

Maria Antonia González: *El arte develado. Consideraciones estéticas sobre la hermenéutica de Gadamer*, México: Herder, 2005, 170 pp.

“Art begins precisely there where something can also be done differently”¹. The text here featured is one of the epigraphs preceding the work we shall review, and states the serious effort it provides for the vindication of H.G. Gadamer’s aesthetic thought in light of the main theses of his hermeneutical proposal.

From this vantage, the book not only aims to shed light on a theme that has, more often than not, been neglected by Gadamer’s interpreters, who –as is said by the author herself– have frequently trodden the road of forgetting, or at the very least, dismissing, his aesthetics; it also strives to evince the tight knit between aesthetics and hermeneutics. In other words, the four chapters that comprise this book will aim to persuade us that aesthetic reflections are a structural element of Gadamer’s philosophical project, as they help a considerable part of his hermeneutical and ontological positions converge and be accentuated (p.23).

In her Introduction, the author reminds us of some aspects relating to the composition of *Truth and Method*² which shed a favourable light on her approach. To begin with, she notes that, even as it is certain that the main concern of this work is the problem of truth and method for the so-called sciences of the spirit, it should not be forgotten that the starting point for Gadamer’s reflections was the inquiry for truth in a work of art and, more concretely, for the relationship between the work of art and being. Secondly, it is sustained that the problematic of art is not just the point of departure for hermeneutical reflection, but also its point of arrival, as shown by the important expostulation on the beautiful in Plato, in the last chapter of the work. According to the author, these two confirmations will allow Gadamer an accentuation of the possibility of drawing a mode of being from the work of art towards the mode of being in being; a possibility that is doubtlessly and amply displayed in his later essays on art and language.

¹ Gadamer, H.-G., “El juego del arte”, in: *Estética y hermenéutica*, Madrid: Tecnos, 2001, p. 131.

² Gadamer, H.-G., *Verdad y método. Fundamentos de una hermenéutica filosófica*, Salamanca: Sigueme, 1977. As of now, shall use the acronym *TM* when referring to this work.

All considered, the author affirms that Gadamer's hermeneutics are interwoven with his aesthetic in a back and forth way. This is why she will use the first chapters of her book to show us how hermeneutics are structured from aesthetic reflections focused mainly on the category of the game, understood as representation (*Darstellung*)³. In the following chapters, she underscores how the hermeneutical categories –comprehension, interpretation, reading, the fusion of horizons, historicity, among others- became incorporated to aesthetics to such a degree that Gadamer conceives the work of art in terms of the aforesaid categories.

In the frame of these initial positions, the author also sustains that Gadamer's aesthetic paradigm is inscribed within the road set out by many contemporary philosophies which –to some extent- found privileged horizons in the arts, even if not exclusively in them, after the so-called “crisis of reason”. It is from this gamble for the arts and the pursuit of other manners of philosophizing beyond the limits of Enlightened reason, that the Gadamerian questioning of Kantian aesthetics and the subjectivization of art produced therein is also understood. To which, the author adds, the closeness –and distance- with Hegel's approach⁴ is resolved by Gadamer's steering towards Heidegger; in a gyre by which Gadamer ends up by subscribing to the impossibility of exhausting the work of art, and admitting to the need of conceiving it more in terms of its intimate communion with being, understood as language (p.18).

The first chapter of the book, entitled “La recuperación del concepto de juego” (The Recovery of the Concept of the Game), busies itself with a punctual analysis of this concept, such as it appears in *TM*, and proceeds to confront it with the acceptance that it has in Kant, Schiller and Fink. Likewise, this chapter presents us with Gadamer's incorporation of Huizinga's main thesis on games in his famous *Homo ludens*, in order to conclude with a presentation of the Gadamerian concept of game as a counter-concept for the modern category of subject. From the spate of themes developed in this section, we shall highlight what follows.

In the first place, we are reminded that, in the context of *TM*, hermeneutical aesthetics serve two purposes: on the one hand, they aim to criticize modern subjectivism, and with it, the ideas of truth and method underlying it; on the other, they strive to establish another notion of truth that ultimately allows for a different experience of being (p.24). From this per-

³ From the Gadamerian vantage, the re-presentation (*Darstellung*) is posited as the manner of being of the work of art and being in general.

⁴ A relationship Gadamer himself expressed in terms of a “tense proximity” with regard to diverse aspects of his philosophical hermeneutics.

spective, the key concept that Gadamer finds to reach these objectives is the concept of game as a mode of being of the work of art; a concept which most certainly permits him to develop an ontology of the work of art, that will eventually become articulated with the central theses of his hermeneutical philosophy.

Gadamer, it can be seen, had to disconnect himself from the appreciation that was given to the concept by Kant and Schiller to find the “subjective signification” he himself sought to dismantle. In this sense, even as this chapter broadly surveys the Gadamerian critique to Kant’s aesthetics – albeit without offering a critical evaluation of the latter– the author is emphatic when it comes to stating the distance between them, paying special attention to the problem of subjectivity and to the recovery of truth in art. Likewise, with regard to Schiller, she underlines how –even when Gadamer puts himself in a critical perspective from which to confront the Kantian ethics– the philosopher also introduces the concept of game with regard to that of freedom, without ceasing to perceive this concept as something referential to the subject, that is, as a human behaviour, insofar as it aspires to freedom.

From González’s outlook, the concept of game would allow Gadamer to distance himself from any interpretation defining the experience of art as the behaviour of a subject apprehending or representing an object; rather, the game would be susceptible of definition independently of the player’s conduct (p.31). The author also finds it justified for Gadamer to part from a critique of the serious/ludic opposition –which is considered in terms of the player’s behaviour and of how he undertakes the game– in his effort to direct his reflection to the essence of the game itself. From this perspective, she reminds us that, even if in *TM* Gadamer defines the game as “the pure realization of movement”, in his later work, *The Actuality of the Beautiful*⁵, he introduces the element of rationality –which helps derive the order, rules and ends that are proper to the human game– to distinguish it from the game that occurs in nature. In brief, she considers that, for Gadamer, the human being is the entity that’s capable of self-imposing ends within a game and thus ordaining movement in compliance with those ends (p. 34).

On another count, and closely adhering to the Gadamerian analysis of the essence of the game, the author stresses the element of otherness also elaborated by it, maintaining that it allows Gadamer to conceive the

⁵ Gadamer, H.-G., *La actualidad de lo bello. El arte como juego, símbolo y fiesta*, Barcelona: Paidós, 1991.

ludic space as the meeting place for alterities and the playing itself with a “being played”. This, she claims, would cast aside any possibility of referring to a consciousness or subject which, in the solitude of its thoughts, was to conform and comprise the game all on its own (p.35).

In the frame of this presentation of the Gadamerian recovery of the concept of game, which incides fundamentally on the autonomy of the game and on the ludic space that it comprises, González moves onto a detailed exposition of Gadamer’s reception of Huizinga’s main theses in *Homo ludens*, which will allow him to reinforce his critique of the “subjective meaning” of the game.

From the variety of themes here remarked, the one concerning the behaviour of the player as regards the objectives at the heart of the game will permit Gadamer to refer to the game as self-representation. González occupies herself with this definition in the last part of her first chapter as, to her mind, it will become the most important aspect of the Gadamerian argumentation leading to the affirmation of being and to the work of art as self-representation.

According to González, for Gadamer the game can only find its purpose in re-presentation, because playing is always and in itself a re-presenting. Even if the game were to access its re-presentation through the players –as it is they who re-present it by playing it, and only bring it into being by doing so–, in this re-presentation the players also abandon themselves to the ludic space, to the game itself that is the holder of the action. Thus too, when defining the game as self-re-presentation mediated by the player, Gadamer would be emphasizing the otherness that is here introduced and explained from the spectator’s situation. This is how, the author claims, the world of the game is revealed as being simultaneously open and closed, which is what would, in turn, allow Gadamer to derive the mode of being of the game to the mode of being of the work of art.

In the second chapter, entitled “La obra de arte como juego” (The work of art as game), we are afforded with an analysis of the transformation of the game into a game of art, parting from the Gadamerian phrasing of the “transformation of a conformation” (*Verwandlung ins Gebilde*). Here, too, the main elements comprising the ontology of the work of art, such as the “disappearance of the world”, “mimesis”, “recognition” and the “increase of being”, are boarded. They are all themes dealt with by Gadamer in chapters four and five of *TM*, where the relationship between art and being is made visible. In this chapter, Gadamer’s aesthetics are also confronted with

Hegel's, considering that the aforesaid elements are owed, in great part, to the Hegelian thesis on art as a "sensible manifestation of the idea".

Of the series of abovementioned topics, we should like to occupy ourselves with the critical analysis this chapter offers on the Gadamerian definition of the game of art as the "transformation of a conformation". González reminds us that Gadamer introduces this definition to distinguish the game of art from any other game. In this way, when the game transforms into art, it reaches its perfection and its ideality, as it is now shown independently of its players and appears as an autonomous conformation: in other words, it arises as a work. The work our game evolves into is designated as a conformation, and the autonomy that's gained as a result of this, as transformation.

The author continues by saying that the autonomy of the game of art before the players is defended by Gadamer mainly for three reasons. The first of them implies the avoidance of Kantian subjectivism, where the experience of a work of art depends entirely on the subject, given that, for Kant, the predicate "beautiful" is not, in fact, a predicate that can be imputed to the object, but refers instead to the agreement of the subject's cognitive faculties. Thus, if Gadamer made the totality of sense that was revealed in the work of art depend solely on the spectator, he would not be straying far from the Kantian subjectivism he had criticized, as the work of art would dilute into an infinity of subjective spectators' interpretations, and be nothing more than that, lacking a sense of its own. The second reason involves the fact that the work of art carries its own sense, a sense that is certainly revitalized, actualized and executed by whoever experiences the work of art, even as that sense belongs to it always. The third reason consists in that, if this totality of sense were to depend exclusively on the artist, as creator of the work of art, it would once again remit to an exacerbated subjectivism which, even if it no longer depended on the spectator, would befall the artist. At this point, González reminds us to what an extent Gadamer came to oppose the genius theory defended by Kant and Romanticism with the notion of an art related to the *sensus communis*, and to socially conformed practical knowledge (pp.52-53).

With regard to the above, the author also concludes that the concept of art as "transformation into a conformation" not only relegates aesthetic subjectivism: in this formulation, art can be thought of as the totality of sense in which a re-presentation occurs, and also remit to the "disappearance of the world" in which quotidian existence unfurls. In this sense, the thematic of the "disappearance of the world" will be a cornerstone in the

argumentation for the truth of art for González, as the emergence or appearance of the world does not imply a shift into a different world, as is the case with Fink's theory, for example. On the contrary, in her opinion, the Gadamerian argumentation would not lead to the distinction between "reality" and "illusion", or between ludic and quotidian spaces, as the Gadamerian ontology does not properly consider a "given reality", but rather, a created, interpreted and understood one (p.57).

From this same position, the author also highlights how the thematic involving the "disappearance of the world" is directly related to the ontological status which Gadamer defended for art, as the latter cannot be understood as the "copy" of an alleged reality that operates as its parameter and has a higher ontological status. Quite contrarily, what emerges in the work of art is in reality a heightening of the truth of its being.

The above is followed by an extensive exposition of how Gadamer picks up the Aristotelian notion of *mimesis* to help explain the emergence of being and truth in the work of art, even as it is explained as a form of recognition of the world veiled by the ontological oblivion of quotidian life. Also in this chapter, González makes a the pertinent inclusion of the hermeneutical category of "reading" to dwell on the access to the work of art, despite this being an issue that Gadamer was to develop posteriorly to *TM*. In light of the thesis she espouses, however, this category gives an exemplary account of the relationship between aesthetics and hermeneutics, insofar as the works of art, in Gadamer's own terms, need to be re-actualized, revitalized, in brief, re-presented (p.78).

The second chapter ends by remarking how the Gadamerian focus on the game of art is also a rendering communicative that may be understood through the model of conversation, to later board the theme of the "hermeneutical identity" of the work in the flow of its re-presentations. In summary, González concludes that what is at the core of the Gadamerian aesthetic is not, thus, any form of subjectivity, but rather the work itself understood as conformation, as a transformation of the real world and as a total mediation, where the work cannot be distinguished from its interpretation. Hence, whether it be through reading or representation, what Gadamer would have rescued is that art cannot be thought of as an object unto itself to which the spectator is inessential, nor as an ahistorical object that remains identical to itself through time so that it may also be identically apprehended by an aesthetic experience that succeeds in performing the distinction between the work and its re-presentation (pp. 84-85).

The third chapter, entitled “Temporalidad e historicidad en la obra de arte: arte y tiempo” (Temporality and Historicity in the Work of Art: Art and Time) takes on the temporality of the aesthetic such as Gadamer develops this theme in *TM* and in his later work, *The Actuality of the Beautiful*. With this in mind, González first addresses the Gadamerian concept of “festival”, which is invested with a structural analogy to the temporality of the work of art, implying its constant becoming, as well as its permanence. In this same vein, which conceives temporality as the “simultaneity” between the present and the past, the author finds the analysis of the category of tradition to be relevant, there where, to her judgment, Gadamer’s theses on temporality, finitude and being understood as language finally converge. In this chapter we are also presented with the applicability of the hermeneutical concepts of the “fusion of horizons”, “effectual history” and “comprehension” for the analysis of the work of art, with which the relation between aesthetics and hermeneutics is, again, remarked.

This section of the book is accompanied by a subhead called “El lector como jugador” (The Reader as Player), which busies itself with analyzing the role of the spectator in the experience of art, parting from the premise that, for Gadamer, the work of art requires of re-presentation for each case. In this section González also has the opportunity to embellish on the pertinence of the categories of “reading” and “dialogue” in the analysis of a work of art.

The chapter is, indeed, one of the more complex ones in the book, because not only does it take on the enigmatic temporal structure of the work of art that derives from its characterization as a game and as re-presentation; the author also wants to show the way back from aesthetic to hermeneutics. Said purpose is not only amply achieved by this chapter, it also represents a fundamental contribution in favour of a unitary vision of Gadamer’s thought that has been quite neglected by his critics and by some of his interpreters.

Of the series of issues boarded in this chapter, we shall only concern ourselves with some aspects which help portray the two-way venue that is advanced by the author as being distinctive to Gadamerian aesthetics and hermeneutics. From this perspective, the first consideration she brings forth is the suitability of the category of the “festival” to help discover the temporality of the work of art, because, just as the festival has its being in its becoming, and is, only to the extent that it is celebrated over and over again, the same can be said of the work of art, which is, if it is re-presented in each case. But this analogy between the time of the festival and the time

of the work of art is also applicable to the temporality of all interpretative experience, as each of these three cases deal with an autonomous reality that needs to be re-presented, but also with the participants of the festival, the spectators of art and the interpreters that enter the game of a re-presentation or interpretation that transcends them always.

Returning to art, González reminds us that, for Gadamer, just as the receiver belongs to the mode of being of the work of art, he who celebrates a festival also belongs to it, which is but another way of saying that their participation falls halfway between radical subjectivization and radical objectivization. To act and to suffer meet simultaneously in both experiences, without either of the elements in the binomial predominating, because action is required, as is a particular hermeneutical effort to confront the work with an attitude or disposition that allows it to say what it has to say. But this effort consists in layering the previous opinions and expectations of sense so that they do not override the work by having it completely determined (pp.89-90).

It follows from the above that the experience of art also produces a “fusion of horizons” (*Horizontverschmelzung*), for once the work is understood, and even when it has its own horizon and the interpreter actualizes the work to his own, there is no way with which to distinguish strictly between what the interpreter puts into the work and what the work says for itself. But since art, for Gadamer, depends –according to González– on the basis of familiarity, what the artist re-presents in the work is but a “common” and binding “truth” (*sensus comunis*) that is not exclusively valid for himself, but which will always be shared and conformed by a community, in the frame of a tradition that is capable of understanding it regardless of how iconoclastic its re-presentation is. It is clear, in any case, that this belonging to a common ground also includes the possibility of breaking with tradition and with what’s established, a theme that is doubtlessly and greatly clarified by Gadamerian hermeneutics.

To González’s own judgment, this community grounding for the experience of art will allow Gadamer to articulate his reflections on the ontology of the work of art with those referred to historicity as the principle for all hermeneutical experience, as well as with those which remit to the ontological character of language. The thesis of simultaneity in art as a unification of past and present leads directly to the dynamism of the tradition inherent to all hermeneutics and to their eminently linguistic nature.

This is how, for González, the categories of simultaneity and tradition become intertwined in the Gadamerian reflection on the ontology of the

work of art, since the work of art is a re-presentation of tradition, a re-presentation of the historic world and, lastly, a re-presentation of being understood as language (p.105). But this is further precised when the author reminds us that the experience of art is a primordially dialogic experience where the work of art is seen as a *thou* that can be comprehended and interpreted. In this sense, dialogue could be conceived with reference to tradition, and the work of art, too, understood as text; if it is, furthermore, a manifestation of tradition, then comprehending the work by way of dialogue would, in the end, imply an understanding of tradition (p.112).

The fourth chapter, “Arte y verdad (arte y ser)” [Art and Truth (Art and Being)] analyzes the definition of the work of art as symbol. The analysis leads González to dwell on the Gadamerian ontology and to particularly note the two-way street between the work of art and being. In other words, it seeks to establish how the work of art is, on the one hand, a re-presentation of being, and, on the other, how the work of art and being are re-presentation and language. Likewise, as in its concept, to conceive the work of art as a symbol also means that it be conceived as a game of concealment and unconcealment, as *alétheia*, this section also affords us with a counterpoint between Gadamer’s and Heidegger’s positions on art and truth. The development of all of the above allows González to, once again, show that Gadamer’s hermeneutical ontology is so narrowly related to his aesthetics, that the first cannot even be imagined without the second. On a separate count, the ontology of the work of art would function as a link between aesthetics and hermeneutics, as both the work of art and being are re-presentation or, in Gadamerian terms, “games”. Besides its thematic wealth, the last chapter of the book has the virtue of conveying the articulation underlying the aesthetic proposal of *TM* with Gadamer’s late writings not just on art, but on language, too. This is how many of the issues developed in the previous chapters come to acquire a greater clarity. For example, González sustains that characterizing art as a symbol is but another way for Gadamer to argue for the impossibility of its definition on the basis of an original-copy relationship, as had already been sustained in *TM*. In this sense, what the work of art –as symbol- re-presents, is out there and not outside it, which does not mean that the work is lacking in referentiality and vinculation, but that it says something about the world, something about being, even as that which it says is put forth in its own words, as a construction of sense, a comprehension and interpretation of singular being which does not admit comparison with reality because of its own unity (p.148).

Thus, this chapter returns to the matter of the temporality of the experience of art, with the author emphasizing the historicity and finitude of Gadamer's aesthetics: art as a re-presentation of being is always an actualized expression that becomes revitalized with every reader, in a different way each time. What she means to say with this is that actualization conceals meanings even as it reveals others, and that the work of art, like being, cannot be apprehended in its totality. It also follows that, for González, that which binds being and art unbreakably is language precisely, also understood as the re-presentation of being, so that coomprehension of the work of art is also movement that's performed by language, and towards it (p.151).

Finally, and following a survey of the Gadamerian reception of the beautiful in Plato, González seems to conclude that both his aesthetics and hermeneutics are run through and through by the indissoluble triad of art-being-truth, which finds its binding link in language, given that each of its elements is essentially language, and understanding language as representation and as a game. With relation to the above, she also affirms that the game category can function as a lead even in Gadamerian thought posterior to *TM*, and that the category of re-presentation is central to all Gadamerian aesthetics.

In the introductory pages to her book, the author showed us that Gadamer had responded to the question of how thinking of being, no longer as if it were an essence, a foundation, or a substrate, was remitted to the experience of art (p. 22). The book concludes not just with the certainty that aesthetics are crucial to Gadamerian hermeneutics, but also with a suggestive invitation –which we welcome– for the recovery of the indisputable relationship between art and thinking by contemporary philosophy.

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