

From Aesthetics to Art: From Ontology to the Holiness of the Real with the Sacred and the Beautiful as Experiential Coordinates

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“Dans notre ville, il y a
Des tours, des maisons par milliers,
Du béton, des blocs, des quartiers,
Et puis mon cœur, mon cœur qui bat
Tout bas.
Dans mon quartier, il y a
Des boulevards, des avenues,
Des places, des ronds-points, des rues,
Et puis mon cœur, mon cœur qui bat
Tout bas.”

(J. Charpentreau, *La ville enchantée*)

Culture, Civilization, Education and Mystagogy:

Man, by nature, finds his planet or the earth hostile. The earth is above all land of origin, land of life that opens itself up to the struggle in order to transform the earth into man's *world*. As man's origin and venue for his being, the earth is a hostile mother. In other words, to be in the earth is to find oneself in a hostile situation. Struggle defines the task of surviving in the bosom of this at times mother. Struggle is the essence of the game of existence called survival, which man, unfortunately, confuses with life itself. However, in all actuality, it is nothing more than just mere existence. It is just “being there”, mere facticity in terms of continuity and in terms of struggle. In this light, man builds sanctuaries to shelter his *persona*. This is what civilization is all about. Civilizations

are man's impositions in the naturally hostile earth transforming it into a world, knowable by means of the institutional and empirical tangibles such as buildings, monuments and roads, which altogether make up the *polis*, the *civitas*, the fortress of civilized man against his very own hostile instincts and the external violent forces beyond his control. All these buildings, bridges, roads and other constructs are the texts of man's civilized nature.

To be civilized is to contain those patterns necessary that enable man to go against the hostility of this earth and to convert the game of survival into life. To be civilized is to be cultured. To be civilized is to view this earth as a terrain that could be transformed, by means of culture, into a *world*. This transformation necessary demands the constant cultivation of culture. Culture is not something given. It is acquired. Its cultivation starts with the process of its acquisition and continues in the act of weaving complex patterns within a basic pattern.

Culture is this basic innate pattern that is the formal cause of civilization, of those texts.¹

Experience is the loom wherein this basic pattern is woven. It is the pattern that allows man to appropriate for himself in order to refigure the pattern of existence into a newly discovered pattern of life, of experiencing. The city, from where conflicts labeled as "political" —and therefore, are conflicts in the world and not in or from the earth— arise, is effectively the binding text that brings together all these edifices or constructs.² The root of these texts is the discursiveness itself, found in the very cognoscitive, better said, rational, nature of man.

Said discursiveness finds its most sublime moment and opportunity in art. "Culture —writes a renowned anthropologist— is that

¹ "Undirected by culture patterns-organized systems of significant symbols-man's behavior would be virtually ungovernable, a mere chaos of pointless acts and exploding emotions, his experience virtually shapeless. Culture, the accumulated totality of such patterns, is not just an ornament of human existence but —the principal basis of its specificity— an essential condition for it.", C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 46.

² For a profound treatment on the relationship and difference between "culture" and "civilization", R. William's reflections are highly recommended. Cfr. *Marxism and Literature*. (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 11-20.

which allows man to penetrate in the beauty and truth of things through introspection which comes close to a kind of capacity including that which is creative.”³ “Beauty” and “truth” are keywords in the ontological discourse of which we will speak in this essay of ours.

To be educated is to have cultivated (not natural) sensibilities and tendencies towards the sublime. Consequently, an educated person necessarily has aesthetic sensibility. When an educated person contemplates a work of art, he cannot help but be awed or have a feeling of reverence. To contemplate is to look at reality (substantive) mediating itself as something real (quality) and the real (substantive) mediating itself as reality (quality) directly with one’s conscious reality (individuated substantive). It is the art of opening one’s reality to the experience that the contact produces. This contact overcomes all narcissistic tendencies, the allurements of Calypso⁴; for contemplating is always reflexive or it always goes back to the contemplator. Contemplation reaches its summit in helping others contemplate or in initiating them into the contemplated (μυσταγογια).

Art, Artworks, Experience, Birthings and Sanctuaries.

Experience converts the mere contact (emperia) into an encounter not just with a reality (which is the work of art in itself nor that which the work of art depicts), but with what is real in

³ F. Marchisiano, “Fe, arte y cultura” in Several Authors, *Arte y Fe. Actas del Congreso de “Las Edades del Hombre”*. A. González Montes (ed.) (Salamanca: Universidad Pontifica de Salamanca, 1995), 60.

⁴ “L’expérience esthétique contemplative ordinaire ressemble donc à l’illusion dont est victime Narcisse qui, le regard tourné vers sa propre image, cherche à l’attendrir sans savoir d’où elle vient. Les beautés corporelles ne sont, paradoxalement, que des images, des traces et des ombres. En voulant saisir ces apprences irréelles, l’homme risque de se perdre, de se noyer dans le grand flux du devenir éternel dont parle le philosophe Héraclite et de vivre en aveugle chez les ombres. L’homme donc, comme Ulysse —l’opposé légendaire de Narcisse—, doit avoir le courage d’échapper aux enchainements de la magicienne Circé et de Calypso, et s’efforcer de retrouver sa vraie patrie, l’Intelligence ou l’Esprit. Car ‘s’il y a dans la nature une raison qui est le modèle de la beauté qui est dans les corps’, ‘il y a dans l’âme une raison plus belle encore d’où vient celle qui est dans la nature’, et cette vraie beauté. Notre Ithaque, notre patrie, est le lieu d’où nos venons, et notre père —le Bien— es là-bas.” J. Lacoste, *L’idée de beau*. (Paris: Bordas, 1986), 54.

itself in as much as the real makes itself real not only in the reality, which is the artwork, but above all in what the artwork depicts. Contemplation is in effect the process of converting contacts into encounters. "Every work of art—affirms a noted philosopher of art—follows the plan of, and pattern of, a complete experience, rendering it more intensely and concentratedly felt."⁵ Each work of art is in itself a sanctuary, a tabernacle that contains the art itself which must not be confused with what the artwork depicts. Sanctuaries are ambiances of complete experience: of its intensity and of the commitment it implies. Its presence consists in its own act of construction. To construct is to make present.

Art in itself must not be confused with the artwork nor with what the artwork depicts. Art in itself is the real (substantive) that becomes a reality (quality) in its own creative process; it is also the reality (substantive) that is real (quality). The artwork, sometimes called craft,⁶ and what the artwork depicts are the reality (substantive) that are the result(s) of said creative process, which consists of the man's participation in the real (substantive) by being reality (quality). Art, in order to be present, seeks a sanctuary.

Art in itself is a presence, a *real presence* of the real as a reality,⁷ borrowing a term coined by American critic George Steiner.

⁵ J. Dewey, *Art as Experience*. (New York: Perigee Books, 1934), 52.

⁶ "The first sense of the word 'art' to be distinguished from art proper is the obsolete sense in which it means what in this book I shall call craft. This is what *ars* means in ancient Latin, and what *τεχνη* means in Greek: the power to produce a preconceived result by means of consciously controlled and direct action. "R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*. (London-Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 15.

⁷ It is worth quoting here the opening paragraphs of the classical work bearing this title: "We speak still of 'sunrise' and 'sunset'. We do so as if the Copernican model of the solar system had not replaced, ineradicably, the Ptolemaic. Vacant metaphors, eroded figures of speech, inhabit our vocabulary and grammar. They are caught, tenaciously, in the scaffolding and recesses of our common parlance. There they rattle about like old rags or ghosts in the attic.

This is the reason why rational men and women, particularly in the scientific and technological realities of the West, still refer to 'God'. this is why the postulate of the existence of God persists in so many unconsidered turns of phrases and allusion. No plausible reflection or belief underwrites His presence. Nor does any intelligible evidence. Where God clings to our culture, to our routines

This presence is creative that finds an ontological outlet. Maximum presenciality, in ontological terms, becomes possible only in the effectivity of the presence in the artworks by narrating what the artworks depict. Ontology, in this light, identifies the art with what the artworks depict and the whole creative process involving above all the artist.

However, artworks are only testimonies of this presence. They speak of the art in which man participates or takes part of. Man does not exhaust this art, but only participates in it; only plays a role or takes a part in the creativity of the real that becomes a reality.⁸ This is due to his condition of being rational or being an

of discourse. He is a phantom of grammar, a fossil embedded in the childhood of rational speech. So Nietzsche (and many after him).

This essay argues the reverse!

It proposes that any coherent understanding of what language is and how language performs, that any coherent account of the capacity of human speech to communicate meaning and feeling is, in the final analysis, underwritten by the assumption of God's presence. It will put forward the argument that the experience of aesthetic meaning in particular, that of literature, of the arts, of musical form, infers the necessary possibility of this 'real presence'. The seeming paradox of a 'necessary possibility' is, very precisely, that which the poem, the painting, the musical composition are at liberty to explore and to enact.

This study will contend that the wager on the meaning of meaning, on the potential of insight and response when one human voice addresses another, when we come face to face with the text and work of art or music, which is to say when we encounter the *other* in its condition of freedom, is a wager on transcendence.

This wager-it is that of Descartes, of Kant and of every poet, artist, composer of whom we have explicit record-predicates the presence of realness, of a 'substantiation' (the theological reach of this word is obvious) within language and form. It supposes a passage, beyond the fictive or the purely pragmatic, from meaning to meaningfulness. The conjecture is that 'God' is, not because our grammar is outworn; but that grammar lives and generates worlds because there is the wager on God."

G. Steiner, *Real Presences*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 3-4. It is not my intention in this essay to pursue the lines of Natural Theology suggested by Steiner.

⁸ In this light, I find that this verse of Argentine poet J. L. Borges marks the spot:

"Dios mueve al jugador, y éste la pieza.
¿Qué dios detrás de Dios la trama empieza
de polvo y tiempo y sueño y agonías."

J. L. Borges, "Ajedrez II" in Idem., *Nueva antología personal*. (Barcelona; Club Bruguera, 1980).

experiencing creature characterized by his finitude and culpability.⁹ This condition, though deprivatory in the salvific sense, provides man with the necessary condition that would allow his participation. Consequently, man does not create *ex nihilo*, but by appropriation, which is *post nihilo*. The latter is carried out by means of taking possession of the art, in its forms, in nature and in the works of others, to create a new form, a new sanctuary, a new tabernacle.¹⁰ After all these sanctuaries, tabernacles are only forms. Form, which can be rightly called a "happy accident" and which is the crux of the Gadamerian notion of *spiel*, is the home of the content, of the art in itself. In this regard, the artist is the guardian of the art, not only of his artworks but of art itself. As guardian, he constructs a home for the art by first and foremost building a home for himself and for his most sublime inclinations. This construction is always a birthing, a responsible birthing of contemplating and making others capable of contemplating.¹¹ It is, in the long term, the responsible birthing of art through the artist.

Birthing, in a certain sense, can be understood in terms of origins. In this light, the opening paragraph from Heidegger's famous essay on art proves helpful:

Origin here means that from and by which something is what it is and as it is. What something is, as it is, we call its essence or nature. The origin of something is the source of its nature. The question concerning the origin of the work of art asks about the source of its nature. On the usual view, the work

⁹ Cfr. P. Ricouer, *Fallible Man*. Ch. A. Kelbley trans. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986). In the original French, the title is *Finitude et Culpabilité* which constitutes the second part of Ricouer's *Philosophy of the Will*.

¹⁰ "The philosophy of this faith can of course assure us that all of God's creative work is to be thought of as different from the action of a craftsman." M. Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" in Idem., *Poetry, Language and Thought*. A. Hofstadter (trans.) (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), 29.

¹¹ "El hombre ha de ir haciéndose no ya su vida, sino proseguir su no acabado nacimiento; ha de ir naciendo a lo largo de su vida, mas no en soledad, sino con la responsabilidad de ver y de ser visto, de juzgar y ser juzgado, de tener que edificar un mundo en el que pueda quedar encerrado este ser prematuramente nacido, sin tiempo, sin libertad, y en su situación entrar en el gran teatro del mundo sin saber tampoco su papel a representar." M. Zambrano, *El sueño creador*. (Madrid: Ediciones Turner, S.A., 1986), 27.

arises out of and by means of the activity of the artist. But by what and whence is the artist what he is? By the work; for to say that the work does credit to the master means that it is the work that first lets the artist emerge as a master of his art. 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.¹²

*The sanctuary, as a temple, is sacred. As a home, the sanctuary is beautiful. The art in itself is that which is holy and is beauty.*¹³

Creativity, Holiness, Reverence and Narration:

Creativity is a call towards holiness, which is characterized participating in the work of the Creator, the only one who could create "*ex nihilo*." Holiness is man's response from his finite and fallible condition that only allows him to create "post nihilo". This call is an initiation into the mysteries. It is, effectively, *mystagogy*.¹⁴ Said initiation into the mysteries makes man grow in his relationship with the Creator making it grow from a relationship with the θεός to an encounter with the πατερ passing through the confession marked by addressing the Creator as κύριος. The call takes the form of history, the venue wherein the real (quality) in reality (substantive) becomes intelligible in being, in τι το ον εστι. Reality (quality) is, inevitably —since the real (substantive) only becomes a

¹² M. Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," *o.c.*, 17.

¹³ In this sense, I differ from the classical thesis of R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (*Das Heilige*). J. W. Harvey trans. (Oxford-New York-London: Oxford University Press, 1958). Neither has the collective volume, *Lo santo y lo sagrado*. (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1993), clarified this difference satisfactorily. See my article for an initial exploration on this matter: "Experiencia e historia. Las bases heurísticas para un estudio epistemológico de la revelación como hecho religioso" in *Studium* 40 (2000), 393-406.

¹⁴ Cfr. T. Alvarez, "Mística y mistagogía" in Several Authors, *La teologia spirituale. Atti del Congresso Internazionale OCD*. Rome: Edizioni del Teresianum-Edizioni OCD, 2001, 735-743; M. Ofilada Mina, "Possible Relationship between Mystagogy and Philosophy and its Bearing on Theology and Spirituality," in *Philippiniana Sacra*, 34 (1999), 219-246.

reality in history—, always an ontological openness towards form to facilitate man's comprehension. The form, is above all an ambiance, power to give an environment of home and not just a dwelling place. Home is the comfortable experience of the house. The world is the assimilable form of the earth; assimilable because it is livable, favorable to experiencing. It is what is contrary to the hostility of the earth, the state that goes against all experiencing. One must go beyond all forms and its ontological quality, even to the point of going beyond substantives that are in constant ontological openness to form. One must go back to the quality the real or the art in itself, that is the root of all essence and beyond all accidents.

A home, any temple of worship, a museum, ancestral house, maternal womb all share one same characteristic: all of them, for being artworks, inspire reverence. It is a reverence mixed with irony. For something to qualify as that which inspires reverence, it must necessarily be in contrast to its surrounding habitat or context. Irony is the condition of being in contrast with the context. Contrast is the main ontological instrument for a hermeneutics.

The reverence that any work of art inspires necessarily implies a narrative struggle. Each work of art, given that it depicts something, is in itself a narrative assumption. Each work wants to tell a story, not necessarily factual, chronological or even expressible. Telling a story is more than just mere expression, which is the primitive state of all production. Anything produced becomes artistic if and when it overcomes the absoluteness of expression and enters into the realm of narrativity by being a narrative assumption. This is especially obvious in the case of classical art with its basic processual antinomy of *mimesis-poiesis*, *representation-fiction*.

In non-classical contemporary forms or schools of art, this narrative assumption is somewhat lost and apparently simply reduced to expression. In many cases, it is more difficult to deduce and articulate this narrative assumption. Notwithstanding, a work qualifies as artistic or an incarnation of art if it is able to attain a doctrinal, magisterial stand, i.e., it must not only teach a lesson or state a message, but must lead the contemplator to the act of contemplating in itself, that is, to the very experience in itself, characterized above all by creativity in as much as experience mediates reality directly.

First and foremost, an artwork must say something without saying; express something without expressing. Going beyond saying and expressing means entering the realm of the discursive wherein narrative becomes an assumption. It is assuming the ontological premise that gives way to the discourse, subject to hermeneutical process in its phenomenological availability.

Ontology: Form and Polysemy

Works of art are inevitably linked to form. They are forms, not in the platonic sense of *eidos*, but concrete forms. The existence of concrete forms is proof of polysemy. It is not art in itself which is polysemic, but that the experiences of it are polysemic. And experiences of the art take form in its forms, namely, in artworks (beings) with the messages they impart or narrate.

The pretentious title of our essay is suggestive of a path. In the simplest terms possible, this article aims at presenting this path. However, considerable attention must be given to the inevitable starting point which is ontology, the prejudicial realm wherein all philosophies of art (and all philosophies) have been cultivated for the past thousands of years or so.

Ontology focuses exclusively on the forms. Being is only known as a form. Being is only a form of reality that is real. Thus, ontology focuses itself on the stories staged or narrated in the artworks. This focus has brought about what consensus has called hermeneutics or phenomenological hermeneutics,¹⁵ which in turn has

¹⁵ This is a concession to Heidegger's notion as expressed in par. 7 of Heidegger's Introduction to *Being and Time*. Cfr. M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*. J. Stambaugh (trans.) (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 23-34. For a broad and yet highly competent commentary (limiting ourselves to titles in English), cfr.: R. Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 23-84; W. J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 46-49. For generalized studies on hermeneutics available in English, cfr. R. E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics*. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1969); J. Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*. J. Weisheimer (trans.) (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1994); Several Authors, *Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects*. G. Shapiro & A. Sica (trans.) (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); P. Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. J. B. Thompson (ed. & trans.) (Cambridge-London: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

revealed the inevitability of polysemy, which gives way to what French hermeneute Paul Ricœur rightly calls "The Conflict of Interpretations."¹⁶

Artworks are the voices of ontology, since they are the incarnations of polysemy. Polysemy should not be pursued in its own right. This would be pursuing *production* instead of *creativity*. Production is only a consequence or a by-product, therefore, its value is not absolute. Polysemy is the expression of the possibility of comprehension.

However, ontology, with its pretensions towards productivity, has been absolutized bringing about excessive production culminating in technological advances with disastrous and violent consequences. These have dehumanized man, the artist and instead made the artist the slave of his artwork.

This deshumanization unfortunately takes the form of technology, wherein art once again becomes τέχνη or the facility of doing things made concrete in devices. Consequently, man, because of ontological absoluteness, ends up sacrificing human dignity.

Ontology "symbolizes" realities as beings (ontological substantivization of substantives). Being is access to reality, in as much as it is real and in as much as it becomes real in realities symbolized as being or beings. Being is epistemological access. It makes reality knowable. It is reality in as much as it is knowable, controllable, available to human hands. Availability to human hands is openness to production. It is openness to polysemy, a necessary condition for all gnoseological and noetic activity.

In order for art "to be," it must pass through the ontological phase of production. But it must not remain there. Art must realize itself and reach the level of creativity, that of being in communion with the real in itself revealing its dimensions in reality and making itself incarnate in realities belonging to the sphere of reality in as much as it is real.

Another dimension or phase of ontology is that of interpretation or hermeneutics or phenomenological hermeneutics. Realities

¹⁶ Cfr. P. Ricœur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*. Ed. by D. Ihde. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

are interpreted herein as beings or in terms of their thingness, in terms of their productivity, in terms of their polysemy. Artworks, together with what they narrate, constitute the ontological mediation, in the guise of the beautiful, aimed at comprehension and cognition. These two should not be confused nor identified with experience or the totality of the experience, especially in its mediation. Comprehension and cognition are only moments. In other words, the "symbolic" (ontological, since being is the symbol of reality in as much as it is real in experience) moments, of the entire experiential realm, process and mediation.¹⁷

To symbolize is to stand in the place of something absent as its ontological substitute.¹⁸ The main function of the symbolical is to represent, to be present on behalf of that which is absent according to the basic ontological categories, which are aesthetic or perceptual, that is, the categories of time and space, the coordinates of presence above all to sense perception and are, effectively, the primary coordinates of cognition.¹⁹ In the light of all these, the natural outlet of the symbolical is expression to the extent of reducing all art and artworks to expression, to its ontological outlet.

Expression, then, becomes the object of interpreting, of seeing; not only visual seeing, but also of the other senses. Visuality is the summit of all aesthetical cognition. It does not have aesthetical mono-poly –although admittedly the visual mode enjoys a certain pre-eminence²⁰– of aesthetic appreciation operating along onto-

¹⁷ "The spiritual life to which art belongs, and of which it is one of the mightiest agents, is a complex but definite movement above and beyond, which can be translated into simplicity. This movement is that of cognition. Although it may take different forms (polysemy-M.O.), it holds basically to the same internal meaning and purpose." Several Authors, *Art, Creativity, and the Sacred*. D. Apostolos-Cappadona (ed.), (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1992), 7. This statement expresses the accepted ontological-epistemological focus on art and the sacred.

¹⁸ Cfr. F. W. Dillistone, *The Power of Symbols in Religion and Culture*. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1986).

¹⁹ Cfr. I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason, I (Transcendental Aesthetic)*. J. M.D. Meiklejohn (trans.) (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1990), 21-43.

²⁰ From a theological viewpoint, the following paragraphs are indeed enlightening: "In this way, works of art are not illustrations nor evidence that validate a particular interpretation of a theological or cultural argument. Rather, works of art are in their own right a mode of human expression that generates theo-

gical realms. Expression is the act of providing a symbol to be interpreted. In the act of interpretation, the symbol is transformed into a text. Expression provides the excuse for reading. Reading, as a personal act, leaves empty spaces, for interpretation selfishly absorbs the spirit of the words in an act of self-appropriation, in a movement of taking possession. And all that is left are words. The emptiness must be filled again by the continuous reading.

Ontological mediation is symbolical. Being is the symbol of reality in as much as it is real.

Said ontological mediation is expressed aesthetically by the thingness of the works of art, which are grounded in being in itself, in its openness, ἀληθία, truth²¹ in the transcendental sense. As one prominent scholar notes:

Before one considers how the question of the truth in art has been attacked, subverted, or deconstructed, it is helpful to note that the history of metaphysical articulations of truth in Western art reflects an ongoing attempt throughout the different epochs to bridge what the Ancient Greeks perceived as an ontological difference between beings and Being. Essentially, the traditional conception of truth, but no means naïve

logical interpretation and reflection, and that reveals its cultural and theological milieu. In order for an interpreter of works of art to be able to understand and to operate in this way, he or she must be carefully trained in the discipline of seeing.

The primacy of the visual modality has been denied and deprecated in Western culture since the Reformation. With the Reformation, the aural modality was retrieved as primary. The power of the scriptural word, which was primary and transformative for Luther and Calvin, has been re-formed in the mid-twentieth century by the power of the press. The classic distinction and choice of word over image has reigned in the development of modern Western culture. Nevertheless, the visual modality has continued to exist and even to flourish."

D. Adams & D. Apostolos-Cappadona, "Art as Religious Studies: Insights into the Judeo-Christian Traditions" in Several Authors, *Art as Religious Studies*. D. Adams & D. Apostolos-Cappadona (eds.) (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1993), 4. For a general approximation to the notion of visuality, the reading of this collective volume is highly recommended: Several Authors, *Languages of Visuality. Crossings between Science, Art, Politics, and Literature*. B. Allert (ed.) (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996).

²¹ Cfr. J. Ortega y Gasset. *The Origin of Philosophy*. T. Talbot (trans.) (New York-London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1967); M. Heidegger, *Parmenides*. A. Schuwer & R. Rojcewicz (trans.) (Bloomington-Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992).

or easily dismissed, verifies that beings are grounded in Being, a verification that, oddly enough, has been mediated by the arts. Plato was fully aware of this oddity in that he found it extremely questionable in the Republic to base one's understanding of the truth of Being on a mimetic relation or *illusion* whose being is difficult to establish with any certainty. What is the being of an epic like the *Iliad*, a piece of music like Claudio Monteverdi's *Vespro della Beata Vergine*, or a painting like *Gilles* by Antoine Watteau? Do these works have being as art independent of a relationship with a beholder, let alone a community or culture? Do they simply simulate with our cooperation a being that they do not, in fact, have? Is non-being part of the essence of the being of the work of art? Or is that non-being merely a symptom of the sham or illusion that is the work of art? Given how open these fairly fundamental questions are, can one responsibly even begin to talk about something like the truth in art? For it is not a leap to begin discussing how a work vouches for the bridging of the difference between beings and Being if we have not resolved the question of how the work itself has being or participates in being?²²

The beingness of the works of art holds true when they serve as mirrors of reality in itself in as much as it is real by being multiple in realities.²³ However, it is inevitable that said beingness hinges on its trueness, not just in the transcendental sense (or of being being true or identifiable with *verum*) but above all in its narrative assumption, in its message, in its content which is still and is inevitably a form. Narrativity, then, becomes the process of truth.

²² H. Rapaport, *Is There Truth in Art?* (Ithaca-London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 1-2. For a broad discussion on the relationship between ontology and art, cfr. E. M. Zemach, *Real Beauty*. (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 140-166.

²³ "Sí; palabras de más, como si acaso,
no fuéramos dichos en el mundo;
cual si no hubiera gozo a cada paso.
Bien, Belleza, Verdad. —Aquí un espejo.
Mírate el rostro inmundado,
Tú que dices así: pues es el caso,
que llevamos el alma en el pellejo."

R. Darío, "Ecce Homo" in Idem., *Poemas Selectos*. J. Garza Castillo (ed.) (Barcelona: Edicomunicación, S.A., 1994), 42.

Form is the root of polysemy, of all conflicts of interpretations. Form, together with matter, make up the ontological essence. In the case of the artworks, this essence consists in the fulfillment of the already mentioned narrative assumption. A work of art is not only true (transcendental level) in its thingness, in its belongingness to the realm of being or in its ontological participation in being. It is also and above all true in its narrative assumption and dimension or in its fulfillment of this narrative role consisting in the task of phenomenologically imparting a message making it available to hermeneutics.

Aesthetics: Ontological Truth, Its Transcendental and Narrative Dimensions.

Therefore the true, ἀληθεια, *verum* in its ontological sense is not only transcendental, but is also narrative. This is especially obvious in the case of artworks and artforms, whether plastic, performing or literary. The transcendental and narrative dimensions of ontological truth, especially in artworks, become the basis of criteriology or of the determination of the truth-value and application of the proper criteria of truth.²⁴ This criteriological basis is clearer in the search for ontological beauty (*pulchrum*), which is subservient to the ontological good (*bonum*) for beauty is the good that gives pleasure or delight. Said pleasure or delight is the commencement of a process of cognition called perception, by which the transcendental dimension already made explicit, with the narrative dimensions is still implicit, submits itself to the ontological and epistemological tutelage of aesthetics.

Aesthetics should not be limited to what is ontologically beautiful alone. Aesthetics is, in all actuality, a broader subject matter and is, in effect, a theory of perception. In this light, it is the starting point of the revelation, openness of ontological truth in beauty. This

²⁴ Cfr. J. Ma. Alejandro, *Gnoseología*. (Madrid, 1969), 404ss.; A. I. Goodman, *Epistemology and Cognition*. (Cambridge, Ma.-Londres, 1986); Varios, *The Philosophy of Science*. (Oxford, 1996); K.R. Popper, *Objective Knowledge*. (Oxford, 1979); J. Losee, *A Historical Introduction to the Philosophy of Science*. 3a. ed. (Oxford, 1993); J. Dancy, *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*. (Oxford-Cambridge, Ma., 1995); A. Ma. Andaluz Romanillos, "Noción y problemática de la teoría del conocimiento" en *Cuadernos Salmantinos de Filosofía* 23 (1996), 5-33.

takes place in the explicitation process of the narrative dimension. Aesthetics reaches its summit or fulfills itself in the narrative process or dimension, wherein the message of art through the artwork is imparted, given, and presented to the admirer.

Truly, aesthetics is the ontological science of the admirer of a work of art. It should not be confused with the philosophy of art,²⁵ which, for its metaphysical character, goes beyond forms, polysemies and the centrality of narrative assumptions, which constitute the development of ontological and transcendental exigencies. *Philosophy of Art goes to the real in itself that becomes a reality, which is hidden and which does not simply appear.*

Aesthetics, in its aim for truth from and through ontology, is formal, that is, it is based on forms and cannot do without them. Form is that which is perceived and, eventually, known in cognition and assimilated as that which gives pleasure or delight to the cognitive sensibilities. These forms ultimately make up the totality of experience, the mediation of the real (quality) in reality (substantive) and of being realities (quality) in as much as they are real (substantive). Aesthetics necessarily implies the development of the faculty of judgement by making criticism explicit for criticism is the only adequate form of response to form. In this light, let us quote Heidegger's concluding paragraph in *The Origin of the Work of Art*:

Truth is the unconcealedness of that which is as something that is. Truth is the truth of Being. Beauty does not occur alongside and apart from this truth. When truth sets itself into the work, it appears. Appearance —as this being of truth in the work and as work— is beauty. Thus the beautiful belongs to the advent of truth, truth's taking of its place. It does not exist merely relative to pleasure and purely as its object. The beautiful does lie in form, but only because the *forma* once took its light from Being as the isness of what is. Being at that time made its advent as *eidos*. The *idea* fits itself into the *morphe*. The *sunolon*, the unitary whole of *morphe* and *hule*, namely the *ergon*, is in the manner of *energeia*. This mode of presence becomes the *actualitas* of the

²⁵ For a comprehensive and suggestive overview of aesthetics as philosophies of arts, cfr. P. Kivy, *Philosophies of Arts. An Essay in Differences*. (Cambridge-New York-Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

ens actu. The *actualitas* becomes reality. Reality becomes objectivity. Objectivity becomes experience. In the way of which, for the world determined by the West, that which is, is as the real, there is concealed a peculiar confluence of beauty with truth. The history of the nature of Western art corresponds to the change of the nature of truth. This is no mere intelligible in terms of beauty taken for itself than it is in terms of experience, supposing that the metaphysical concept of art reaches to art's nature.²⁶

The subject of aesthetics, which is commonly confused with Philosophy of Art, is what is expressed or what is symbolized by ontology. This subject is converted into a text within a cognitive process that begins with perception above all of what is pleasant giving a sensation of good. This perception of beauty is always attached to the forms.

Ontological beauty aims to give pleasure. It is subordinated to the good for being its effect. It is not perceived from the thingness of the work of art, nor in the works of art in themselves, but in the narrative content of said works demanding a criteriology, a judgement or a critical stand with which aesthetics culminates. Because of this, in certain circles aesthetics is also known as art-appreciation or more precisely, art-appreciation within the context of philosophy as a general theory of criticism.²⁷

Heidegger, in the paragraph just cited, apparently has found the path beyond ontology. He alludes to reality and the act of abandoning being and beings and knocks on the doors of experience, as the mediation of what is real as reality in realities that are real.

²⁶ M. Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art", o.c., 81.

²⁷ Writes one author: "*Art-criticism... the passage to the philosophy of art in particular, is obvious. We may characterize it as the general theory of the criticism of art and aesthetic objects. Art-criticism were it fully and explicitly aware of the meaning of the assertions that it makes, could be characterized conversely as applied philosophy of art. Of art-criticism which, as in the immense majority of cases, has no such conscious theoretical background, all that can be said is that it implies some philosophy of art, and, unavoidable, one replete with errors and contradictions. And since no one can walk a straight path in the dark except for brief moments by chance, art-criticism of that sort is not simply futile, but muddling.*", C. J. Ducasse, *The Philosophy of Art*. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1966), 5-6.

Obviously Heidegger cannot or will not overcome ontology. The philosopher from Fribourg has chosen to remain at the crucial threshold. He has not crossed into the realm of the real, which is the realm of the experiential. For him, crossing the boundaries of ontology consists in toying with the idea of nothingness, which is still an ontological problem and frontier.

Aesthetics: *Mimesis* and *Poiesis*.

The plenitude of aesthetics consists in its narrativity, which is also the key to overcoming the ontological limits of aesthetics in order to enter another realm of beauty, that which is *metaphysical*, that which is *identifiable* with the *Holy* in itself.

For being symbolic and textual, artworks are two-sided. On the one hand, this two-sidedness makes possible the artworks's polysemy. On the other hand, said two-sidedness is a demand: that of searching for meaning, which acknowledges the thingness of the artworks and yet this search retreats from this thingness going back to the originary quality. The key to this retreat consists in going beyond forms, inflated in the signifying function of language.²⁸

The movement is a retreat. At the same time, it is moving forward towards the goal. The origin is reencountered at the end as a goal. Retreating is giving reverence to this goal as origin; but going forward is acknowledging that the origin can only be encountered at the finish line.

The path is aesthetical. The aesthetical is always a path of configuration and refiguration, that is, of creating *post nihilo* and taking possession of forms. Aesthetics seeks to provide new forms for reading. Aside from remodeling the reader's expectations, it

²⁸ "La dévaluation même du mot 'langage', tout ce qui, dans le crédit qu'on lui fait, dénoie la lâcheté du vocabulaire, la tentation de séduire à peu de frais, l'abandon passif à la mode, la conscience d'avant-garde, c'est-à-dire l'ignorance, tout cela témoigne. Cette inflation du signe 'langage' est l'inflation du signe lui-même, l'inflation absolue, l'inflation elle-même. Pourtant, par une face ou une ombre d'elle-même, elle fait encore signe: cette crise est aussi un symptôme. Elle indique comme malgré elle qu'une époque historico-métaphysique doit déterminer enfin comme langage la totalité de son horizon problématique." J. Derrida, *De la grammatologie*. (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1967), 15.

makes this earth readable as a world, a place of culture and civilization.

To refigure is mimetic, whereas configuration is poetic. Mimesis seeks to express and present, whereas configuration aims at opening new spaces and possibilities. Refiguration points out to the experiential dimension, whereas configuration is the process wherein man recognizes and discovers shades and colors within the same dimension that before man did not notice because of its sheer implicity. And yet this discovery does not necessarily mean the overcoming of the barrier of ineffability. This discovery is not just an interpretation (this is the role of configuration), but rather it is a recreation, an initiation (*mustagogia*) into the real world by the act of creating it²⁹ as a sanctuary, a home for the Holy which is the real. Given that the Holy is the real, it is experienced, from the vantage point of art, as origin and as goal, that is, the originary (the original rediscovered in the path as a goal or end in itself).

The goal, however, is not yet clear. Even though the origin is not yet totally clear, it has been configured as the starting point. From the perspective of the origin, the role of creating the real world as a sanctuary is, in effect, the task of making this world experienciable as an archive. In this regard, it is worth quoting this philological and historical analysis of J. Derrida:

In a way, the term indeed refers, as one would correctly believe, to the *arkhe* in the *physical*, *historical*, or *ontological* sense, which is to say that the originary, the first, the principal, the primitive, in short to the commencement. But even more, and *even earlier*, "archive" refers to the *arkhe* in the *nomological* sense, to the *arkhe* of the commandment. As in the case for the Latin *archivum* or *archium* (a word that is used in the singular, as was the French *archive*, formerly employed as a masculine singular: *un archive*), the meaning of "archive", its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded. The citizens who thus held and signified

²⁹ I have paraphrased here S. Davis "Introduction" in *Several Authors, Art and Its Messages: Meaning, Morality and Society*. S. Davies (ed.) (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 16.

political power were considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law. On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that *place* which is their house (private house, family house, or employee's house), that official documents are filed. The archons are first of all the documents' guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutica right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives. Entrusted to such archons, these documents in effect speak the law: they recall the law and call on or impose the law. To be guarded thus, in the jurisdiction of this *speaking the law*, they needed at once a guardian and a localization. Even in their guardianship or their hermeneutic tradition, the archives could do neither without substrate nor without residence.

It is thus, in this *domiciliation*, in this house arrest, that archives take place. The dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public, which does not always mean from the secret to the nonsecret.³⁰

*Configuration and refiguration*³¹ converge in the artwork's narrative assumption, wherein the artwork becomes a world in itself, a sanctuary to man's spirit that seeks to participate in the θεός, in the Lordship (κυριότης) of the θεός and eventually in the Fatherhood of God, by being able to call Him πατερ. But this world, wherein all polysemies and the search for meaning (and not meanings) converge, of the narrative artform should not be rendered as absolute. It only serves as criteria: as the moment wherein one can speak of truth within the context of an artwork. It only points to something that symbolizes or that which is necessarily beyond it as an event, as a being in its thingness. It must point to the experience of man himself.

Experience, in this sense, does not only mean man's particular experiential moments nor his empirical contacts inspite of

³⁰ J. Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression*. E. Prenowitz (trans.) (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 2-3.

³¹ I have to acknowledge the inspiration here of P. Ricœur, *Critique & Conviction*. K. Blamey (trans.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 172-174.

their functionality towards cognition in perception. Experience, is above all, the ambience for man wherein the real becomes reality and the reality becomes real.

Truly artworks must point to the real, to an experience of renovation in the ineffability of the supreme quality of being real going beyond all forms and even substantives. However, these substantives play a metaphorical role in as much as that they integrate all of man's finitude and fallibility into the mediating realm of experience that mediates itself in man's artistic capabilities and its ontological outlet.

From integrating there is an act of transferring to another integrating level: that of the real in itself. However, there is a bridge towards this new level built over the abyss of ineffability or the impenetrable silence of primordial creativity: that of the sacred and the beautiful, the primordial coordinates of what is real (qualities) in as much as it is reality (substantive).

From Aesthetics to Philosophy of Art in Metaphysics: The Encounter with the Holy of the Real in the Sacred and Beautiful.

The Holy is metaphysical: transcendent and yet immanent. It is not merely $\theta\epsilon\omicron\zeta$, but is above all pater, relational, personal, experiencing and experientiable. In order to discover, the $\theta\epsilon\omicron\zeta$ as $\pi\alpha\tau\epsilon\rho$, one must undergo the experience of the Creator as $\kappa\upsilon\rho\iota\omicron\zeta$, which necessarily implies an artistic confession.

In the ontological realm, the Creator is $\theta\epsilon\omicron\zeta$. But in its intimacy, which is the goal of all participation, it is $\pi\alpha\tau\epsilon\rho$. The only path to its intimacy, which is its very own quality of being real, one must pass through the *ascesis* of art, that is, the process of detachment and breaking away³² from the forms in order to make a confession of the real as *kurios* towards a rediscovery of the Lord as Father, as the origin in the experience of Him as the originary especially at the end of the enriching experiential journey.

The $\kappa\upsilon\rho\iota\omicron\zeta$ only dwells in the sacred and the beautiful, which are the only adequate categories of response to the call of the real

³² X. Pikaza, "Teología de la belleza: Experiencia bíblica y estética cristiana" in Several Authors, *Arte y Fe*, o.c., 320.

as *kurios* in order to overcome the ontological notion of *qeos* and to discover its sublime quality as the real in reality and as the reality which is real in itself as *πατερ*.

The sacred is a call to *latria*; the beautiful is a call to *ethos*. *Latria* is a call to religion, *ethos* to morals. Together they build a temple, worthy dwelling of the Holy, the pater who is the real (substantive) who makes Himself reality (quality) and the reality (substantive) that is real (quality) in experience, who is also Beauty in itself in as much as He is the Creator. In this light, they also construct a home wherein creativity is nurtured, guarded and cultivated. Temples, homes: these are the two sides of the coin which we have called in this essay, sanctuary. To enshrine, to give shelter: these are the two acts that take place in a sanctuary. To adore, to make dwell: these are the calls of the sanctuary. The sacred and the beautiful: these are the substantives of the Holy and Beauty. In the sacred and the beautiful, the pater is *kurios* relativizing the absoluteness of the *θεος*.

The call to *latria* and *ethos* reached its boiling point in the aesthetic and ascetic experience of Israel, which prohibited the making of images. This call is the word, the word as principle, principial³³ and the originary for the end of the journey consists in an enriched reencounter with this word that goes beyond all forms and images and are, consequently, not reducible to them. This word is the fire of the Creator, the hearth of the presence of the Creator that gives warmth to this cold earth transforming it into a world: into a temple and home. Writes one theologian: "It is evident that Israel prohibited the idols because they have especially attracted the people and made them feel the temptation of making and making themselves, of fabricating the world according to their standards and fabricating itself. In this way, religious art has been presented as a strong titanism: it does not only aim at stealing fire from God, but of stealing the gods themselves. In other words, of stealing God Himself to manipulate Him, to configure Him according to our standards (in the image of the cosmos in which we find

³³ Cfr. J. L. Chrétien, *L'arche de la parole*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998).

ourselves).”³⁴ This spoliation and manipulation are ontological acts in their pretension towards absolutization. We must free ourselves from the pleasurable tyranny of aesthetics or of ontology and liberate ourselves metaphysically in and by art in its course towards beauty itself.

The Sacred and the Beautiful are substantives that speak of what is *Beauty* and what is *Holy* (qualities). As substantives, they are experiential categories. They are the points of encounter with the quality of the Holy, of Beauty, of what is real. They are the gifts of the Holy and Beauty in which the Holy and Beauty gives itself.³⁵

What is real manifests itself as that which is Holy, in as much as it occupies the highest place in the metaphysical realm; it is that which reveals itself as Beauty, for it is the supreme aspiration in the metaphysical realm. Unfortunately, man has been a slave of aesthetics making him forget *latría* and *ethos*, thus making him violent and a violator.

³⁴ X. Pikaza, *art. cit.*, 314. Translation mine. Another author, contemplating the figure of Prometheus, writes: “Prometeo se arroga la fundación del hombre. Antes de su robo del fuego divino y de su donación desinteresada, los hombres, en poder de la voluntad y, por tanto, sin deseo de destino, vagaban sometidos a las leyes caprichosas de un sueño tiránico. Prometeo, aprisionado en su privilegiado morador, tiene opiniones crudas y nada bucólicas: ninguna lejana Edad de Oro surge de sus labios sino, más bien, una Edad de la Idiotéz, en la que el buen salvaje era una pieza obediente en el engranaje convulso de la naturaleza. Gracias a sus dones el hombre se rebela contra esta obediencia.

No obstante, la concesión de la memoria y de la adivinación, de la medicina y de las diversas técnicas para transformar su entorno no son suficientes. Lo primordial, lo que introduce una profunda dislocación en la rueda del cosmos, es el sentido de perpetuación y de futuro que permite al hombre forjar una imagen única de su destino. La fundación del hombre es, por tanto, la enunciación de su mito como criatura distinta, separada, capaz, a su antojo, de las mayores creaciones y destrucciones. Pero Prometeo, como expresión del *máximo seductor*, no disimula que promete para engañar. En el moment crucial de la representación, cuando el Corifeo le pregunta por el antídoto que ha utilizado para evitar que los hombres sucumbieran a su miseria. Prometeo confiesa que les insufló *ciegas esperanzas*.” R. Argullol, *El fin del mundo como obra de arte*. (Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, S.A., 1990), 26-27.

³⁵ Cfr. J.-L. Marion, “Sketch of a Phenomenological Concept of Gift” in Several Authors, *Postmodern Philosophy and Christian Thought*. M. Westphal (ed.) (Bloomington-Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 122-143.

Metaphysics opens itself up to the experience, which is mysticism. And this opening is mystagogy, initiation into the creativity by means of art and relativizing from this metaphysical experience its ontological configuration and refiguration in artworks together with their narrative assumptions that not only take place in history, but are history in themselves.

From history, testimonies spring up. These testimonies are then consigned to the narrative assumptions of artworks, the noblest crafts of human technique and the most sublime products of man's hands. These testimonies are efficacious only if they are mystagogical and if they are consistent calls to go beyond the realm of the ontological. □