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The Time of the Aesthetic Experience according to H.G. Gadamer

Abstract: Does following the call that the work of art addresses to its contemplator's consciousness lead to sequential reintegration into another existential area? Is the full living of the aesthetic message a form of extrapolation in a moment of temporal and spatial suspension, in a meta-moment that opens itself towards primordial ontic grounds? If this interpretive version is accepted, then isn't it necessary to re-assess the role of art in the human paradigm? By opening these topic areas, H.G. Gadamer tries to deepen the themes arising here, starting from the understanding of the art phenomenon as a celebration of the spirit.

Keywords: Aesthetic, Artistic Approach, Rejoicing, Temporality of Art, Creation, Celebration, Work of Art

Writings that point out the *art* phenomenon have tried and will always try to find and postulate decisive responses to queries such as: Why do we construct works of art? Why is the artist present in the excitement of a world often insensitive to the aesthetic dimension and how does he assume the drama and the sublime of his existence? What fascinates us in the art and towards what does it lead and transpose us? If, according to Dostoievski, *beauty will save the world*, then can the artist be regarded as a saviour of the human spirit, a pioneer towards the light of transcendence? Are there, according to Petre Țutea, two ways to absolute: one belonging to *sanctification* and the other to the *artistic genius*? Follower of the metaphysical and hermeneutical thinking mode of Heideggerian type, H.G. Gadamer will attempt an analysis of the artistic phenomena, surprising an undiscovered aspect of it, namely its *celebrating* character, the fact that art is a celebration of human consciousness. Focusing on this feature, Gadamer will also indirectly bring answers to the above-mentioned questions.

One of the states likely to induce to the human being the most intensive convulsive moods, feelings of maximum collapse and rare lucidities, which may be dramatic as well, is represented by *loneliness*. Aristotle tells us that man is a social human being, outside the city he could only be beast or god. One of the most efficient forms to avoid the twilight of loneliness was discovered by humanity in *the act of celebration*. Any celebration requires alliances, communions, gathering together of people and thus, it is not only

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a temporary relegation of loneliness, but also its sequential forgetting. In the midst of celebration, the one who is celebrating forgets the stuffy difficulty of his/her own existence and the way in which he/she is always alone in front of vicissitudes which he/she constantly encounters throughout life. The celebration releases him/her and gives him/her a respite, a pause-syncope, a parenthesis in the flow of an ebullient life, projecting him/her in another spatial and temporal dimension, in the complex dimension of what is being celebrated. But this projection does not separate him/her from the other human beings, does not isolate him/her, by presenting him/her as a solitary individuality. On the contrary, here is refused any type of isolation, and is instead cultivated the communion, the participation to the celebration being a *collective* act. To take part in a celebration means to join a group which celebrates and the one who is not celebrating is excluded from that group, more precisely, he/she excludes from it himself/herself, he/she refuses himself/herself to the celebrating act, an act that can only be committed together, through the reunion of various individualities¹. The celebration involves the stopping of daily activities, the stopping of human beings' anchoring in the rush of mundane realities. There is a suspension in which people's gathering in order to celebrate is doubled by the jumping over ephemeral worries of the daily life. These worries do not have any longer the capability to provide guidance on an individual, he/she as an individuality does not matter anymore, he/she is not important anymore, for that they are no longer invested with existential value. When the celebration occurs, the worry loses its overwhelming influence on the one who celebrates. The split with the presses and the goals imposed by engaging in the mechanisms of the mundane shall be carried out in such a context, in common, by inscribing each individual in a new collective, the group of those who are celebrating a feast. So if the day-to-day work, the effort of production and the exhaustion in the consumption that open towards a new production involve an individualization, despite appearances, the celebration gives rise to a real, active and alive communion. In the daily activities and actions, people are working next to each other but, in fact, they are bore away, in the sense of alienation, of the lack of openness to each other. The role of the person operating in mundane along with the others is nothing more than the role of a spiritually extinguished individuality, showing an ossified consciousness to one another. When working together, as a matter of fact, people are solitary souls, each and every one stepping on his/her road, *parallel* with the other one's road. In the act of celebration, there is an opening towards the others for the joy of celebration. Here we only have one way to be followed by several people.

¹ Gadamer, H.-G., *Actualitatea frumosului (The Actuality of Beauty)*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2000, p. 110.

They acquire, in this context, common values and targets, create a community governed by the genuine solidarity. Foreigners holding a single common way, they join one another for the same fact and thus transform themselves into comrades for a single feast, comrades who could have never been such when dealing with daily activities of the everyday life, widespread in its always new determinations and expectations. The celebration does not propose new objectives to be achieved, always other plans that should be materialized and completed. On the contrary, it does not have a future to lead towards, or a past that is always evoked. It only occurs in an *over-time* stamp, in a suspended present, in a moment without developmental transit. In the celebration's over-time, everything happens now and here. What is celebrated is not re-mentioned but lived each time *as if it were* for the first time.

In Gadamer's opinion, the celebration which brings people to an active communion holds powerful artistic meanings. It is not an accident that humanity often celebrated the act of artistic creation. The celebration is perhaps the most advanced framework for reliving, releasing artistic resources, aesthetic creative potencies. Starting from this observation, it may be noticed that most means, representation forms for celebrations have been and are of artistic nature. Thus, in the celebration are to be found almost always artistic elements and acts such as: the festive speech that is related to the rhetoric art, beautiful words, habits, traditions, rites and clothes appropriate to the concerned celebration. All of these items can be potentiated, in Gadamer's opinion, by *the festive silence's presence*. It is about the state called by the common expression: to be stuck dumb with admiration. This silence of the one who celebrates is the resultant, materialized at the body level, of the status of highest aesthetic delight. The admirer/contemplator may be seized by a moment of silence in front of a brilliant artistic creation in the sense that he does not find adequate words to express the feeling he gets in front of such masterpieces. Here, the aesthetic celebration of the spirit called and raised by the vision of the masterpiece is shrouded in the absence of words, of the utterance. In front of a masterpiece, the spirit feels that any word would be pointless, only the living and assuming of the revealed beauty are important in this context. The art as a celebration of the spirit not only meets, but also gives the common impulse of collective participation in an *intentional activity*. Thus, it picks and puts together with a view to celebrate, assigns to the common will an end and a belief which aims at the celebration a determined factor. This collective fixation that leads to a unique direction the pulses of the will and thinking of those who participate in the celebrations act generates *the association* and prevents the splitting of the group which is celebrating in separate individualities that isolate and close themselves, by redirecting their personal areas. In the midst of celebrations there are no individual areas or

boundaries, but only a single common sphere of ecstatic experience. The celebration favours the communion and cancelling of the individuality, by its loss in the exuberant excitement of the common celebration.

According to Gadamer, the loss of a clearly demarcated individuality occurs while is felt a detachment from a day-to-day temporal dimension and an integration of the consciousness of fluctuations in the time of celebration. The time of celebration represents a homogeneous and indivisible fact that cannot be fragmented in divided moments. So, when a group of people are celebrating, they anchor the rhythm of their beings during the celebration. The mundane time is suspended, more precisely, the one who celebrates lives the experience of the spatial and temporal suspension, the projection in another spatial and temporal dimension. Gadamer thinks that art is exceptionally this opening towards another ontic, as well as gnoseologic dimension. Art determines, for those who are celebrating, the projection from the daily space and time to other universes of emotion and understanding, it influences the consciousness of those initially involved in the time and space which characterize the superficial mundane, for leading them towards depths of the spirit, towards which one can direct himself/herself through exercise and through assuming the artistic experience. According to Gadamer, the work of art means in relation to a consciousness that celebrates it, an organic whole, a homogeneous structure that gravitates around its own centre-atom, it cannot be dealt in a fragmented manner. You live a work of art in its entirety or you do not experience it emotionally and cognitively at all. It is not possible to only engage in a fragment of a work of art². This time of celebration of this work of art cannot pull you out from the time of the partial trivial mundane time, but it projects and re-situates you totally, in such a way that to celebrate a creation of art means to celebrate this achievement in all its spiritual senses and dimensions. This *time of the work of art* is conceptually similar to the *sacred time* evoked by Mircea Eliade or to the *psychological time*, tackled by Bergson's analyses. For Bergson, the foundation of dynamics that defines life is represented by the pure duration. The present may not be thought, in this context, as a fragment of this duration, from this active flow of permanent becoming. The duration cannot be fragmented and presented under different states discontinuously. It lasts for the purposes of a ceaseless process, of a modification that always maintains the same substance, but changes constantly its auxiliary forms. Thus, the past is connected to the present and the future is already included in it. *The subjective time* involved here going down in the telluric dimension of life, the detachment of the rhythm of temporal surfaces, the exile from the boundaries of second temporalities, from the flow of the mundane time towards the depths of a primordial

² *Ibidem*, pp. 111-114.

pulsation which has its own ontic rhythm³. In Mircea Eliade's opinion, the duality profane time – sacred time involves a primordial difficulty essential for the believer in the existence of Divinity. This difficulty will be confined to the impossibility of full anchoring in a temporal boundary to the other persons' detriment. The believer is unable to assume a radical and irreversible detachment of the profane temporality, being connected to it in an ontic manner through his/her mortal temper, through his/her profound structures bearing the stigma of impermanence. Being, however, a believer, he can neither abandon, nor reject the dimension of the sacred, concretely and completely integrating in the universe of profane time. Therefore, he must choose the moments he considers the most redeeming for his consciousness and to always relive these capital events, by evoking them not as though they had occurred once but, on the contrary, as though they are going on each and every time they are celebrated⁴. In the same way, the celebration of the work of art involves the transit through a time of the latter which induces the state of actuality, of living presence of the universe described and opened by the work concerned. It is not, therefore, a structure that has been constructed once and now just sits towards exposure to the general public. On the contrary, it continues to be fulfilled and each admirer of it is a co-participant, along with the creator artist, to the completion of its composition.

The genuine work of art, although it owns, according to the Kantian analysis, a finality of the forms that are situating it from a structural point of view, must not be hedged by any reason. Only in this way it is possible to co-participate in its ascent to an ideal of perfection, ascent for which is also needed the contribution of the one who celebrates, he himself/she herself, by such an approach, advancing to phases of a consciousness that gravitates around the platonic idea of Beauty. The poetry, the painting, the music, and any art, considers Gadamer, have their *times*. Thus, for example, a musical part has a tempo of its own and a poetic text develops the flowing of its verses under a tone that bears it and incessantly sustains it. The submission of consciousness in front of this temporal tact determines the co-participation in the modulations and pulse, in the ontic rhythmicity of that particular artistic creation. Gadamer insists here on the idea of constructive joining between the contemplator and the creator. In this way, when we look at a sculpture, we participate in its construction and maybe we reconfigure it according to our aesthetic dimensions. In the same way, when we walk through the spatial opening circumscribed by the columns of a temple, we

³ Bergson, Henri, *Evoluția creatoare (The Creative Evolution)*, Institutului European Publishing House, Iași, 1998, p. 21.

⁴ Eliade, Mircea, *Mituri, vise și mistere (Myths, Dreams and Mysteries)*, Univers Enciclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998, p. 161.

do not only admire and meditate on those structures designed and implemented in material by the manufacturers, but we also experience a state of re-construction of the temple by this inner initiative, being, in this way, similar to the original authors of such a majestic project. Thus, states Gadamer, we *re-build* or *re-paint* at the level of consciousness a building or a pictorial implementation, we walk and we enter in universes opened by these works of art. For Gadamer, a work of art cannot be deeply understood than by its spiritual conquest. We must, therefore, extrapolate in the fields, in the universes of that works and such a projection involves a sustained effort of concentration and devotion, of attention and close following of the route already got through and accomplished by the creator artist. It is only when we become *consorted* in this way with the artist that his work opens towards our conscience, facilitating the access to its deepest meanings, to its pulsatile telluric dimension, telluric dimension which, in its turn, opens the contemplator to the primordial and metaphysical meanings of the world. Along with the accession to the eidetic fund of a work of art, the contemplator will feel the real suspension of the temporality in the sense of detachment of the multiple connections which linked his/her consciousness to past memories, but also to future expectations. In such a moment of his/her aesthetic experience, the contemplator lives in a *present* like never before, a present that is hovering over the profane reality, an era never touched by the ephemeral dimension, a moment which only concentrates in itself the artistic mirage⁵.

To linger in this moment of existential and also gnoseologic suspension, means to anchor your human being in the ground of the finished replica of the eternity maybe as propaedeutical state which prepares the consciousness for a meeting with eternity. According to Gadamer, art teaches us to *linger* while being patient, to break up of the daily rush, re-sitting down in the plenitude of ourselves and engaging to the access to our own forgotten deepness⁶. The meditative-aesthetic delay re-learns to us the course and the tact of eternity, split us in relation with the daily vulgarities, opening new doors for us, towards spiritual feelings and plenitudes impossible to predict before meeting the call of art, which challenges our consciousness in such a revitalising way.

⁵ Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Adevăr și metodă (Truth and Method)*, Teora Publishing House, Bucharest, 2001, p. 102.

⁶ Idem., *Actualitatea frumosului (The Actuality of Beauty)*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2000, p. 117.