes that are highly charged with stock emotions" (39, 26). The word *stock* is very important here. These emotions are already defined and accepted. "Kitsch comes to support our basic sentiments and beliefs, not to disturb or question them" (39, 27). Milan Kundera expresses this wonderfully:

³³ Even before that we have to explain the etymology of the word. As Matei Calinescu indicates, it is not certain, but there are various hypotheses. "Some authors believe that the German word derives from the English "sketch", mispronounced by artists in Munich [where the word came into use] and applied derogatorily to those cheap images bought as souvenirs by tourists. ... According to others its possible origin should be looked for the German verb *verkitschen*, meaning in the Mecklenburg dialect "to make cheap". Ludwig Gietsz ... also mentions the hypothesis that links kitsch to the German verb *kitschen*, in the sense of "collecting rubbish from the street" ... it can also mean "to make new furniture from old". ... According to Gilbert Highet, kitsch comes from the Russian verb *keetcheetsya*, meaning "to be haughty and puffed up." (12, 234-235) Karsten Harries also mentions about the German verb *kitschen*, but in the meaning of "playing with mud" (32, 74).

Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: How nice to see children running on the grass! The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch. (53, 1)

Kitsch takes our prejudices, shapes them, and gives them back to us. This shaping is not a transformation, but just the reverse. It cleans our prejudices and makes them shine, it freshens them and makes them look 'better', more attractive. After this experience we hold on our prejudices even more tightly than before. So, kitsch never says, "you have to change your life". It tries to please us; it tries to please more of us, as many as possible. In order to do that it uses "the most common denominators". Although it tries to do that, as it is very unlikely that there exists something common for every human being, there are various kinds of kitsch: "Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Communist, Fascist, democratic..." We are inevitably affected by kitsch; it, one way or the other, catches us. How? This question leads us to the second condition of kitsch: "The objects or themes depicted by kitsch are instantly and effortlessly identifiable." (39, 33).

We can not understand a painting of Picasso at one sight. We get into a dialogue with it, and in this endless dialogue the truth of the work emerges. Unlike this, the dialogue with a kitsch-work does not take a long time. It may be at most two sentences:

The kitsch-work says: I have what you want, take it and consume.

And we reply: I want to have you and show everyone that I have you.

Art is something to understand whereas kitsch is something to have.

Recognition and understanding happens at about the same time. How can this happen? First, kitsch speaks “the most common language understandable to all”, and secondly, it “displays considerable disregard for detail” (39, 31).

“Kitsch never ventures into the avant-garde, or into styles not yet universally accepted. It can jump on the bandwagon only after the novelty wears off and becomes commonplace” (39, 33). So kitsch is conservative; it can not stand the new because the new and the innovative are dangerous for it. “Kitsch can not afford to be, and hence never is, confusing” (39, 31)

To summarize what we mean in an aphoristic way we can say:

Art asks: Who are you?

Kitsch asks: What is your name?

According to Gadamer, an artwork causes an “increase in being.” The artwork opens us a new world, and after the experience of art, we can not stay the same. Oscar Wilde has been “reported to have said that there was no fog in London before Whistler painted it” (39, 36). Wilde’s emphasize on the transformative power of the artwork reaches its climax with his sloganlike aphorism: “Nature imitates art.” But as we are not challenged by kitsch, this increase in being, this transformation can not occur. This is the third condition of kitsch: “Kitsch does not substantially enrich our associations relating to the depicted objects or themes.” (39, 37) This is also the reason why there are not

(m)any³⁴ abstract kitsch paintings or sculptures. Kitch does not want to be interpreted, or wants to be interpreted only in one way, which are, in fact, from a Gadamerian perspective, one and the same thing.

A dialogue with an artwork is an infinite dialogue, however, a dialogue with a kitsch-work only seems like an infinite one. Lets think of two mirrors facing to each other. The distance between them is in fact finite, and even a very easily measurable one. But kitsch tries every way to deceive you and to take you in itself, into its horizon. If it succeeds, and makes you look at one of the mirrors, the distance will seem as if it is infinite.

After explaining these three conditions, Kulka says this: “If we consider our three conditions jointly, they point to the essentially parasitic nature of kitsch.” Greenberg explains this nature like this:

The precondition for kitsch, a condition without which kitsch would be impossible, is the availability close at hand of a fully matured cultural tradition, whose discoveries, acquisitions, and perfect self-consciousness kitsch can take advantage of its own ends. (35)

Kitch does not create beauty, but uses the things that are called beautiful, so that makes itself seem beautiful. In fact, it does not create anything, except catharsis. This is why, we guess, as we have mentioned before, Adorno had called kitsch as “the parody of catharsis.” Referring to the words of Clement Greenberg will make this definition more understandable: he says, “If the avant-garde imitates the processes of art, kitsch ... imitates its effects.” (30, 116) Without a *you have to change your life* kind of experience, without any self-questioning, without expending the great effort which is necessary to discover

³⁴ As Harries indicates “abstraction has developed its own cliches”. So, there exist an abstract

something about being and truth, you can arrive at the ‘same’ point via kitsch. Considering this, we see that Mehmet Ergüven’s emphasize on the resemblance of kitsch and “sex for money” is very meaningful (17, 192). Just as catharsis is not the thing which makes art, art, sex is not the thing which makes love love; but is only a part of it. Like the experience of art, love is also a dialogue in and after which you can not stay the same. You change and, in Gadamerian terms, there exists an increase in your being. But in “sex for money,” the part becomes the whole, and the result takes the place of the process. There only exists a pseudo-dialogue: one side talks and makes the other side response in a determined manner. There exists no change, no increase in being, but only a consumption: sex is bought and consumed just like catharsis is bought and consumed via kitsch. For kitsch only the result, the effect, the catharsis is important. So it offers, apparently, the same results (if it can really be called the same) of an artwork while offering a shortcut. Then, for some people, there exists no reason to take the long path. But why do those people, instead of getting into an enriching dialogue with an artwork, surrender to the kitsch, which reduces experience to catharsis³⁵? Adorno explains the reason of this in this way:

People want to have fun. A full concentrated and conscious experience of art is only possible only for those whose lives do not put such a strain on them that in their spare time they want relief from both boredom and effort simultaneously. The whole sphere of cheap commercial entertainment reflects this dual desire. It induces relaxation because it is patterned and pre-digested. (12, 242)

As it is seen, kitsch is not just an aesthetic problem, it is also ideological. Calinescu says “[m]ass culture is indeed ideology.” He thinks that

kitsch, but it is not something subject to interpretation, but is only used to “decorate homes, and offices to lend them an air of culture [and] a certain dignity.” (32, 82)

³⁵ In the meaning of an intense emotional response, not anything transformative.

today's popular culture is often pure kitsch (12, 241-243). For Dwight McDonald, in opposition with the folk art which grew from below, mass culture is imposed from above. (12, 243) Clement Greenberg also thinks that kitsch is the culture of the masses. Moreover he remarks on the use of it in controlling the masses.

The encouragement of kitsch is merely another of the inexpensive ways in which totalitarian regimes seek to ingratiate themselves with their subjects. Since these regimes cannot raise the cultural level of the masses – even if they wanted to – ... they will flatter the masses by bringing all culture down to their level. (30, 122)

The artwork has its real being when it meets with the spectator (23, pp. 124, 128); whereas, kitsch has its real being when it meets with the mass.

This is also why kitsch is generally considered as a recent phenomenon. We can not say that bad taste did not exist in the past; but it “did not have the means to systematize its conventions and to institutionalize its activities in order to reach a large number of would-be consumers of specifically fake art” (12, 240). So, it is not very probable to think of kitsch without considering the technological advances since the 19th century. Technology helps kitsch to spread more and more, and the more it spreads, the more inactive we become:

[T]he mass media induces a state of passiveness in the typical onlooker: one simply turns on the TV and is flooded with an indefinite number of “predigested” images (which do not require any effort to understand). . . . [P]assiveness, combines with superficiality, are important prerequisites of that state of mind that foster kitsch. (12, 256)

The inactivation process is followed by the assimilation (“homogenization”) process.

A largely unified audience has emerged, whose tastes and emotional needs are skillfully manipulated by the technicians of mass culture. This situation [is]

described by McDonald as a “merging of the child and grow-up audience,” meaning: “(1) infantile regression of the latter, who unable to cope with the strains and complexities of modern life, escape via kitsch (which, in turn, confirms and enhances their infantilism); (2) ‘over-stimulation’ of the former, who grow up too fast.” ... [T]he type of artistic experience provided by the media becomes eventually a norm for all artistic experience in the eyes of the conditioned customers of our time. (12, 256)

There are, however, some people who see no problem in this assimilation process. Leslie Fiedler is even proud of being in this mass. He thinks that there is no reason to “condescend to popular literature”, which, in his view, “join together all possible audiences, children and adults, women and men, the sophisticated and the naive...” We would certainly agree with him if this joining together had been on the basis of free choice. It is certain that those people themselves chose to read those books. Our point is that, we are forced to choose from a very limited set. We are told that we may choose them or not, in order to make us think that we are freely choosing them. They know where to shoot us, so they just target to the Achilles’ heel. Then? We are made to choose them, we inevitably choose them: as a matter of fact, we do not know what else to choose, some of us even can not think that something else can be chosen instead. Why?

Kitsch is inevitable in our time. We are born in it. There is nowhere else we can go. By changing Derrida’s famous saying once again, we can say that *there is nothing outside kitsch*. Kitsch has swallowed the art. Art is in it, in its stomach. Instead of challenging our prejudices, kitsch became a prejudice of its own: our new prejudice; it is our *tradition* now.

We do not notice kitsch any more as once, a long time ago, some people had done: it is everywhere. We are looking from inside the kitsch culture, so, accordingly, we can not see it. We can not not have it. We can not but only be

aware. It is buried into the system of the world now. It can be called as the result of this system, a child of it. It can not fade away as long as we live in a world like this.

Like forgery, kitsch is an inevitable feature of a world in which money and desire are spread more widely than taste and knowledge. (16)

This does not mean that a new system will certainly destroy kitsch. It may, but more probably, it will produce its own kitsches. In this technological era, kitsch is so powerful that it is almost impossible to imagine a system that will not want to use it. However, Calinescu is not as anxious as us:

[T]he dangers of kitsch should not be exaggerated. Offering “duplicates” of almost every known art form, kitsch suggests (sometimes with more accuracy than we would like to believe) the way toward the originals. After all, in today’s world no one is safe from kitsch, which appears as a necessary step on the path toward an ever elusive goal of fully authentic aesthetic experience. After many reproduced of fake Rembrandts, a viewer may ultimately be receptive to the experience of coming upon the real painting of a Dutch master. He may finally become aware that art, even when exploited, misunderstood, and misused, does not lose its value. (12, 262)

In our view, Calinescu is over-optimistic. He does not consider kitsch as something very deeply merged with the capitalist economic system and its results. Kitsch is not one of the trends in fashion. It is the main trend, the trend of being trendy, that is to say, the fashion itself, which does not change with the change of the trends. It is deeply fused in our culture. It is the main mode of our time. It is one of the reasons why “The time is out of joint.”

Although we are not so optimistic, we agree with Calinescu at one point: art will overcome. But how can we say that?

We will make another definition of kitsch using Gadamer’s terms. In our view, kitsch is illegitimate interpretation. It is this definition which helps us to

hope that kitsch will not last forever, at least the kitsch of this time. As it always renews itself, a total disappearance of it is not very imaginably. As long as there exists a mass, kitsch will continue to exist.

Broch brings us a different, namely, ethical perspective to look at the issue. He thinks that kitsch is the element of evil in the value system of art.

The essence of kitsch is the confusion of the ethical category with the aesthetic category; a 'beautiful' work, not a 'good' one, is the aim; the important thing is an effect of beauty. Despite its frequent use of realistic terminology, the kitsch novel depicts the world not 'as its really is' but 'as people want it to be'. (6, 71)

To 'work beautifully' or to 'work well'; that is the problem. We have already told that kitsch gives us what we want. Gadamer goes one step further and say that the origin of kitsch and all bad art is "the case when we enjoy something for the sake of some quality or other that is familiar to us", because there, we are not willing to encounter anything that can change us. On the contrary, we are overpleased with the familiar which will not force us to learn, to see or to think anything. Gadamer emphasizes that "such art is designed upon us." They are "the destruction of art" because "for something can only be called art when it requires that we construe the work by learning to understand the language of form and content so that communication really occurs." (27, 52) Here, in the light of Broch and Gadamer, we will try to answer this question: What is the right ethical stand in front of /against kitsch, and its acts?

The producer of kitsch does not produce 'bad' art, he is not an artist endowed with inferior creative faculties or no creative faculties at all. It is quite impossible to assess him according to aesthetic criteria; rather he should be judged as an ethically based being, a malefactor who profoundly desires evil. And as it is this radical evil that is portrayed in kitsch, . . . kitsch should be considered 'evil' not only by art but by every system of values that is not a system of imitation. (6, 76)

The sin of kitsch, for Broch, as it is seen, is the crime of imitation. But is it really a crime? Here, Broch uses the word *imitation* in the meaning of *copying*. As kitsch can not copy the “creative act”, it only copies “most simple shapes” of art. And even though it is aware of what it has done, impudently, it still claims to be as valuable as the original work. This is where we should start our ethical consideration. The first sin of kitsch is lying. By giving us what we want, kitsch commits another sin: it causes/helps/incites us to escape.

[P]ersonal nostalgia for a better and safer world enables us to understand why historical studies and the historical novel are thriving again today, but it also shows that this is just another way of entering a sphere that already belongs to kitsch’s sphere of influence (any historical world nostalgically re-lived is ‘beautiful’). In reality, kitsch is the simplest and most direct way of soothing this nostalgia. (6, 73)

Kitsch gives us “sweet dreams.” It satisfies our need to run away from our monotonous lives, but takes us into itself: to another monotonous world. It is an intellectual drug.

After examining kitsch as an object, which, for us, is not enough to understand kitsch, we will proceed with the examination of the spectator of kitsch, who is generally named as *kitsch-man*³⁶. If we were to define this concept:

A [kitsch-person], to put it bluntly, is one who tends to experience as kitsch even non-kitsch works or situations, one who involuntarily makes a parody of aesthetic response. In the tourist’s role, for instance, the [kitsch-person] will “kitschify” not only cultural monuments but also landscapes, and especially great sights. ... What characterizes the [kitsch-person] is his inadequately hedonistic idea of what is artistic or beautiful. ... [The kitsch-person] wants to fill his spare time with maximum excitement (derived from, among other things, “high culture”) in exchange for minimum effort. For him the idea is effortless enjoyment.” (12, 259)

³⁶ But instead of it, like Hansen, Nerdrum and Tuv, we will use *kitsch-person* in this survey.

Nothing can stay as it is in front of this gluttonous being. It can swallow anything that is told to be beautiful. It only eats, and never spends any effort: if it were a person, it would certainly be an obese. So here we can add two more sins to its account: gluttony and, agreeing with Richard Egener, sloth.

For Gillo Dorfles, kitsch is “the attitude of the individual when confronted with artistic and natural phenomena, which are observed from that particular point of view which immediately transforms them into something inferior, false, sentimental and no longer genuine” (15, 29). In addition to that, his words below strengthen our claims about kitsch, although we do not agree with one of his criticisms: namely, his criticism of kitsch referring to the intentions of the creator of the work of art:

[T]his kind of public will demonstrate its lack of understanding or faulty interpretation of the work of art not only when they stand in front of modern art, but also when confronted with the great works of antiquity which they think they understand. Such people will judge Raphael as if he were a painter of picture postcards; Wagner or Verdi on the basis of the romantic content of their libretti rather than of the quality of their music; Antonello da Messina or Morandi on the ‘pretty’ or ‘decorative’ aspect of their paintings, rather than on the truly pictorial aspect (15, 16). The [kitsch-person] is most clearly visible in [his/her] way of listening to music; the [kitsch-person] who can turn even the great Johann Sebastian into kitsch, by attaching his rigorous and even pedantic compositions some sentimental intentions which he never even dreamt of having (15, 29).

This is the collapse of the dialogue. A kitsch-person never listens to the work of art. He/she never tries to speak with its specter. He/she orders to it to make it speak the words he/she wants to hear, just like Horatio did, so can never inherit anything. Art that is reduced to silence, that is forced to be silent, becomes kitsch.

Our claim is that philosophical hermeneutics can help us to take our understanding of kitsch one step further than the approaches that we have mentioned so far have done.

6.1 Play

An artwork can not be understood if it is seen as an object. Like in play, we should not try to “conduct” the play, but let it play us. When the play rises above both the players and the spectators, the play becomes a real play, and a “transformation into the true” occurs. (23, 112)

However, we can not experience something like this in the play of kitsch. It is true that we can also lose ourselves in the play of kitsch too, but it is more like loosing ourselves in computer games. It seems as if in both the play of art and the play of kitsch, the same thing happens and the play plays us, but in fact, in the play of kitsch we are not played by the play, but by another player who is not seen. We are “manipulated” by a kind of *Big Brother*. He/she knows what we want and creates an illusion of play to satisfy us. After the play, there remains only a pleasure of consumption, but nothing changes. We stay the same. The world stays the same.

Time is a good measure to differentiate these two kinds of play. In the play of art, time becomes something uncountable. Art destroys the clock, whereas kitsch makes it work fast.

Another difference lies in these words of Gadamer: “Understanding begins when something addresses us. This is the first condition of hermeneutics” (23, 299). A kitsch-work does not address us in the manner of an artwork which

may possibly say: “Listen to me, I have something to tell you”. It addresses us rather this way: “Buy me, I have something to satisfy you”. This is how the play starts in each of them. The play of art calls us like the specter of King Hamlet calls his son, whereas the play of kitsch does in the manner of a sales-person. So, the plays can not be the same.

One more point to consider is the kitsch-person. For him/her, it does not matter whether the thing in front of him/her is an artwork or a kitsch-work. He/she even sees the great works of art as an object: something to “decorate” his/her house, something to make him/her seem intellectual etc. So, he never gets into any kind of play. He is out of the consideration for this part.

6.2 Symbol

An artwork points to what it represents, a symbol does that too. But for us to understand a symbol, we should already be familiar with it, whereas an artwork is not familiar to us in this manner. (23, 154)

Regarding these, we can say that a kitsch-work is a kind of symbol, a kind which is at a far more distance to an artwork than an ordinary symbol is. In a kitsch-work, there is not and there can not be anything unfamiliar to us. Just on the contrary, it should be so familiar that we can understand it at one sight. Sometimes a kitsch-work as a whole may seem unfamiliar, but if it is examined in detail, it can be seen that it is composed of familiar parts: it is a kind of ‘best of’.

A kitsch-work always points to somewhere else: something that has been done before, something that was once new and revolutionary but which has

become ordinary. So it is, in fact, more like a sign (which tries to make us believe that it is a symbol). But unlike a sign, a kitsch-work does not stop when it points to another place. A kitsch-work fills itself with the meaning that is given to what it points to, and the artwork that is being pointed pays the price: it is emptied. This is how, many inventions of the avant-garde is kitschified. They are used in a way that their inventions become clichés.

You can see this kitschification process everywhere. Just switch on the TV, everyday, there talks a dictator, who has started a war, about peace and freedom. In fact, these words are, due to the “stock” meaning in them, subject to the attacks of kitsch-people. They are emptied, they are made meaningless, so they are kitschified.

That is to say, kitsch is a “parasite” which has to kill to live.

6.3 Festival

If art is a specter which comes again and again, and which says new things every time, kitsch is a specter which comes once and stays; which says the same thing repeatedly; and (as it stays) which had lost its “in-between”ness. A specter that is not in between is in fact not a specter any more. A specter can only be as a non-living and a non-dead at the same time. It has no home, and it is always in migration. As light can not stop, a specter can not be otherwise.

The reason why kitsch-works are liked so much lies in the fact that it domesticates this uncontrollable specter. Its specter does not causes fear any more, it becomes an ordinary guest. It does not force us to answer to strange questions, or to play strange games with it, but just talks like us, in everyday

language, and plays our own games with us. It behaves like the people who want to be loved by everyone: it does not get into any debate. It does not want to be good but wants to seem good. It approves every word we say, and by doing that, it only aims to make us love it more and more. So, this degenerate specter can not resemble to any kind of festival.

What happens every time in the experience of an artwork, only happens once in the experience of a kitsch-work. That is to say, if art is a festival, kitsch is an anniversary.

“A festival exists only in being celebrated” whereas kitsch exists only in being consumed. A kitsch-work, like a festival, is “meant for everyone”. But while the latter sees everyone as a participator, the former sees him or her as a potential consumer. It is an interesting coincidence that kitsch objects are sold in festivals: we mean, the ones who sell these objects are out of the time and the mood of the festival. Just like them, kitsch stands beside the festival of art without joining it.

6.4 Prejudice and Tradition

As we have mentioned before, unlike art, kitsch never challenges our prejudices, on the contrary, it feeds them. What it feeds are not the ones that Gadamer thinks as inevitably necessary for any understanding, but the ones that he himself also calls as “false prejudices.” Kitsch is a kind of toady, it tries to make us happy of what we are, so that it can reach to what it wants: to make us buy it or to make us believe it, if it is a political kitsch.

Kitsch makes use of everything to reach its aims. It even uses the unusable: the tradition. As tradition is not an object for us, we can not be said to have it, rather, it has us. So, we are unable to use it, but kitsch is not. Kitsch's greatest ability is its ability to kitschify everything. So, it also attacks to tradition: it kitschifies history, philosophy, art... For it, to be is to eat, to ruin, to destroy...

Tradition is not something static, it surely changes, but in our time, it does not only change, but also is being changed. What we mean is this: people still inherit as before, but a great part of the population inherits through mass media. This creates a very dangerous opportunity for manipulation³⁷ and kitsch uses it very well. It tries to become the tradition, and as far as it is seen, it is very successful so far, and there is not much thing that can make it stop. Kitsch enlarges the mass, the mass empowers the kitsch. And there exists a father of these two brothers/sisters who feeds them both: a world that tries to swallow and to cash in everything that is valuable.

A real specter brings inheritance. A pseudo-specter, on the other hand, will only bring an empty chest as it has spent all of it itself before giving it to you. The strange thing is, only a few people open it: only a few people have the courage to see its emptiness, and want to stop this deceit. It is really hard to accept that a 'beautiful' lie is still a lie.

6.5 Fusion of Horizons

In this part, we will try to join the two approaches: the one that tries to understand kitsch as an object, and the one that tries to understand it via the subject, namely, the kitsch-person.

Our present horizon and the historical horizon of the artwork fuse so that we understand the work (23, 306). Our claim is that kitsch also has a horizon, but it is, again, a different kind. Kitsch's horizon is both occupying and imperialistic. This means that, there can not be a productive fusion but only a destructive occupation in a relation with a kitsch-work. It is like a sniper who always looks for an opportunity to shoot. As soon as you lose your *vigilance*, it catches you.

Kitsch paralyzes its victim, so that he/she is imprisoned in his/her present horizon. And because of this, he/she becomes unable to question his/her prejudices via historical horizon. At this point kitsch's horizon, which takes the place of historical horizon, starts to penetrate into him/her. As long as the victim is not aware of it, like cancer, it occupies more of him/her. This can be an explanation why millions of people spend more of their time (their life) in front of a TV: they are infected by kitsch. We have said that kitsch resembles to an obese: it is not a coincidence that most of those people are this kind.

Kitsch does not stop its occupation before changing its victim into a kitsch-person. This is its climax, because after that, that victim will not only consume the kitsch-works but also kitschify the artworks. A kitsch-person's horizon is just the reverse of a kitsch-work's. That is, while a kitsch-work imprisons its victim in his/her present horizon, a kitsch-person imprisons (also)

³⁷ Of course this is not the first manipulation of a mass in history, but that mass has never been at

an artwork in its historical horizon. So, the work becomes unable to tell him/her anything. Then, of course, there can be no inheritance, no fusion, nothing.

6.6 Poetry

A poem is never *mine*³⁸, but always “*ours*”. A kitsch-work is never “*ours*”, but always *mine*.

A poem is in fact something dangerous: it takes you from your warm place and leaves you in the realm of unfamiliar, alone. A poem always makes you feel lonely, that is to say, there is no one to help you to answer to its questions, whereas a kitsch-work always makes you feel that there are thousands of people like you, moreover, there is no questions to trouble you.

A poem only points to itself. But, as a kitsch-work is *parasitic*, it can not do that. It has to point to the old (once new) great works, which have proven themselves to have artistic value. So, a poem is always new (even if it is old) whereas a kitsch-work is always old (even at its birth).

If a poem gets closer to the “conventional”, it becomes dirtied: This dirt can be called as kitsch.

You can not consume a poem; you can not but consume kitsch.

A poem is ambiguous whereas for kitsch, ambiguity is a mistake.

Poetry creates beauty; kitsch sells it. Kitsch is a merchant of beauty.

A poem can not be written following a method whereas kitsch is always “mechanical” and produced by following a certain strategy.

this size before.

³⁸ Even the poet of that poem can not claim possession on it.

6.7 Kitsch and Avant-garde

Avant-garde wants to “transform the world.” For it, to be is to revolt. Kitsch is what this revolutionist hates most: a conformist. But we have also said that avant-garde’s non-conformism had “[generated] a new type of conformity”. (12, 111) This is because, when an avant-garde movement is accepted by the culture it opposes, before avant-garde is able to transform it; when it is domesticated; when it becomes to be seen as interesting but not challenging; when it becomes ‘harmless’, it becomes itself a (“new type of”) conformity. This is “the death of avant-garde.” The resistance methods of the power mechanisms have been improved. There is no need to kill a revolutionist any more: just commercialize him/her, he/she is dead. Another strategy is to include: when an avant-garde work is put into a museum, it becomes dumb, it becomes deaf: it becomes kitsch.

Avant-garde is against any kind of systematization whereas kitsch is a part of it, it is one of the weapons of the system³⁹, not of a definite one, but of the one whichever is ruling.

Avant-garde questions everything including itself; kitsch is the place where the ones who do not want to question escape. We have mentioned the possible reasons of this escape. But here we will make a differentiation between “sweet kitsch” and “sour kitsch” (32, 82) Wherever there is “boredom”, there

³⁹“ [T]he main trouble with avant-garde art and literature, from the point of view of fascists and Stalinists, is not that they are too critical, but that they are too ‘innocent’, that it is too difficult to inject effective propaganda into them, that kitsch is more pliable to this end. Kitsch keeps a dictator in closer contact with the ‘soul’ of the people. Should the official culture be one superior to the general mass-level, there would be a danger of isolation.” (30, 123)

emerges “sweet kitsch”. Wherever there is the feeling of “nothingness”, there emerges “sour kitsch.” Sour kitsch is “what wax[s] lyrical over despair”, Harries asks “What ... is more enjoyable than despair?” (32, 82) And as he indicates “[t]he popularity of decline, anguish, nothingness, absurdity and death” is a proof of its power on us. (32, 82) Even nothing is something for kitsch to sell.

Avant-garde challenges the values of the society; kitsch preserves them, it is the safeguard of its prejudices. But it goes even further. It makes us (but we also let it make us) believe that there is nothing wrong with these prejudices and that they are special and precious. “Kitsch is successful precisely because it lets man forget his self-deceit.” (32, 83)

Cliché and kitsch are twins. But while cliché is poor, kitsch is rich. This is because kitsch is a thief: it steals everything it can from avant-garde, and makes a fortune on them. So, kitsch becomes a boss, and makes cliché work for it. (By making another analogy we can say that kitsch is the seller of cliché or that, when cliché is sold or used for having domination on others, it becomes kitsch.) While avant-garde is after freedom, kitsch is after freeloader. When an avant-garde movement gets older, kitsch emerges like a vulture, and gets fed on it. (A vulture may wait till its victim dies; kitsch does not.) Avant-garde may use kitsch, but kitsch can only consume avant-garde. This is why we have blamed kitsch as one of the murderers of the avant-garde.

Avant-garde is a “dreamer⁴⁰” whereas kitsch is a dream-seller.

⁴⁰ A word from *Imagine* which is a song of John Lennon.

What we have said in the previous part is mostly valid in this part also: because avant-garde is, in character, close to poetry whereas kitsch is close to daily language.

Although Pop Art is also an avant-garde movement, it differs from the rest with its heavy usage of kitsch. Because of this heavy usage, it is always subject to misunderstanding and to the accusations of being kitsch. But “to make use of kitsch is not the same as to produce kitsch” (39, 109): Pop Art “use[s] “Kitsch” elements deliberately to make people aware of their strangling ubiquity.” (28, 314)

When we face with a work of Pop Art, although it may seem familiar to us due to the kitsch elements in it, we can still not identify it at once. We become puzzled: something “addresses” us, calls us to a “dialogue”. This is because Pop Art “need[s] interpretation. Kitsch never does.” (39, 109) Then, how can Pop Art be so different although most of its parts consist of kitsch? This is because Pop Art uses kitsch in an “ironic” manner, and “irony is incompatible with kitsch” (39, 111). While the “deadly serious” kitsch tries to construct the “monuments” of the “fetish mass culture”, Pop Art “[makes] fun of” it. (39, 111)

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Milan Kundera says “brotherhood of men on earth will be possible only on the base of kitsch.” (39, 16) Then, were we on the wrong way from the beginning? Should not we try to improve something that can establish the brotherhood/sisterhood of people, instead of criticizing it?

Before all, these words of Kundera should not be interpreted as a eulogy to kitsch. Kundera surely knows that a brotherhood/sisterhood of people that becomes real via kitsch can only be the brotherhood/sisterhood of the mass, which will most possibly turn into a totalitarian⁴¹ system that will be ruled by a small minority, by some *BigBrothers*; so, it can only be, if we name it, a *BigBrotherhood*. For us, these words of Kundera are, in fact, criticizing the kitschification of “the brotherhood of men”. Then, where can be the way that goes to the brotherhood/sisterhood of people? In a complete refusal of kitsch?

For Wawrzycka, “denying the existence of the world of commodities, has itself become a commodity, thus bearing within itself a seed of kitsch” (57). Again, these words should be interpreted carefully. In our use of these words, we do not mean to name every kind of rebellion, protestation or revolutionism as kitschy, but just want to say that any movement, whether revolutionist or conformist, when systematized, starts to produce its own kitsch, and that, even,

⁴¹ “By ignoring multiplicity of perspectives, kitsch presupposes transcendental knowledge and power, and hence claims a monopoly on truth.” (57)

being anti-systematization can become a kind of systematization as this was just what had happened to Dada. Kitsch is immune to the attacks that wants to destroy it, and in fact, will be happy of them; because, “[t]o reject kitsch outright is to be tempted to fall into kitsch” (45). If so, what can we do to cope with it?

We will once more refer to the words of Kundera: “As soon as kitsch is recognized for the lie it is, it moves into the context of non-kitsch.” (39, 107) Then, it seems that our *vigilance* to kitsch is the most important thing we have to cope with it. Via being able to detect it and via being -and also trying to make some others- *vigilant* to it, although we may not be able to end it, at least, we can stop its spread and can even, force it to regress.

This research is done with the hope of having a contribution to this purpose, even a slightest one.

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