

# ASPECTS REGARDING THE WORK OF ART

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**Abstract:** *An important feature of the work of art is the imitation of nature. It is important to mention that art does not imitate nature by creating a series of identical phenomena that repeat themselves; art imitates without repetition, without creating a set of identical copies of the same natural object. To the extent to which art imitates but does repeat nature, it opposes it. At the same time the work of art is self-sufficient in the sense of a “world”, a whole that needs to be evaluated according to its own criteria.*

**Key words:** *work of art, technique, artefact, aesthetics, value.*

## 1. Introduction

Tudor Vianu talked about a paradox of art: on the one hand, it pertains to the set of forms and processes of nature, as the product of a creative force and natural energies and, on the other hand, it opposes nature for two reasons: it is both a product of human technique and “the product of the ultimate activity of the spirit” [7]. To the extent to which art imitates but does repeat nature, it opposes it. At the same time the work of art is self-sufficient in the sense of a “world”, a whole that needs to be considered according to its own criteria. This can be seen in the works of art of the Antiquity that no longer belong to the context of their initial creation and admiration and their aesthetic value is by no means diminished. At the same time, the aforementioned lead to the fact that the opposition of art to nature must be viewed from the perspective of a new opposition, namely the one between art and technique. The phenomenon of art actually presents us with its three operational fields: nature, technique and spirit (or value).

## 2. Art and technique

Art is opposed to nature to the extent to which it opposes technique (not by mechanical imitation) and if it shares something with technique, it also shares it with nature. Namely, the finality of technique involves a determined purpose that may also be regarded as a simple mean. On the contrary, the finality of art is purposeless. From this viewpoint art resembles nature as the finality of nature is not external to nature. Therefore it is said that art forms a self-sufficient whole: like nature, it has no relative purpose (to other purposes). We could argue that art resembles a body. This idea was supported by Plato who spoke about *logos* as a living being whose parts were worthless unless they were considered by means of the whole and in view of the whole. Only in this way we can understand better the way in which art is said to imitate nature: it tends to become as nature, i.e. self-sufficient. We cannot agree with Tudor Vianu who claimed that art had something from machine and technique *because* it

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was not always dependent on its creator. The Romanian author considered that art became autonomous which is beyond doubt but not as a machine that would work according to its own rules. “The technique of art renders the work independent from the artist and brings it closer to the machinist type of human activity” [7]. The machine is not self-sufficient because it exists in view of an external finality, it is a means to achieve a certain goal, and when the goal disappears or when it can no longer contribute to its achievement, it becomes useless or immoral. Unless it is abandoned, it may serve other purposes by adapting the mechanisms to other needs. However we agree with the other observation of Tudor Vianu, namely that art resembles technique because, when lacking its expressivity, it becomes a mere means to achieve other purposes. The conclusion drawn from the comparison of art with nature is that art is a “field of interferences”. The ontology of the work of art is, therefore, a challenge for the philosophers that reflect on the status of the work of art as *artifact*.

From this angle (of the concept of artifact) the relation between art and technique may be better analyzed as long as the work of art is a product of human work which is as good as that of a machine. This analytical stance proved to be important especially in the context of surpassing an aesthetical tradition of mystical origin by valuing inspiration too much. In order to analyze the relation between art and technique as work products, the distinction between several types of work was made. Art belongs to the type of work that is exerted in liberal professions following the production of singular objects. The product of technique may be compared to art or may be considered to be artistic only when it is original, perfect, autonomous and singular (being a manufactured product). However,

a manufactured product does not succeed in the imitation of nature so as to reach perfection and autonomy as in the case of the work of art. As Tudor Vianu said, “art is the ideal of the entire human technique and also the technical product that reached the perfection of nature” [7].

An entirely different conception, in Romanian philosophy, was supported by Blaga in his *Orizont și stil (Horizon and Style)*, *Spațiul mioritic (The Mioritic Space)* sau *Geneza metaforei și sensul culturii (The Genesis of Metaphor and the Meaning of Culture)*, works that compose *The Trilogy of Culture*. Defining the human being as existence in the horizon of mystery, Blaga defines the creation of culture (mystical, artistic, philosophical, scientific) as revelation of mystery. From this perspective, the creation of a work of art bears two features: a) it is a metaphorical creation and b) has a stylistic seal. Unlike the facts of civilization that are stylistic products, the works of culture (therefore art as well) are destined to reveal a mystery. This brings us to the understanding of the difference between art and technique which can be explained even in Blaga’s terms starting from the revealing sense of mysteries and from the fact that art needs to be discussed according to its own criteria [3]. This means that we can transfer the general features of cultural creation, except autonomy, to art.

### 3. The foundation of the work of art

#### 3.1. Spatial and temporal isolation or discontinuity

Considering aesthetic value as a finality without purpose removes the work of art from the set of natural phenomena. Speculating on the idea of Kant that freedom is the faculty to naturally start from a series of phenomena [5], we can argue that the work of art is the end of a set of phenomena. We can also notice that, as

there is a specific pleasure for every artistic genre (if we were to accept the idea of Aristotle), there is also a specific way to acquire aesthetic autonomy for every genre in part. There are concrete devices to isolate the work of art from the profane life that surrounds it: silence in music, the frame of the painting in painting, the covers of the book in literature, the socle in sculpture, etc. The intangibility of objects, their lifting for the public, their exhibit or the light projection in art exhibits are all ways to isolate the work of art. On the device of isolation, Nicolai Hartmann said that “this detachment and isolation recurs in every art that shows something borrowed to reality or something free invented according to it. The most common place in this sense is painting where framing has an isolating effect. No admirer will think of mistaking the painted landscape for the real one, the portrait for the real person” [4]. By these conventional methods of isolation a proper artistic space is defined, having visibility, and discontinuity in relation to the mundane space as main features. In the case of fictional and narrative arts we can also speak about a temporal discontinuity: artistic space borrows the features of sacred time as presented in the descriptions of Mircea Eliade (and it is precisely this idea that some of his literary writings are trying to emphasize). Obviously, the time for admiring a painting is also comparable to a sacred time but certain arts such as literature, drama, or cinema turn time itself in substance of art. Starting from this suggestion of the analogy between art and religion on the change of the relation with space and time, we can understand better the necessity of isolating the work of art. Without a sacred space and a sacred time no experience of the sacred would be possible.

In aesthetics, the evaluation of the work of art by its own criteria is treated as a

matter of art autonomy. This claim was supported as part of the *aestheticism* that Blaga agrees with even if the delimitation of art from the other fields of culture (aesthetic purification) was sometimes justified. Blaga rejects aestheticism for it isolates art from the other fields of culture (such as the mythical) and leads to a weak art. In this sense, the Romanian philosopher recovers the tradition of German romanticism that insisted on the importance of mythology for the artistic creation. As translator of Goethe’s *Faust*, Blaga recovers in his philosophy the idea that art has to express feeling, real life and the vital force of the creative genius. By its revealing finality and the stylistic seal, “art can neither be isolated from the other fields of cultures, nor claim privileges” [2]. But this integration within the wholeness of culture is based on a content of ideas (or an ideal one) such as in Hegel or Schelling. Blaga completely rejects aesthetic idealism: “the artistic revelation of the mystery does not refer to the accomplishment of the absolute Idea or its approximation (as if art would be an improper idealist philosophy)”. The essence of art is to convert mysteries and not present ideas; besides, the absolute is impossible to render in ideas: “the only objective concept that man can have on “the absolute” is that of “mystery”, and this concept is the negative vector” [2]. The justification of idealism that art is the *sensible* representation of the Idea does not hold: idealist philosophers did not understand that, in art, the sensible does not fulfill the same function as knowledge (of nature), being subordinate not to the categories of the receptivity (of knowledge), but to the spontaneity of abyssal and stylistic categories.

### **3.2 Ordering or unity of variety**

This feature refers to a work of art’s own way of introducing a certain order in the diversity of things that it represents. By the

type of world ordering that it proposes, art distinguishes itself essentially from science which cannot represent the individual and the peculiar. As one of the important passages of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* read, science could only be the knowledge of the general (of essences) [1]. Consequently, it can only represent things by removing details and individual aspects which are considered as insignificant. On the contrary, art is even representation of the individual. Its instrument of representation of the unit of (ordering) variety is not the concept, but the image. For instance, in fine arts we have a certain geometrical outline that brings various details together (such as the scheme of the triangle in Renaissance, the square, the direction of orientation or the repetition of the same scheme), a motive that repeats itself in musical arts, by the grouping of the verses in various types of stanzas or the unification by rhythm and rime. The most important factor of unification is the form of the work that can be either general or individual. The individual form is also called internal form, due to the individualization of the work by modeling the material from the inside. Nicolai Hartmann claimed that the internal form opposes the external one which is merely accidental: "the term gave a vague remembrance of the ancient Aristotelian *eidos* which should have formed the principle of shaping the exterior as internal moving force" [4].

The issue was intensely debated by authors of German idealism such as Schelling or Hegel that gave an intellectual answer to the issue of the relation between aesthetic intuition and the faculty of the intellect. According to these authors, there is an absolute reason that lies at the base of the real; in this case artistic intuition is only an intermediate stage to the access of conscience to truth and fulfills, as well as the intellect, but to an inferior extent, the

function of ordering the real. Although Schelling situates intuition above the concept, he sees the absolute as rational [4]. According to Hartmann, we would not have an intellectualism in the narrow sense to bring the relation with the world to concept and judgment, but an intellectualism in the wide sense considering "aesthetic intuition as a way of cognitive perception" [4]. The aesthetic theories that are influenced by the philosophy of German idealism are oriented towards the problem of content (of the Idea that is rendered through art and the spiritual life in general), discussing less the matter of apparent form and its aesthetic value. Hegel's idea according to which art, religion and philosophy all say the same truths is well-known by now; it is expected for the difference between various artistic forms not to be less significant.

However, the various aesthetics of form gave a particular importance to the fact that "unity in variety is proper to any natural figment, also a unity of the parts." [4]. The object of interest for aesthetics and its main difficulty precisely consists in defining the modality to adjust form to the content of expression, i.e. *the unity between form and content*. The principle of unity between form and content, entitled "monarchical subordination" by Theodor Lipps refers not only to the subordination of diversity to a common element, but also to the unification resulted from the first subordination of an element or a part of diversity" [6]. This subordination is *immanent* (as a smaller piece of land to a larger one) or *in juxtaposition* (the subordination of a part of the whole to a closer part as in the case of the secondary units of a building being subordinated to the central unit). These subordinations "create unity"; "and this particularly corresponds to *the fundamental law of aesthetics which is a law of unity*" [6].

### 3.3. Clarification or guiding aesthetic perception

Baumgarten, the founder of aesthetics, spoke about this important feature of the work of art. Clarification is the process by which the artist abandons the sphere of the familiar, of what is previously known to rebuild reality from his own perspective following a personal imaginative scheme. In general, our referring to individual things is mediated and determined by the already made representations that taught us the relation with the world; the reality we perceive is already oriented by the *prejudices* that come to anchor our knowledge in the world and the concepts we order. When discussing real perception, Nicolai Hartmann said that “in real perception we are always provided with a complex structure, a unification of many details full of contrasts and transitions ... that naturally complete themselves; as we never see, optically, what can be seen in an object, yet we complete it in a natural way, we link, we unify – and we do not even realize what we are doing” [4]. Our perceptions are supported by a series of syntheses and anticipations as when we look a person in the eyes and “see” his/her previous life in his/her eyes.

At the same time, our perception is oriented towards a series of interests and valuable relations, as well as towards certain emotional features. Consequently, “perception transcends itself” [4]; we go beyond what we perceive and select a “perceptive field”. Thus aesthetic perception presupposes a return to a sort of “primitive attitude”, but not as we encounter it in children or in the people of primitive cultures. We are dealing with a revision of the *objective attitude* that is centered on knowledge without touching objectivity. Aesthetic attitude tends to eliminate entirely the “noematic content” [7] to preserve only “the perceptive content” from the relation with the world.

Aesthetic perception is no “real knowing perception”; it can only be compared to the “playfulness”, but this playfulness is conscious and controlled. Clarification consists in the purification of aestheticism by the intellectual “debris” and the already established significances. We must not mistake the idea of clarifying with the procedure through which artistic images are clarified; we refer to the *clarification of the aesthetic* and not the clarity of the image. The equivocal, ambiguity, polarity, obscure, confuse, indecision, and mystery may as well be clear from an aesthetic viewpoint. The means for clarifying (as well as those of isolation and ordering) are specific to each artistic experience. The direction, dimension, forms, colour, shape are aspects that need clarifying in fine arts. This is also the case of literature and especially poetry that is dealing with a vision on the world that is different from the “photographic” mean, introducing an intuitive vision that selects certain images and impressions that do not lack “clarity”, yet this clarity is aesthetic and not analogical-representative. Clarifying is nothing else than “*the guiding of perception inside the aesthetic relation* [guidance by which] *the detail becomes essential*” [4].

### 3.4. Idealization and de-realization. Stratification of the work of art

It has been often noticed that the work of art belongs to the field of the apparent, and not to that of existence. This was also the reason why the discipline that chose the beautiful as object of study was called “aesthetics”: the beautiful pertains to perceptive appearance and does not have a real existence or an ideal one. Idealization consists in the tendency to give to the beautiful a status *as if* it existed. Kant firmly noticed that the feeling of the beautiful derives from our way of relating to the object, having the conscience of pleasure that this object awakens in us [5].

The appearance of the work of art is hence an appearance for conscience, a fact that implies the adaptation of this appearance to the operations of the conscience. The work of art is ideal precisely because it is constantly situated in opposition to the real; but this does not mean that it is unreal. Tudor Vianu believed that “the ideality of art is areal” [7]. An author such as Nicolai Hartmann assessed that the work of art is *stratified*: we have a series of representations that pertain to the sensible appearance of the work of art and a series of representations that send beyond of what reality or the sensible existence signifies: “in this way the natural aesthetic object is built on two strata that are manifestly posited one after another precisely as the two steps of intuition [...] this double nature of being, with all its complete heterogeneity does not render the object as split in appearance or lacking unity” [4]. Stratification is nothing else than the relation of unity and harmony of nature outside us with the nature inside us which makes “the beautiful an object of two types” in one and the same object: it exists and it does not exist at the same time. Hartmann also speaks of “realization and appearance” or “derealization and occurrence”. By these terminological couples, the German philosopher wishes to show that genuine art is not an imitation of nature, but, on the contrary, an *occurrence*

of a new nature (which actually makes reference to the issue of isolation of the work of art): “reality on the first plan perceived with the senses, a mere appearance in the second – being in it-self in the first, pure being-for-two in the second” [4]. The detachment of art from the real is what Hartmann calls *derealization*, and this aspect involves a *special significance of freedom*, namely *creation*.

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