

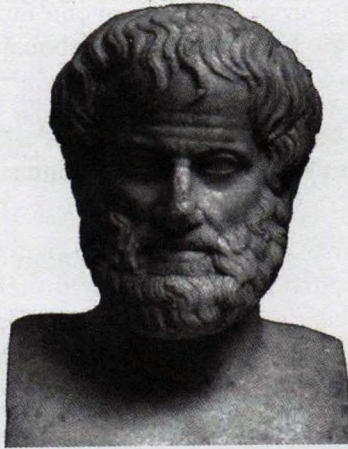
THE WORLD CONGRESS OF PHILOSOPHY THE PHILOSOPHY OF ARISTOTLE



VOLUME II

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF ARISTOTLE



VOLUME II

EDITED BY
KONSTANTINE BOUDOURIS
AND KOSTAS KALIMTZIS



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Ineta Kivle

Ontology of Art: Aristotle's Mimesis and Gadamer's Play

ABSTRACT: The present study analyses Aristotle's and Gadamer's cognitions about art - in comparison of mimesis with play is seen that both philosophers focus on being and functions of art from several points of view: a) Concepts of mimesis and play take importance not only for understanding of art but also for clarification of creative and cognitive actions of human. Gadamer's concept of play shows how artworks are related to tradition, history and interpretation, how artist, artwork and audience are included in art. Aristotle's view about mimesis justifies order of complete artwork that is effected by imitative actions of human and expressed in actual existence of art. b) Gadamer's hermeneutical philosophy shows play as ontological structure that illuminates being and existence of artwork. Aristotle's cognitions about mimesis show order of artwork with its own inner sequence of actions. c) Aristotle's analysis of imitative action, in the context of *poiesis*, gives theoretical ground for further philosophy of art and aesthetics. Gadamer's hermeneutics accentuates that understanding and true interpretation maintains tolerance to artwork as well as to different cultures and others. The present study shows, that mimesis and play as philosophical concepts exist beyond (above / bellow) of the concrete expression of art but, at the same time, they are immanent to any artwork and consist of such inseparable components as: movement and action, sequence and order, imitation and interpretation; truth and catharsis; horizons of art, place and time of artwork; essence and appearance; representation and transformation. In philosophical interpretations of these components is seen being of art that is mediated by human's actions – human creates artwork by imitation and play.

KEY WORDS: *ontology, art, play, mimesis, hermeneutics, ancient*

Philosophical concepts of mimesis and play uncover art from several points of view and show reversible influence of both: artwork and human – mimesis and play are immanent to any artwork as well as to creative activity of human. From the origin of mimesis in antique Greece to contemporary aesthetical and philosophical modifications various dimensions of usage of the term have developed. What is the being of any artwork? How is a unit of artwork made? How is the truth of artwork seen? Philosophical approach of Plato and Aristotle concerns mimesis in context of its implementation in concrete imitative actions of human, binding the created works with

human nature. Mimesis as philosophical concept exists beyond concrete expressions of art, yet, at the same time, shows human's knowing of art on the basis of concrete actions and particular artworks. Play in Gadamer's hermeneutics concerns the issue of ontological structure of art showing that play is a primordial order not only for art but also for other created worlds mediated by human actions. Mimesis and play are immanent to any artwork as well as to creative activity of human, they light up not only specificity of various forms of art and horizons of philosophical interpretations of art, but also give deep understanding of human being by showing realms of human actions and human knowledge.

Ontology of art in the context of mimesis, play and explications of origin of artwork shows linkage between ontological components of artwork and its functions. Artwork has its own being that is illuminated by the activity of artist, philosopher or any other human that experiences art and is involved in play of art. This study is divided into paragraphs: 1) *Aristotle's Mimesis* – giving characterization of mimesis in Aristotle's and Plato's cognitions. 2) *Gadamer's Play* – characterizing play in the context of hermeneutical philosophy of art. 3) *Ancient, Phenomenological and Hermeneutical approaches* – viewing correlation between ancient philosophy, phenomenology and hermeneutics showing different and common standpoints of these philosophies and giving explication of a question: how is ontology of art seen?

Aristotle's Mimesis

Mimesis represents different realms of human activities uniting the ones grounded in human nature with those implemented by creative actions. Aristotle shows that mimesis connects human reason, emotions and faculty of imitation with such created realities as art, politics and philosophy. The connection of these realms makes mutual influences: on the one side, human imitative actions manifest self-understanding and knowing (or unknowing) things in art, politics and philosophy; on the other hand, art, politics and philosophy evoke human character and knowledge. Mimesis connects not only the human's imitative actions with what the human creates, but also shows implications between art, education and ethics.

In *Politics* Aristotle writes about connection between education, ethics and mimetic arts: "In education the most ethical modes are to be preferred, but in listening to the performances of others we may admit the modes of action and passion also. For feelings, such as pity and fear, or, again, enthusiasm, exist very strongly in some souls, and have more or less influence over all. Some persons fall into the religious frenzy, which we see as a result of a sacred melodies (4. 1342a2-11)¹. Imitation is a required component in most of Aristotle's works – at the beginning of *Poetics* Aristotle characterizes modes

¹All references from Aristotle's and Plato's writings are in standard form. Thus, (4. 1447a15) indicates the 1447a15 section of the fourth and fifth book in LITERATURE list.

of imitations in art and gives examples how imitation works in different kinds of art: poetics, dance, music: "Epic poetry and tragedy, as well as comedy, dithyrambic poetry, and most flute playing and lyre-playing, are all, viewed as a whole, modes of imitation. But they differ from one another in three ways, either in their means, or in their objects, or in the manner of their imitations" (1. 1447a15). In comparison of various kinds of art Aristotle acknowledges that music is much more powerful than visual art in its "kinetic" capacity to express emotion. Mimetic works contain more than imitation or mirroring of reality, more than the image of human expressions, there are signs of ethical qualities – musically organized sounds have emotional state and they express character. Dances overlap representation fields of both, visual art and music – they combine rhythm and visual forms and provide mimesis of character, emotions and actions.

Plato is in the same position about the role of music. There are likenesses of *ēthos* – the listener of music recognizes the emotions in music, feels psychological engagement and senses his own movement of soul. Music sets up a structure of mimesis framing emotions in the performance and, at the same time, conducting these emotions to the audience. Aristotle does not locate mimesis "in" tones and rhythms in order to set up an "objectivist" interpretation of musical representation, but correlates the musical performance with the receiver of it. Such explanation of music characterizes music as together made reality and shows functionality and inter-subjectivity of music – music joins intentions of the composer, musicians and listeners. Functionality of art opens up mimesis between artwork and artists, musicians and audience.

In *Laws* Plato shows how to grasp representation art: "He must understand, first, what the object reproduced is, next, how correctly, third and last, how well the given representation has been effected, in point of language, melody of rhythm"(6. 669a-b). Plato talks about correctness of representation - he gives a technique for the right understanding. In general, mimesis unites language with emotions, imitates real things in forms of art, sounds and concepts – mimesis shows reality of images and words that exist beyond the sensory world and connect relations between the visible and the imaginary. Plato in *Republic* writes about imitation of imitations and, in this case "mimetic arts are far removed from truth"; creations of imitators "threefold removes from reality and easy to produce without knowledge of truth – for it is phantoms and not realities that they produce." (7. 598b4-599a3). For Plato, in imitation the truth is not seen because pictorial imitations are based on the experience of illusionistic character – the same object can appear differently – straight and crooked, bad and good. "We are fairly agreed, that the imitator knows nothing worth mentioning of the things he imitates, but the imitation is a form of play, not to be taken seriously, and that those who attempt tragic poetry, whether in iambics or heroic verse, are all altogether imitators." (7. 602b-c).

Aristotle in characterization of mimesis expresses immanence of imitation to human nature: "Imitation is natural to man from childhood, one of his advantages over the lower animals being this, that he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns

at first by imitation" (1.1448b1-5). There are differences between imitation – children's play does not create reality like painting, drama or music; it remains in the realm of actions arising from spontaneous need to communicate with things and others. Similar to children's imitative actions, Aristotle maintains that humans have a natural desire to knowledge that aims to know "the limit of all things" and the order of things. Knowing of "the limit of all things" shows essential connections between the ontological order of things and the knowledge of these things. In *Metaphysics* Aristotle writes that the limit is the last point of each thing and the first point within which every part is. Further Aristotle explains that each thing is applied to the form (eidos), to the end (telos), to the substance (ousia) and to the essence (tieneinai). Similar to manner of explication of the order of things, Aristotle shows how a poet constructs connected events that make particularities of content, intensity of plot, causality of tragedy and inner order of poetry. Poetry depicts an action with a beginning, middle and an end that forms the limits of movement and time of action. Movement shows towards which, from which and to which, for the sake of which poetry is.

Aristotle's disposition towards comprehensive analysis of all that makes knowledge pretends to illuminate general principles of the order of things and also gives circumstantial descriptions of all possible expressions and particularities. In a similar manner he shows various kinds of imitations: 1) Art imitates people and their actions "better than our normal level, or worse than it, or much the same". In characterization of Homer's epic poems Aristotle writes that Homer imitates noble objects as well as comic Margites. Homer's style is characterized as the "poet of poets, standing alone not only through the excellence, but also through the dramatic character of his imitations (...) his Margites in fact stands in the same relation to our comedies as the Iliad and Odyssey to our tragedies" (1. 1448b1-35). 2) Tragedy is organized as imitation of unity consisting of three components: unity of place, time and action. "A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself, in language with pleasurable accessories (...); in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions (1. 1494b25). Experience of emotions in tragedy or comedy shows how pleasure, pity or pain can affect soul and change audience's perception, how catharsis is reached. Catharsis is not possible in intellectual art or construed reality where the deepest emotions is excluded from mimetic structures and in all other occasions where mimesis acts in ensemble with clear forms, determined colour spectrum or clear definitions. However, any kind of mimesis exists in a mind-depended and creative reality and is modelled by complicated relations between names and things, perceptible world and images.

Gadamer's Play

The central concept of Gadamer's ontology of art is play: play comprises art's ontological structures and artwork's existence in historicity. Gadamer shows that hermeneutics is more a reflection on experience of art, its existence, functions

and intensity and less a theory of art. Art's being and existence is viewed through such concepts as play, player, mimesis and double mimesis, transformation, truth, understanding, interpretation and horizon. For Gadamer true understanding and interpretation acknowledge an inclusion of art in the tradition and historicity considering different cultures and experience of others. His philosophy considers how artwork obtains a new existence and new understanding, where any new interpretation of artworks must maintain a truth resided in artwork's primordial being. Any new performance and interpretation of an existing artwork makes a new mimetic reality and new hermeneutical horizons where artwork dwells.

Art does not represent or copy the given world but allows to actualize itself in a new world of art, it double-transforms – firstly, the created work transforms from natural reality to reality of art, secondly, with any new understanding and interpretation artwork comes in new existence, new historicity and new actuality. It seems that art comprises a unit that consists of components of art's ontological play as well as of particular content and functions of art. Being and particularity develop actuality of artwork realizing a play – any actuality of artwork allows not only to contemplate on artwork, but also to interpret it and put it in new forms of performance. New performances and new interpretations invite questions for further interpretations bringing the past into the present and making a dialogue between human, artwork and historicity. The being of play appears in the movement of play: “A drama really exists only when it is played, and ultimately music must resound” (8. 116). Experience of art makes relationships with the world and generates new understanding of things and the world – the experience of art presents not only the particular content or object but also the meaningful whole (horizon) of life and the world that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point.

Hermeneutical horizon as the world of human thoughts and meaningful experiences shows realm of understanding. A world enclosed in horizons fuses and enlarges, makes connections with others, and the things known by one person come to another person and transform in new interpretations giving deeper understanding. Fusion of horizons enlarges knowledge and makes a dialogue with historical context that relates to the present understanding of the world.

Gadamer accentuates empathy in knowing and interpretation of things and art - with any new interpretation, artwork is transformed into a new mimetic reality. Gadamer gives great weight to empathy that is necessary for true interpretation and understanding of other cultures and unusual experiences. Empathy can be understood as akin, but, at the same time, different from ancient *technē*. *Technē* more shows practical skills of the artist or craftsman that determine forming of an artwork, but *technē* also concerns multiple imitated realities: artwork's reality, reality of theoretical interpretation of art, reality of experienced emotions. *Technē* clarifies answers to the question, how mimetic reality is made from different components: sounds, names, material and visually grasped things, etc., and if they are created by copying or mirroring, naming, interpreting,

seeking and knowing. In any case, *technē* takes into consideration different realities as well as qualities of representation art – the creator of artwork keeps correctness and conformity with mimetic reality that he performs. The difference between *technē* (skills) and empathy (considerate attention to others and the world in general) is seen in imitative actions as well as in creativity. Gadamer suggests that any new performance and interpretation of an existing artwork make a new mimetic reality and new horizons of understanding of art. The empathy creates attentiveness and maintains the truth of artwork, but too violent attention disarranges the play of artwork.

Any play has its own rules that include players and observers and make the spirit of play: “Games differ from one another in their spirit. The reason for this is that to-and-from movement constituting the game is patterned in various ways. The particular nature of a game lies in the rules and regulations that prescribe the way the field of the game is filled. The playing field on which the game is played is ... defined far more by the structure that determines the movement of the game (8. 107). Structure is before the beginning of play, but it is seen through the manifestation of play where players present the play’s structure and rules. Play’s structure, rules and space make ontology of play and artwork. “Every game presents the man who plays it with a task. He cannot enjoy the freedom of playing himself out without transforming the aims of his purposive behaviour into mere tasks of the game. (..) Play is limited to presenting itself. Thus, its mode of being is self-presentation. (..) The self-presentation of the game involves the player’s achieving, as it were, his own self-presentation by playing.” (8. 107.-108)²

Art shows the structure of play through artworks – play transforms in structure and play’s manifestation in artwork includes representation and self-understanding of the player. Artwork contains its own representation and autonomy containing historical, visual and audial horizons; fusion of these horizons makes “transformation of artwork in structure”. Artwork shows itself with a play-structure and gives a possibility for the player to reach self-understanding through representation.

In the context of play Gadamer uses terms: imitation, presentation, representation, transformation, transposition. These terms differ from each other by their meaning: presentation (*Darstellung*) imitates very similar as things are in reality without new interpretations and new forms, representation (*Darstellung fuer jemanden*) imitates giving new interpretations and new forms. Gadamer writes about imitation: “But the concept of imitation can be used to describe the play of art only if one keeps in mind the cognitive import in imitation. The thing presented is there. That is the situation basic to imitation. When the person imitates something, he allows what he knows to exist and to exist in the way that he knows it” (8. 113)

Gadamer uses term “transposition” that means “placing ourselves in the other situation” that is compatible with the dialogical movement of play. Dialogue with self and others, and understanding of all that is included in the play-area contain a set of

² Reference (8. 107-108) of Gadamer *Truth and Method* indicates pp. 107-108 from the eighth book in LITERATURE list.

unique rules that take space and must be played in the game. Game is more primordial than players are – human has the capacity to enter or not into a game. Human governs play however play has its own being and play experiences itself – the structure of play absorbs the player into itself. Rules of game are adherent to mimetic structure of play and form intensity of play. In experience of art, players and observers enter a unique time and space of a game where incorporation in game is natural to human nature.

Interpretation differs from imitation, it can be characterized as fusion of horizons where through historical horizons the player experiences artwork and reaches self-understanding. In experience of art the representation of self-understanding and self-experience makes double mimesis, it is not passive reception of truth of artwork, it gives explication of the questions how artwork represents its ontological structure and how the human experiences it. These questions show that humans – player and observer – are both included in play and make a common meaningful play's space. Play-experience develops a dialogue between fusing horizons of historicity, self-understanding and representation. Understanding of self and artwork is not raised from isolated components but from relations, empathy and unity of elements of play and fusion of horizons.

Gadamer's ontology of art and hermeneutical circle (play – art – artwork –player) resounds Heidegger's questions about truth in artwork and the role of artist in artwork. In *The Origin of the Work of Art* Heidegger writes: "The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. Neither is without the other. Nevertheless, neither is the sole support of the other. In themselves and in their interrelations artist and work are each of them by virtue of a third thing which is prior to both, namely that which also gives artist and work of art their names – art." (9. 284.)³ Heidegger shows how the being of art emerges and how it is other than that of copying of reality. But Heidegger's pronouncement is not so far from mimesis either: the basic mimetic structure is seen here – "naming" of things, expressed by specific poetic language of Heidegger: art gives names to artist and artwork. Two players of art, artist and artwork, make mimetic relations – artwork is because of artist, and artist is because of artwork. Heidegger's philosophical texts show mimesis between thoughts, naming of thoughts and intuition of being. In that case, it is philosophy that does not want to lose connection with reality (being) existing before any mimetic actions.

Heidegger is closer to pre-Socratic thinkers – his explications about the essence of truth or unconcealment (aletheia) show that truth is seen in openness of the world and comportment towards the things. Heidegger turns away from determined creation of mimetic reality and talks about a way of being attuned to the world. Instead of the performance as organized mimetic reality and explications of artwork as a piece of representational art, Heidegger's interest is overwhelmed with unconcealment of being in artwork – true work of art is a place where the truth establishes itself. Heidegger's

³ Reference (9. 284) of Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art" indicates p. 284 from the ninth book in LITERATURE list

philosophy justifies that imitative way of art is explicated in term *Vorstellung* (conception, representation). He shows the difference between “representational art” and “art in its “this-ness”. Representational art is imitative, it is mimesis of something – it is created for performance and, in accordance with Heidegger’s philosophy, is out of dwelling place⁴ and home. Heidegger’s dwelling place is akin to the midst of living, seeing of being, secret and at the same time sacred place, free from subjective effect. Heidegger’s philosophy justifies that origin of art is pre-theoretical. These Heidegger’s views draw a different attention to art as one developed in art philosophy in general. Heidegger’s philosophy shows that imitated things turn away from true existence – in Heidegger’s philosophy mimesis is the act that presents a world into being. Not imitation, but true questioning is the special method which shows being and truth – true questioning seeks truth not in discourse, not from construed “fictions” but in reality, as it is. *Turn to reality as it is* shows common philosophical approach to ancient thinking, phenomenology and hermeneutics.

Ancient, Hermeneutical and Phenomenological Approaches

Gadamer, for whom play and mimesis were two major concepts characterizing ontology of language and art, writes: “If the heart of the hermeneutical problem is that one and same tradition must time and again be understood in a different way, the problem, logically speaking, concerns the relationship between the universal and particular. Understanding, then, is a special case of applying something universal to a particular situation.” (8. 312). In paragraph *The Hermeneutic relevance of Aristotle* Gadamer views Aristotle’s ethical thoughts in connection with human sciences and two kinds of knowledge – practical (*phronesis*) and theoretical (*episteme*). Gadamer’s evaluation of Aristotle’s input in hermeneutical thinking shows a play of reason: “It is true that Aristotle is not concerned with the hermeneutical problem and certainly not with its historical dimensions, but with the right estimation of the role of that reason has to play in moral action” (8. 312)

Alongside opening of wide and even contradictory evaluations of mimesis in Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s philosophy, there are other remarkable interpretations of mimesis and play in comparison with ancient philosophers. Seeking of essence is one of the common points for ancient and hermeneutical phenomenology. For Aristotle the essence is “what a thing is”, his analysis comes to cognition that “a definition is a phrase signifying a thing’s essence” (2. 102a1). Definition represents the essence of things in language and transforms things to another reality as they are. Aristotle

⁴ Dwelling is a safe place and home place - local but open fourfold that includes the earth, the sky, mortality and immortality. Dwelling is fourfold (*das Geviert*), but at the same time dwelling is “simple oneness” of the earth, the sky, the mortals and immortals – dwelling means to think of all four, to belong to a place, to be at-home. Dwelling place is open, but bounded – human being is mortal, he bounds his own dwelling place with his mortality.

offers methodology for reaching the essence: existence, identity, power, categorization, relations are attributes of things that are used in descriptions of the things. Any description of things makes specific mimetic reality that imitates sensory world; it is seen in drama, text or art. Aristotle establishes the limit of understanding of things and the limit of our comprehension of them – a human can grasp the essence of things in conformity with the limit of his comprehension. Here we see hermeneutical approach – Aristotle's "limit of comprehension" is of the same kind as horizon in phenomenology and hermeneutics – the difference is in historicity used by Gadamer, however Husserl's phenomenology is philosophy of subjectivity and his usage of horizon refers to meaningful world. The second common philosophical question for both, ancient and phenomenologically hermeneutical, but with a different development, is: "How to reach essence?" whereas phenomenological interest is concentrated on the question: "How to know things as they are?"

The analysis of the question of how to reach the essence shows different ways of philosophical thinking. Thinking as a method is common for philosophy, in general, and the question "how" opens up different ways of thinking about "things as they are". Husserl's method of reduction, reflection and his thesis "Back to Things Themselves!" show how to constitute the things as they are. Husserl's evidence comes to the cognition that things are given as appearances (phenomena) in human experience. They imitate their own objectivity in mimetic structures and show themselves in intentionality as meaningful phenomena. From phenomenological point of view, the essence of phenomena is constituted in intentionality exploring the method of reduction that brackets all casual conditions. In phenomenological and hermeneutical philosophies, representation of things in mimetic reality may be considered as a condition, which enables to cover the truth of things or, quite the reverse, uncovers the essence of things. It is dependent not only on the contents of performance, or choice, comprehension and empathy of creator of particular artwork, but also on the way of philosophical thinking and basic concepts and questions of a philosopher.

These references show that the essence of mimesis can be substantiated beyond the visible and the audible and gives a possibility to compare different traditions of philosophical thinking – the ancient with the phenomenological and hermeneutical. Definitely, these philosophical traditions are based on essentially different standpoints – the ancient approach seeks the truth in harmony with cosmos and in the order of things while phenomenological thinking develops into reaching of truth in perspective of subjectivity and shows a method of constitution of the essence of phenomena (in this case, the essence of mimesis), hermeneutics views ontology of art, giving explications of such concepts as play, interpretation, understanding and truth of art. The interest of ancient philosophy concentrates more on the question: "What is the essence of things?" Thinking as a method is common for philosophy in general, and the question "how" opens up different ways of thinking about "things as they are".

Comprehension of essence of things makes connection with "naming" of things and

meanings, at the same time remaining its own objectivity. Art imitates reality of things making meaningful mimetic relations between things as they are with as they appear.

Mimesis and play as philosophical concepts usually are explored beyond of the analysis of concrete expressions of art, but, at the same time, they show human actions in the context of particular artworks. Play in Gadamer's hermeneutics concerns the question about ontological structure of art showing play as a primordial order of art that are mediated by human actions. Hermeneutics lightens up mimesis as unceasing creative action where human experience, reason and emotions play with intentions of the existing artwork. In general, ontology of art shows the self-sufficient structure of play and mimesis – humans are enclosed in a play a priori, and the play involves them in the rules and space of the play; human imitative actions show reality that exists beyond the sensory world and manifests self-understanding and the order of things in mimetic realities – art, politics, philosophy.

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Dr Ineta Kivle
 National Library of Latvia
 Latvia
 ineta.kivle@lnb.lv