

## The Place of The Sacred with Regard to Gadamer's Ontology of Art

Muharrem HAFIZ\*

### Abstract

The experience of art-work is, for Gadamer, related to *truth* which goes beyond the *methodological* knowledge. Hence discovering of truth is possible through the ontology of art, and the experience of art is an experience of truth that can be applied to the hermeneutic problem in its whole dimension. The work of art is, in this respect, the experience of truth as an 'event'. Opposing to the aesthetic differentiation which abstracts the work of art from its possibilities of content (religious, moral, cultural), Gadamer tries to overcome this distinction of consciousness through the concept of *game*. The reason of *Dasein*'s inner tension towards the "unknown" is the fact of remaining of the sacred/infinite as *non-understanding*. Gadamer argues that the work of art transforms the tension into the relaxation by means of the ontological hermeneutics of it. Therefore, the distinction between sacred and profane is *relative* in Gadamer; and all the works of art have always sacred about it and the sacred speeches to us via the work of art. In this article, it will be seen how Gadamer establishes this togetherness with regard to the ontology of art.

**Key Words:** sacred, the work of art, experience, truth, hermeneutic, game, transformation into structure, contemporaneity,

### Özet

Gadamer'e göre sanat eserinin tecrübesi *metodolojik* bilgiyi aşan *hakikate* ilişkindir. Bu bakımdan hakikatin keşfi sanat eserinin ontolojisi üzerinden mümkündür ve sanat eserinin tecrübesi, tüm boyutlarıyla hermenötik probleme uygulanabilecek bir hakikat tecrübesidir. Sanat eseri, bu yönüyle, hakikatin bir "olay" olarak tecrübe edilmesidir. Sanat eserini, onun içerik şartlarından (dini, ahlaki, kültürel) soyutlayan *estetik farklılaşmaya* karşı olan Gadamer, bu bilinç ayrımını *oyun* kavramı üzerinden aşmayı dener. *Dasein*'in "bilinmeyen"e yönelik içsel geriliminin nedeni de, kutsalın/sonsuzun anlaşılamayan olarak kalmasıdır. Gadamer sanat eserinin ontolojik hermeneutiği aracılığıyla bu gerilimin "rahatlama"ya neden olduğunu savunur. Dolayısıyla kutsal ile profan arasındaki ayrım Gadamer'de *nisbidir* ve her sanat eseri daima kendisine has kutsal bir şeyi paylaşır ve kutsal bize sanat eseri üzerinden hitap eder. Bu makalede Gadamer'in bu birlikteliği sanat ontolojisi açısından nasıl tesis ettiği görülecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** kutsal, sanat eseri, tecrübe, hakikat, hermenötik, oyun, yapıya dönüşüm, eş-zamanlılık.

### I.

Gadamer writes in the introduction of his Magnum Opus *Truth and Method*<sup>1</sup> that the studies in it are concerned with the problem of hermeneutics; that is the

\* M.Ü. Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Din Felsefesi Bilim Dalı Doktora Öğrencisi.

<sup>1</sup> Gadamer, Hans Georg, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, Continuum Publishing Group, London, 1989, p. xx. It will be referred to the text as TM in this article.

phenomenon of understanding, the correct interpretation of what has been understood and he explains the phenomenon of understanding not with regard to scientific method, but as to a *world-experience* of man. In virtue of its irreducibility to the mode of consciousness, this experience is also the ground of which the “human sciences” (*Geistwissenschaften*) are established.<sup>2</sup> Hence Gadamer considers that Heidegger’s temporal analytics of *Dasein* persuasively shows that understanding is not only one possible behavior of the subject, but also the mode of being of *Dasein* itself. Gadamer takes the experience of the artwork as starting-point as to lay the foundation of his hermeneutics in *TM* and claims that “*everyone who experiences a work of art incorporates this experience wholly within himself: that is into the totality of his self-understanding.*”<sup>3</sup> From this viewpoint, it must be emphasized at first that he did not begin his analytics of hermeneutics with reading and interpretation of the text, but from the experience of art –the exact name of part one in *TM* with *The Question of Truth as it Emerges in the Experience of Art*. For Gadamer, *Dasein* discovers himself in the act of understating and this act is not restricted to the texts. In this context, performing a musical work of art, reading a poem or looking at a painting, all these acts are “understanding”; since all performance is primarily interpretation and all interpretation is “understanding”.<sup>4</sup>

Hermeneutic perspective is so universal and comprehensive that it includes art and nature, and especially the experience of artwork.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, he takes the problem of aesthetics out of the objective assertions of tradition and places it in the focus of hermeneutic encounter. Hermeneutics as understanding is totally related to the experience of art, as the realization of self-understanding and the activity of understanding includes not only historical documents but also the

<sup>2</sup> We know today that the use of the term “hermeneutics” can be traced back to philosophers as Frederick Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger which Gadamer frequently referred to. Yet, we must declare first that hermeneutics did not achieve its philosophical maturity and acquire the worldwide recognition that it deserves until Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*. With the help of Heidegger, Gadamer did not explain hermeneutics as a theory of interpretation, but attempts to disclose the ontological dimension of understating as a mode of *Dasein*, our being-in-the-world. (Chan, Alan, “Philosophical Hermeneutics and the *Analects*: The paradigm of tradition”, *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 34, no. 4, October 1984, p. 421.)

<sup>3</sup> Gadamer, *TM*, xxvii.

<sup>4</sup> Gadamer, *TM*, xxviii.

<sup>5</sup> Gadamer, “The Universality of the Hermeneutic Problem”, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and edited by David E. Linge, University of California Press, 1977, s. 3-17; Gadamer, “Aesthetics and Hermeneutics”, *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings*, trans. David Linge, edited by Richard Palmer, Northwestern University Press, 2007, s. 123. It will be referred to the text as AH in this article.

works of art; since the works of art have "contemporaneity" that allows them to speak to us with a special immediacy despite the passing of time. Therefore, elements in Gadamerian hermeneutics can be applied to the encounter with artworks as well as to the texts in words. At this point, he recognizes that just as an encounter with a biblical or literary text involves self-understanding as theologians have noted, so also does an encounter with art bring increased self-understanding. Hermeneutics, then, offers itself as a way of comprehending more adequately *in the experience* of encountering an artwork<sup>6</sup>, and artwork is related to *truth* which goes beyond *methodological* knowledge.<sup>7</sup> Of all the things that confront us in nature and history, it is the work of art that speaks to us most directly; for the work of art possesses a *mysterious intimacy* that grips our entire being.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, although Gadamer sees himself as close to Hegel's speculative dialectics and accepts the conclusions that Kant arrived at in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he also states the task that: "*the infinite relation remains*". In his own words: "*My way of demonstrating it seeks free itself from the embrace of the synthetic power of the Hegelian dialectic, even from the 'logic' which developed from the dialectic of Plato, and to take its stand in the movement of dialogue, in which word and idea first become what they are.*"<sup>9</sup> From now on, we will concentrate on *his way of demonstrating* the relation between finite and infinite, from within his hermeneutic approach.

## II.

In fact, the transcendental function that Kant ascribes to aesthetic judgment and distinguishes it from the conceptual knowledge seems to Gadamer plausible;

<sup>6</sup> Gadamer, *AH*, p. 123; Gadamer, "On the Problem of Self-Understanding", *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, translated and edited by David E. Linge, University of California Press, 1977, s. 58.

<sup>7</sup> David West writes in this context that Gadamer shares the belief that hermeneutics is the most fundamental dimension of human existence and "cannot be made sense of within the categories of 'methodical' natural sciences. It is particularly important, in this context, that the conjunction of the terms 'truth' and 'method' in the title of Gadamer's best-known *Truth and Method*, is not misunderstood. A method, in Gadamer's terms, is a set of explicit procedures and rules designed to purge knowledge of all distorting and idiosyncratic subjective influences. [...] But Gadamer does not seek to formulate an equivalent method for the human sciences in order to secure the objectivity of its interpretations in analogous fashion. This, in effect, is the project of Dilthey. On the contrary, Gadamer's aim is to demonstrate the limits of methodical science. [...] As some commentators have suggested, therefore, truth or method might have been a less misleading title. In Bubner's words, Gadamer's project is a matter of explicating the reciprocal relations between methodical science and an original truth which transcends the methodical." (David West, *Introduction to Continental Philosophy*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 1996, p. 106).

<sup>8</sup> Gadamer, *AH*, p. 124.

<sup>9</sup> Gadamer, *TM*, p. xxxiii.

however he asks the question that “is it right to reserve the concept of truth for conceptual knowledge?”<sup>10</sup> At this point, despite his acceptance for the role of the “genius” in art, Gadamer appreciates the position of German Idealism (especially Fichte and Schelling) and its stress on the *standpoint of art*. After Kant, basing aesthetic judgment on an *a priori* of subjectivity was to acquire a new dimension and Gadamer designates this step as *the standpoint of art*; the *phenomenon of art* and its experience is overrated and the Kantian ideas of tastes and genius completely changed from this *standpoint*.<sup>11</sup> “Kant’s grounding aesthetics on the concept of taste is not wholly satisfactory. The concept of genius, which Kant develops as a transcendental principle for artistic beauty, seems much better suited to be a universal aesthetic principle. For it fulfills much better than does the concept of taste the requirement of being immutable in the stream of time. Kant’s statement ‘Fine is the art of genius’ then become a transcendental principle for aesthetics in general. [...] German Idealism drew this conclusion. Unlike Kant, Fichte and Schelling considered the *standpoint of art* all-inclusive embracing even nature which is understood as a product of Spirit (Geist).”<sup>12</sup> As a consequence, he considers that Kant’s limiting the concept of art to the artists alone did not prevail and the concept of genius rose to a universal status concurrently with the use of the concept of *Erlebnis*.<sup>13</sup>

*Erlebnis* exhibits the *immediacy* with which something real is grasped and as a result “what is experienced is always what one has experience oneself.”<sup>14</sup> In this context, the concept of *Erlebnis* expresses the criticism of Enlightenment rationalism through emphasizing the concept of *Leben* (life). For Gadamer the concept of life is also represents the metaphysical background for German speculative idealism and plays an important role in Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, and Schleiermacher. Hence Dilthey and Husserl were wrong when they used the concept of experience, as the epistemological ground of all knowledge and *Erlebnis* expresses the more universal and comprehensive position than does the knowledge. Gadamer emphasizes the role of *Erlebnis* through acquiring in living and *praxis* rather than a theoretical and epistemological use of this concept.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 49.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>13</sup> Gadamer recognizes that the romantic and idealistic use of this concept lay behind this development and it acquired its position through the unconscious philosophy of Schopenhauer. (Ibid, 52).

<sup>14</sup> Gadamer, *TM*, p. 53.

<sup>15</sup> The nature of hermeneutic reflection for Gadamer requires the constant return to the *praxis* of hermeneutic experience. At this point he recalls the words of Schleiermacher “I hate all theory that does not grow out practice”. (Gadamer, “The Artwork in Word and Im-

Gadamer argues for that the pantheistic and religious background of the concept is in evidence in Schleiermacher who does not directly use the term. Borrowing his ideas Gadamer evidently states that: *"Every act, as an element of life, remains connected with the infinity of life that manifests itself in it. Everything finite is an expression, a representation of the infinite."*<sup>16</sup> In other words, every experience is *"an element of infinite life"*.<sup>17</sup>

At this very point, we can see that Gadamer deals with another concept, *adventure* –from which he borrowed Georg Simmel who relates it with the concept of *Erleblis*. For Gadamer, in parallel with Georg Simmel, *"the objective not only becomes an image and idea as in knowing, but an element in the life process itself."* Here, Gadamer makes a relationship between the episodes and the whole: Episodes/parts are details that which have no inner coherence and for the same reason have no permanent significance; on the other hand *adventure* interrupts the customary courses of events/episodes and lets life be felt as a whole. *"It removes the conditions and the obligations of everyday life. It ventures out into the uncertain."*<sup>18</sup> The adventurous step into the infinite/sacred is possible with *Erlebnis* which corresponds to the experience of art; in other words, there is an affinity between the structures of *Erlebnis* as such and the mode of being of the aesthetics. *"Aesthetics experience is not just one kind of experience among others but represents the essence of experience per se. As the work of art as such is a world in itself, so also what is experienced aesthetically is, as an Erlebnis, removed from all connections with actuality. The work of art would seem almost by definition to be an aesthetics experience: that means, however, that the power of the work of art suddenly tears the person experiencing it out of the context of his life and relates him back to the whole of his existence. In the experience of art there is present a fullness of meaning that belongs not only to this particular content or object but rather stands for the meaningful whole of life. An aesthetics Erlebnis always contains the experience of an infinite whole. Precisely because it does not combine with other experiences to make one open experimental flow, but immediately represents the whole, its significance is infinite."*<sup>19</sup>

Gadamer's attempt to explain the hermeneutics with regard to art-experience is then coherent, since hermeneutics itself is the activity of the translation the context of meaning belonging to 'another world' into this lived-world and it is

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age: 'So True, So full of Being'", trans. Richard Palmer, *The Gadamer Reader*, p. 197.) It will be referred to the text as AWI in this article.

<sup>16</sup> Gadamer, *TM*, p. 55.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60-61.

the activity of appropriately explaining the sacred sphere, especially the sacred and authoritative will, into the mortal.<sup>20</sup> Gadamer elucidates the representative structure of artwork of “another word” by referring the concept of *game*; but before this concept, we must accentuate his analysis of the concepts, such as *symbol and allegory* in order to see the place and role of the sacred in his ontology of art.

### III.

Symbol and allegory have something in common; both concepts refer to something whose meaning does not consist in its external appearance but in a significance that *lies beyond it*. In other words, one thing stands for another in both. For Gadamer, “*this relation of meaning whereby the non-sensory is made apparent to the senses is found in the field of poetry and the plastic arts, as well as in that of the religious and sacramental.*”<sup>21</sup> Although they have different usages in one way, i.e., allegory belongs to the sphere of the logos and is therefore a rhetorical and hermeneutic figure, and symbol is not limited to the sphere of the logos, for its sensory existence has meaning; they are close to one another not only because of their common structure, that is, representing one thing by means of another, but also both find their own applications in the religious/sacred sphere.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, Goethe’s statement as ‘everything is a symbol’ is the most comprehensive formulation of the hermeneutic idea. According to this idea ‘everything points to another thing’ and “*as the universal as the hermeneutic idea is that corresponds to Goethe’s words, in an eminent sense it is fulfilled only by the experience of art.*”<sup>23</sup>

According to Gadamer, the term ‘symbolon’ is first used by Pseudo-Dionysius who defends the need to proceed symbolically through referring to the incommensurability of the supra-sensory being of God with our minds, which are accustomed to the world of the senses. Symbol here has a mystical/spiritual function. In other words, it leads to knowledge of the divine; therefore Gadamer emphasizes that “*the allegorical procedure of interpretation and the symbolic procedure of knowledge are both necessary for the same reason: it is possible to know the divine in no other way than by starting from the world of the senses.*”<sup>24</sup> When such a

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<sup>20</sup> Gadamer, *Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence, *The Gadamer Reader*, p. 228.

<sup>21</sup> Gadamer, *TM*, p. 63.

<sup>22</sup> Gadamer, *AH*, p. 130.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>24</sup> Gadamer, *TM*, p. 63.

metaphysical background of the symbol is taken into consideration, it can be stated that symbol has a function of leading beyond the sensible to the divine/sacred; *"for the world of the senses is not mere nothingness and darkness but the out-flowing and reflection of truth."*<sup>25</sup> Symbol presupposes, then, a metaphysical connection between visible and invisible and *"inseparability of visible appearance and invisible significance, this 'coincidence' of two spheres, underlies all forms of religious worship."*<sup>26</sup> At this point, he argues that the term can be extended to the aesthetic sphere, and through borrowing Solger's words he states that *"symbolic refers to an existent in which the idea is recognized in some way or other, i.e., the inward unity of ideal and appearance that is specific to the work of art."* In this respect, symbol is the coincidence of the sensible and the non-sensible; allegory is the meaningful relation of the sensible and the non-sensible.

Gadamer also considers that the usage of symbol in philosophical aesthetics is probably established through the Greek 'religion of art' and mentions Schelling's development of philosophy of art out of mythology in a parallel way and he gives place to Schelling's statements as follows: *"Mythology in general and any piece of mythological literature in particular is not to be understood schematically or allegorically, but symbolically. For the demand of absolute artistic representation is: representation with complete indifference, so that the universal is wholly the particular and the particular is the same time wholly the universal."*<sup>27</sup>

As we have stated above, the experience of artwork in Gadamer includes 'understanding' as a question of truth; hence it exhibits itself as a hermeneutic problem, but not at all in the sense of a scientific method. By opposing the aesthetic theories that disregard every element in which the work of art is rooted such as the religious/sacred, moral, cultural and even secular function that gave it significance<sup>28</sup>, he establishes his ideas through the concept of *game* with the

<sup>25</sup> For Gadamer the modern concept of symbol also cannot be understood apart from this gnostic function and metaphysical background. (Ibid., p. 64.)

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

<sup>27</sup> Frederich Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, trans. Douglas W. Stott, University of Minnesota Press, Canada, 1989, p. 48-49; Gadamer, *TM*, s. 66.

<sup>28</sup> Gadamer calls this attempt 'aesthetic differentiation' in terms of its abstracting the aesthetic quality of a work from all the elements of content that induce us to take up a moral or religious stance towards it, and presents it solely by itself in its aesthetic being into the aesthetic consciousness. Gadamer appreciates, at this very point, Kierkegaard's acknowledging the destructive consequences of subjectivism and describing self-annihilation of aesthetic immediacy. In Gadamer's view, he shows the desperate and untenable attempt of pure immediacy and discontinuity to differentiate and dismember the whole of life. *"The pantheon of art is not a timeless present that presents itself to a pure aesthetic consciousness, but the act of mind and spirit (Geist) that has collected and gathered itself histori-*

context of hermeneutic activity and ontology of art.

#### IV.

*Game* means neither the state of mind of the creator nor of those spectators of the work of art, but *the mode of being of the work of art itself*.<sup>29</sup> The concept of *game*, in Gadamer's view, contains *sacredness* in itself; however this sacredness is only possible in the condition that the player loses himself in it. Taking the experience of art as a question of truth necessitates the acceptance of it as the experience of truth as a 'fact'; in other words, what designates the importance of artwork is the disclosure and discourse of the sacred *in and through the event/real*.<sup>30</sup> For, "it is possible to know the divine in no other way than by starting from the world of the senses."<sup>31</sup> Therefore, we can easily say that the phenomenological description of the game in *Truth and Method* is to be suited within the context of the philosophy/ontology of art; in other words, the determination of the work of art as *something* formed as a result of an event of truth plays a central role.<sup>32</sup> Setting art through the game as truth means the nature of latter in representing itself by itself; in other words, for Gadamer, the principal function of the game consists in a "self-representation", just as in the work of art. "The work of art is not an object that stands over against a subject for itself. Instead, the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it. The 'subject' of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it but the work itself. This is the point at which the mode of being of play becomes significant. *For play has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of those who play. [...] The players are not the subject of play; instead play merely reaches representation through the players.*"<sup>33</sup>

In Gadamer, it is the game that is playing and played; what is more, whether

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*cally.*" In this respect he stresses the limitedness of being of man (*Dasein*) and states that the work of art is not an alien universe into which we are magically transported for a time, but *learn to understand ourselves in and through it*. Hence Gadamer considers that "we must adopt a standpoint in relation to art and beautiful that does not pretend to immediacy, but corresponds to the historical nature of the human condition." (TM, p. 83-84).

<sup>29</sup> According to Gadamer theories of aesthetic consciousness fail to do justice to the *reel situation*, hence he says that he applies to the concept of game in his exposition.

<sup>30</sup> Tokat, Latif, "Sanat Kutsalın ifşası mıdır?", M.Ü. İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi, 29, 2005(2), p. 146.

<sup>31</sup> Gadamer, TM, p. 63.

<sup>32</sup> Rudolf Bernet, "Gadamer On the Subject's Participation in the Game of Truth", *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 58, no: 4, (Jun. 2005), p. 788.

<sup>33</sup> Gadamer, TM, p. 103.



there is a player who plays it or nor is totally irrelevant. For the play is the occurrence of the *movement* and the movement of playing has no goal in itself. This movement expresses not any forcing, but much more a *spontaneity* which means an absence of phenomenological tension, not an absence of reel endeavor. The phenomenological tension here corresponds to the tension between the sensible world and the supra-sensible one; from this viewpoint, the sacred character of the game results from the fact that the finite and infinite sides of *Dasein* can be combined in a mode of *relaxation*, since Gadamer asserts that the ease of play is experienced subjectively as relaxation. The structure of game provides the player to be lost in it and absorbed in it; the game frees the player from *the burden of taking the initiative which constitutes the actual strain of existence*. Within the context of being sharing the medial meaning of game and artwork, Gadamer states that inasmuch as nature is without purpose and intention, it can be essentially a self-renewing play and in this sense can appear as a model for art. At this point he recalls the words of Friedrich Schlegel: "All the sacred games of art are only remote imitations of the infinite play of the world, the eternally self-creating work of art."<sup>34</sup>

The common ground of the game-playing and of the experience of the work of art is to allow the person to go beyond the ordinary and daily existence through the experience of play, or work, and this carries him to a kind of *adventure*. In the very of act of playing, the player enters into the new and mysterious environment, which allows the player to put aside his personal interests/desires and submit himself to the purposes and the rules of the game. In cases of game-playing and the experience of the artwork, the player and the spectator find himself in a new reality; however this experience requires the obedience of its laws and rules. Hence, Gadamer argues that there is a *primacy and authority of play over the consciousness of the player* and normative authority of art/work of art upon the creator and spectator.<sup>35</sup> In this regard, art is not something from which they awake into the mundanity of their ordinary existence, but instead something that present a *challenge* to that existence.<sup>36</sup>

Both art and history, according to Gadamer, present the world not as "absolutely" but rather as it appears from a certain point of view and art is therefore

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>35</sup> The authority here is not a compulsion or coercion, since there is by no means of compulsion and coercion in the work of art.

<sup>36</sup> Warnke, Georgia, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason*, Stanford University: Standford, 1987, p. 49.

wholly *mimetic* and *representational*.<sup>37</sup> Due to the fact that all presentation is potentially a representation for someone, this potential is the characteristic of art as game; at this very point Gadamer exemplify the religious rites which are not exhausted by the fact that they present themselves and point beyond themselves to the audience or spectator who participates in the rite. The game is here the *representation for someone*. "The presentation of a god in a religious rite, the presentation of a myth in a play, are not only in the sense that the participating players are wholly absorbed in the presentational play and find in it their heightened self-presentation, but also in that the players represent a meaningful whole for an audience."<sup>38</sup> Therefore, Gadamer defines play as a process that takes place "in between"; the player of the game or the spectator of the artwork is, in this respect, "in between" the experience of the *finite part* and that of the *infinite whole*: the player experiences the game as a reality that surpasses him. Consequently, the game does not have its being in the consciousness or attitude of the player, but on the contrary it draws him into its *Geist*. Although the player experiences the game as a reality that surpasses him and the religious or the profane play represents a world wholly closed within itself, Gadamer consider that the play/work is still open to the spectator; since it is, in the sense of representation, *for someone*. When the play was transformed into representation, the game puts the spectator in the place of the player; in this respect Gadamer suggests that there is a methodological precedence of the spectator, since the play is presented *for him*. Consequently, "even there is no one there who merely listens and watches artistic representation is, by its nature, exists *for someone*." At this point, Gadamer calls this change in which the human play comes to its true consummation in being of art as *transformation into structure*.

## V.

*Transformation into structure* expresses the situation in which only the *game* exist, not the players; all the differences disappear in and through it, and in this respect: *transformation into structure* is also transformation into *truth*. The game emerges, only in and through transformation into structure, as detached from the representing activity of players in a pure appearance of what they are playing. "What no longer exists is the player –with the poet or the composer being considered as one of the players. [...] The players no longer exist, only what they are playing."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>38</sup> Gadamer, *TM*, p. 109.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 110.

From the Gadamerian viewpoint, then, the experience of art as a question of truth is critically important; since the work of art performs its duty of *aletheia* – uncovering, demystifying and clarifying of truth. In other words, the work of art produces and brings to light what is constantly hidden. Gadamer considers, at this point, that the performance of a representation entirely resembles the religious/sacred act, which exists as something that rests absolutely with itself. “It no longer permits of any comparison with reality. [...] It is raised above all such comparisons –and hence also above the question of whether it is all real- because a superior truth speaks from it.”<sup>40</sup>

Fred Lawrence mentions that the game-play structure of life is disclosed in the Christian experience of grace and faith; and he argues for that Gadamer is also in a parallel fashion that “*in and belonging to God, a wholeness is achieved in trust and hope rather than analysis.*”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, by transposing self-understanding from the pure, abstract and reflexive act of consciousness into the game-play structure of human life, Gadamer considers the relationship of religious faith to human understanding and interpretation. “*Whatever is said to us we must receive into ourselves so that it speaks to us and finds a response in our words in our own language. This holds utterly true for the text of proclamation which cannot be really understood if it does not appear as being said to our very own selves. Here it is the sermon in which the understanding and interpretation of the text attains its full reality. Neither the explicating commentary nor the exegetical labors of the theologians, but the sermon stands in the mediate service of proclamation inasmuch as it not only mediates the understanding of what Holy Scripture tells us, but witnesses to it at the same time.*”<sup>42</sup> Since the divine/sacred is immediately experienced in the religious sermon and rite and this example in fact discloses the strict relationship between hermeneutics and liturgy. Therefore, hermeneutical philosophy which explicates the question of art that has a rigid relationship with divine and sacred shows that the human quest for meaning is shaped as “*faith seeking understanding*”<sup>43</sup>; “*for instance, the prior influences of one’s religious heritage or of one’s own historical experiences are always operative in one’s experience of an artwork.*”<sup>44</sup>

It must be stated that to a large extent Gadamer defends the theory of mime-

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>41</sup> Fred Lawrence, “Gadamer, the Hermeneutic Revolution, and Theology”, *Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, edited by Robert J. Dostal, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 189.

<sup>42</sup> Gadamer, “On the Problem of Self-Understanding”, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 57-58.

<sup>43</sup> Fred Lawrence, “Gadamer, the Hermeneutic Revolution, and Theology”, p. 193.

<sup>44</sup> Gadamer, *AWI*, p. 200.

sis, which takes place the center of Greek art and was mainly applied throughout the Medieval era in order to establish a relationship between religion/God and art. According to Gadamer, "*the classical theory of art which bases all art on the idea of mimesis obviously starts from play in the form of dancing, which is the representation of the divine*" and from the Platonic theory of *mimesis* as *anamnesis* (recognition)<sup>45</sup>, the concept of *mimesis* can be used as to describe the work of art only if one keeps in mind the *cognitive import in imitation*. In other words, what is imitated and represented is raised through *mimesis* to its own validity and truth; hence representation and imitation are not merely copy or repetition, but knowledge of the essence and "bringing forth". Gadamer considers that in a parallel to platonic consideration of *mimesis* that imitations contain in themselves an essential relation to everyone for whom the representation exists.<sup>46</sup>

For Gadamer, the representation and performance of an artwork is the mode of its being, and *mimesis* is the dominant concept for the work of art, when one keeps in mind the cognitive import of being, the true source of the artwork, in imitation. The import of *mimesis* in the work of art is explicated through the concept of game in which discourses disclose the audience in presentation/performance, and self-presentation is then the true nature of the work of art. In the act of performance there is a distance between the player and the spectator, the player plays in such a way that he keeps the spectator in the game. Gadamer argues that this kind of representation is seen more explicitly in a *religious rite* and states that the relation of the sacred rite or play to the community is obvious. Therefore, "*an aesthetic consciousness, however reflexive, can no longer suppose that only aesthetic differentiation, which views the aesthetic object in its own right, discovers the true meaning of the religious rite or the play. No one will be able to suppose that for the religious truth the performance of rite is inessential. [...] Rather, it is the performance and only in it -as we see most clearly in the case of music- that we encounter the work itself, as the divine is encountered in the religious rite.*"<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, what is imitated in the imitation -being formed by the poet, represented by the actor and recognized by the spectator- belongs to the same area of truth and there is no differentiation; since what the poet (artist) creates, the actor plays and the spectator recognizes is the one and the same *mimesis*, and it is the same thing that comes to existence in each case. As we stated above, Gada-

<sup>45</sup> From the Platonic viewpoint, "*the 'known' enters into its true being and manifests itself as what is only when it is recognized. As recognized, it is grasped in its essence, detached from its accidental aspects.*" (Gadamer, TM, p. 114).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>47</sup> Gadamer, TM, p. 115.

mer reminds here that the same mode of being in three dimensions, i.e., creating (artist), the performance (actor) and the spectator, corresponds to the “transformation into structure”; since the play/the work of art is a structure which means that, despite its dependence on being played, it is a meaningful whole.

He also argues that the abstraction of aesthetic differentiation does not recognize this wholeness, and calls that structure as *aesthetic non-differentiation* opposed to aesthetic differentiation of aesthetic consciousness. The distinction between a play and its subject matter or a play and its performance corresponds to “*a double non-distinction as the unity of truth which one recognizes in the play of art. [...] What we have called a structure is one insofar as it presents itself as a meaningful whole. It does not exist in itself, nor is it encountered in a mediation accidental to it; rather, it acquires its proper being in being mediated.*”<sup>48</sup> Therefore, transformation into structure is the mode of being of the work of art and the meaningful wholeness; nevertheless this is not an absolute and abstract, but it is a “total mediation of *Dasein's* aesthetic temporality and contemporaneity”.

## VI.

Starting from the fact that the work of art is a game and its actual existence is the representation/performance, Gadamer lays the foundation of true being of the work of art via the concept of *contemporaneity*. The contemporaneity and presentness of aesthetic being is its timeless; but this timeless is essentially related to the temporality to which it belongs. He argues that when one speaks of two kinds of temporality in the work of art, i.e., historical and supra-historical (sacred time), it is not possible to easily move beyond the dialectical antithesis between two; in other words, the tension between the historical mode of the work of art and its supra-historical/sacred time are not easily overcome. The emphasis on the supra-historical/sacred mode of the work of art is not sufficient; it must be supported with the concept of continuity, since “understanding” is the mode of being which is revealed as temporality. “*Only a biblical theology of time, starting not from the standpoint of human self-understanding, but of divine revelation, would be able to speak of a ‘sacred time’ and theologially legitimate the analogy between the timelessness of a work of art and this ‘sacred time’.* Without this kind of theological justification, to speak of a sacred time obscures the real problem, which does not lie in the artwork’s being removed from time but in its temporality.”<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 116-117.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

In order to legitimate the relationship between original time of the sacred event, and its timeless character, Gadamer refers to the term '*festival*'. The time-experience of the festivals is the celebration of the supra-historical/sacred time and *sui generis* a *present time* which is not the fleeting moment, but the fullness of time. The temporality and contemporaneity of the artwork or aesthetic experience is not the usual experience of temporal succession; however Gadamer explicates its character as the presentation of the original essence of artwork through transmission itself always in a different way. In other words, the original sacral character of the festival is repeated in the festivals that come round again, but it is not the original sacred event, nor another festival. Therefore, the historical connections of the festival are accidental and secondary, and its original essence is always to be something different from the standpoint of temporality. For Gadamer, contemporaneity is the essence of "being there", accordingly the sacred which is the same and the unchangeable presents itself in temporality via different/changeable situations through the work of art; since "contemporaneity" of the sacred artwork proclaims that the original and source of it exists *here and now*.

At this very point, Gadamer recalls the Kierkegaardian theological emphasis on the concept of contemporaneity. "*For Kierkegaard*", as Gadamer declares, "*contemporaneity does not mean existing at the same time. Rather, it names the task that confronts the believer: to bring together two moments that are not concurrent, namely one's own present and the redeeming act of Christ, and yet so totally to mediate them that the latter is experienced and taken seriously as present (and not as something in a distant past)*" Gadamer accepts the Kierkegaardian theological meaning of the concept and clearly states that: "*Now I maintain that the same is basically true when we experience art.*"<sup>50</sup> This experience is, then, significant for the hermeneutic understanding through which he establishes for the ontology of art, and in this respect the work of art has an ontological power that binds the spectator in a timeless and supra-historical manner to the primary and original essence/idea by means of its contemporaneity. "*Contemporaneity in this sense is found in religious rituals and in the proclamation of the Word in preaching.*"<sup>51</sup>

Hereafter, as Gadamer maintains, "neither the being that the creating artist is for himself, 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." He names this experience again as a total mediation, and a

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

transformation into structure in which all the differentiation and compartment is annulled. From this viewpoint, it can be clearly understood that he insists that the theological content of contemporaneity is dominant in all sacred artworks and religious rites which builds a bridge between the original source of a religious event and its representation/performance through the contemporaneity of the work in time. The prior influences of one's religious heritage are always operative in one's experience of an artwork, and every religion has an absoluteness of its own truth; hence the work of art has special and vital function in expressing the sacred.<sup>52</sup> The position of the work of art at an absolute distance that precludes the intentional participation also precludes the spectator's ecstatic self-forgetfulness which corresponds to the continuity with himself. "Precisely that in which one loses oneself as a spectator demands that one grasp the continuity of meaning. For it is the truth of our own world -the religious and moral world in which we live- that is presented before us and in which we recognize ourselves. Just as the ontological mode of aesthetic being is marked by parousia, absolute presence, and just as an artwork is nevertheless self-identical in every moment where it achieves such a presence, so also the absolute moment in which a spectator stands is both one of self-forgetfulness and of mediation with himself. What rends him from himself at the same time gives him back the whole of his being."<sup>53</sup>

Artistic creation/creativity has, on the other hand, a rigorous relation to the religious concept of Creation, which was not making in the sense of making an object by hand. "*In the beginning was the word, the verbum creans –the creating word*"<sup>54</sup> and the experience of a work of art is, in fact, the exact experience of 'Creation' and it is, in this respect, divine. The religious discourse that "In the beginning was the word" for Gadamer is a creative/creating word and it is divine; the creation and experience of an artwork belongs to this divine experience and has a clear relation to Creation/creating word. He notes in this context that "*neither in ancient times nor in the Christian Middle Ages was there any discussion of the elevated rank in being that is possessed by works of art. The reason for this is that their 'place in life' was already self-evident for the ancient world and sacral orders. The ecclesiastical as well as secular forms of Christian metaphysics both accepted as fact that the order of the world, which was also the order of creation, included with it a high rank for works of art.*"<sup>55</sup> That is to say, ancient man was able to bind himself to

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<sup>52</sup> Gadamer, AWI, p. 198-199.

<sup>53</sup> Gadamer, TM, p. 124.

<sup>54</sup> Gadamer, AWI, p. 202.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

the divine/sacred through the experience of artwork and he recognizes this experience as an experience of Creation itself. At this point, Gadamer insists that “*only with the advent of humanism, after the Middle Age came to an end, did the situation change. Here alongside the creator God of the Old and New Testament, stepped the creative artist as an alter dues –an ‘other God’, a kind of second God*” with the impact of individualism through humanism and Enlightenment. Gadamer thinks that there is an impact on this attempt of scientific claims of religious studies, which put a rigid distance between itself and especially beautiful itself/arts; and religious studies attempt in this sense much more a *methodological* pursuit rather than *truth*. It must be remembered here that Gadamer insists that *Geistwissenschaften* (human sciences) has to keep its relation lively to truth and this is only possible with *the experience of art*. Unfortunately, “*ecclesiastical and secular topics were no longer the means through which a holy world could come to presentation in art.*”<sup>56</sup>

The experience of the artwork is not a mere copy of something; rather one is absorbed in it. For Gadamer, neither the creative act of the work, nor the experience of it can be explained in a reasonable fashion, since the work of art has indeed succeeded and possesses its *ungraspable rightness*.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, the experience of an artwork consist such a double-polarity that it is not only an emergence from hiddenness, but at the same time is something really there in its seclusion. Therefore the work of art is an *assertion*, however it does not have the form of a scientific/*methodological* assertion, it is like a *myth or saga*; because in what it says, it equally unfolds things and at the same time holds them in readiness. Its supra-historical and sacred character arises from the fact that it speaks over and over again.<sup>58</sup>

Further, Gadamer elucidates the work of art and its true experience with the Aristotelian concept of *energeia*. *Energeia* has two meanings for Gadamer: one is activity, and the other is reality. In Aristotelian metaphysics, as Gadamer maintains, God is introduced as the Unmoved Mover of the cosmos and is also described as leading a life of pure *energeia*. This kind of being is presence as such. However, Gadamer states that no one can answer the question of how God’s contemplative seeing has as its object; and this is also available in Hegel’s Absolute Spirit. Here Gadamer argues for that the experience of art is a movement

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>57</sup> Therefore, Gadamer maintains that it is meaningless to ask the artist what he or she meant, or to ask the perceiver what it is that work really says to him or her. (Ibid., p. 212).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 212.



like the *Movement of the Unmoved Mover* of the cosmos; but "in thinking of it one thinks of what, for example, the mysterious cults protected as a holy secret. Thus the work of art is there and is, as Goethe said, 'So wahr, so seiend', 'so true, so full of being'. In this process it contains the goal of its being (*telos echei*)."<sup>59</sup>

There is an ontological unity between what is represented and its representation, and Gadamer fortifies his assertion with the example of a picture: the ontological union between the picture and what is pictured is sacred and this is presented in the ontology of picture. Apart from the other arts, there is an immediate relation to its original in the picture (and the plastic arts as well); since the content of the picture itself is ontologically emanation of its original. Gadamer argues at this point that neo-Platonic theory of emanation is the ground of the ontological status of the picture; because "the original One is not diminished by the outflow of the many from it, this means that being increases."<sup>60</sup> Consequently, he clearly asserts that *only the religious/sacred picture* exhibits truly the ontological power of the picture; since "the divine becomes picturable only through the word and image. [...] A picture is not a copy of a copied being, but is in ontological communion with what is copied."<sup>61</sup> In this respect, "art increases the picturability of being"<sup>62</sup> and it can easily be seen that status in the religious/sacred pictures. In this connection, Gadamer states that "the representation of Christ as *Pandokrator [Ruler of All]* that are found in medieval wall paintings or in mosaic art contain a sacred radiance. This fact, I think, points in truth to the absoluteness and contemporaneity of all art."<sup>63</sup>

Finally we take into consideration the relationship between profane and sacred, from the Gadamerian viewpoint, and the togetherness of sacred and the work of art.

It must be stated first that the opposition between sacred and profane in Gadamer is only *relative*. For him, the concept of profane always presupposes the sacred, and it is actually the place in front of the sanctuary.<sup>64</sup> In fact, the opposi-

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 213-214.

<sup>60</sup> Gadamer, *TM*, p. 135. According to Gadamer, the Greek fathers used the neo-Platonist ontology against the hatred of images on the basis that they accepted the incarnation of God as fundamental acknowledgement of the visible appearance and legitimated the works of art from this viewpoint. Therefore, overcoming the ban on images supplied the development of the plastic art in the Christian west.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>63</sup> Gadamer, *AWI*, p. 223.

<sup>64</sup> Gadamer, *TM*, p. 143.

tion/difference between profane and sacred was only *relative* in classical antiquity, and there was not distinction between them; because the whole sphere of life was *sacrally* ordered and determined. In this respect, he sees the difference of sacred and profane as relative and suggests that there was no any distinction of these spheres in truth. However, Gadamer maintains, in an astonishing way, that profaneness come to be understood in a special content *only with Christianity*. In Gadamer's terms "*the New Testament undemonized the world to such an extent that an absolute contract between the profane and the religious became possible. The church's promise of salvation means that the world is always only 'this world'. The fact that this claim was special to the church also creates the tension between it and the state, which coincides with the end of the classical world; and thus the concept of profane acquires special currency. The entire history of the Middle Ages is dominated by the tension between church and state. What ultimately opens a place for the secular state is the spiritualistic deepening of the idea of the Christian church.*"<sup>65</sup> These lines evidently show us that in Gadamer's view the tension/difference between sacred and profane is not true, but historical. After the church's attempt to attain 'this world' in the name of salvation, secular/profane put itself distance to the religious/sacred and declared its autarchy. Therefore, two areas which coincide in the antiquity have come to separate from each other by virtue of history of the church itself; yet, "*there is no such thing as profaneness in itself.*"<sup>66</sup>

On the other hand, when we apply his thought about the profane-sacred relationship upon the work of art and its experience, we can see that "*the difference of the sacred and the secular is relative in a work of art.*" In fact, beyond the non-difference between them, Gadamer clearly emphasize that "*it is not accidental that the religious concepts come to mind when one is defending the special ontological status of the work of art against the aesthetic differentiation.*" Hence, he evidently declares that "*a work of art always has something sacred about it.*"<sup>67</sup>

### Conclusion

In Gadamer's view, art as a whole is an event of being and it reveals and discloses itself in the work of art. The ideality of artwork is not the copying of an idea and reproducing of it, but in the "appearance" of the idea. Taking art and the work of art as a question of truth, and rigidly opposing to the aesthetic differentiation which is the essential element of aesthetic consciousness and

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

takes the work of art out of life, Gadamer concerns "understanding" as a hermeneutic problem with the ontology of the work of art. Hence, he considers that the step into the sacred is a problem of *understanding*, not *knowledge*, and it can be established from the viewpoint of *Erlebnis*. *Erlebnis* corresponds to the kind of experience we encounter in the experience of art and what is more aesthetic *Erlebnis* is essential to the whole of our experience and is not just one kind of experience among others but represents the essence of experience per se. In other words, *an aesthetics experience always contains the experience of an infinite whole*. Gadamer relates the experience of artwork with the concept of *game* and then maintains that art/the work of art is, in fact, a game/playing-game. Just as in the game, the work of art as well has an independent status of existence from its creator, player and spectator. In the ground of all religious rites and sacred arts, there is the real fact that the believers experience the original source of the work, i.e. *sacred present* via the contemporaneity of the work as celebrating these festivals. The purpose of it is self-understanding through understanding the work of art, along with an act of ecstatic losing of themselves and finding themselves again in the work. The reason for *Dasein's* inner tension towards the "unknown" is the fact of it remaining as *non-understanding*; however Gadamer argues that the work of art transforms the tension into relaxation by means of ontological hermeneutics, and that all the sacred games of art are, as its revealing of itself and at the same time a challenge to our mundane existence, only remote imitations of the infinite play of the world, i.e., the eternally self-creating work of art. This seems decisively proved by the fact that pure aesthetic consciousness is - being apart from the place of life as a whole which includes the religious, moral, cultural and aesthetic in it- acquainted with the idea of profanation. Essentially, the so-called difference of profane and sacred is only *relative* and there is no such thing as profaneness in itself; therefore *a work of art always has something sacred about it* and the true meaning and import of artwork in the discourse of the sacred/infinite.

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