

Works of Art as Support for Axiological Memory

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Abstract: Among the meritorious attempts to unravel the enigma of artistic creation are the views of Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer. In the following, we want to emphasise an aspect that is less discussed in the specialised literature, namely the relation between memory and creation. We are talking about the authentic creation that Kant and Schopenhauer consider to be the one that carries in itself the *Aesthetic Ideas*. With minor differences, the concept, as well as the associated linguistic expression, come together in the work of both German philosophers. An authentic work of art is the work of genius and it has the role of transmitting Ideas. Thus, we will be able to observe “the secret” of a work of art – the *Aesthetic Idea*.

Keywords: memory, work of art, Immanuel Kant, genius, aesthetic ideas

I

CREATION AND MEMORY

Works of art, as a work bearing aesthetic ideas, are the result of innovation, invention and of the imagination as the source of ideas. All of these aspects are very well emphasised in the specialist literature, but the role of the memory in creation is, to our knowledge, less studied. Since the beginning of his work, *The World as Will and Idea*, Arthur Schopenhauer talks about memory as a defining characteristic of human beings. He states that: “Deficiency of *understanding* we call *stupidity*. Deficiency in the application of *reason* to practice, we shall recognise later as *foolishness*. Deficiency of judgment as *silliness* and lastly, the partial or entire deficiency of *memory* as *madness*.” (Schopenhauer, 1909: 51) As we can see, he, first of all, correlates memory with madness in the sense that its absence means madness. However, later when talking about authentic artistic creations, Arthur Schopenhauer correlates memory not only with madness but also with genius. In a simple and clear formulation, Schopenhauer's thesis about memory, madness and creation is the following: there is a type of madness that comes from too little memory or from a lack of it, as stated in the text quoted above. Another type of madness comes from an excess of memory.

This is the case of the genius, who memorises the Ideas that he/she intuitively finds in nature and in life in order to fit them into works of art, thus contributing to the development of the axiological memory of an era or of a community. Precisely because the genius sees and stores in the memory the things that an ordinary individual does not see with his/her own capabilities, he is seen by others as crazy, a phenomenon on which Schopenhauer insists in *The World as Will and Idea*. Only the genius has the natural gift to observe the authentic ideas, to contemplate them and to represent them in works of art. In this respect, the role of the genius in the edification of the axiological memory can be exemplified through some works of art, as we shall do in the second part of this essay.

However, we should now define, as precisely as possible, what is a work of art. It is a well known fact that this question has received numerous conflicting answers. We shall mention now a couple of them in order to be able to emphasise that the specificity of the conception of Kant and Schopenhauer is about aesthetic ideas as the essence of works of art. To name works of art, the Greeks used the word *téchne* (Blackburn, 1999: 388). This was for the craft as well as for the art itself, thus designating certain knowledge of how things are made. Therefore the importance of the creation can be determined as starting from its crafted composition. This meaning of art was taken by the Romans and, through them, it passed through the Middle Ages and into modernity in the form of the various *arts*.

Roger Pouivet argues that if a definition for a work of art does exist, it can be valid for all other works. However, the American aesthetician Morris Weitz believes that a work of art hasn't got an essence that is common to all works of art, which may confer the idea of what they are, noting that we don't always know if something is a work of art or not. Nevertheless, he believes that there is an incompatibility between the creation of the work and the work of art itself. Weitz's vision is that a definition must allow us *to identify* the defined object with certainty" (Pouivet, 2009: 25) and that works of art may thus have partial similarities where the resemblance relationship is universal. Thus, works of art have certain parts in common which are not necessarily observable but they are exactly what we are looking for.

Roger Pouivet mentioned some of the important definitions of works of art, saying that it is the sensitive realisation of the idea or that it is the expression of the self of the artist. A work of art is what opens up a

dimension that is inaccessible to any other experiences. On the other hand, it is the subversion of any norm and the demystification of social reality (Pouivet, 2009: 8). A work of art arouses a certain experience, adds the author. This aesthetic experience requires a specialised instruction and it plays an important role in the life of every viewer. This is because aesthetic experience produces the aesthetic object. If a work of art arouses no interest, then there is no work. All interests in the work of art appear after there has been aesthetic satisfaction.

The work of art is something that determines the possibility to perceive it according to our senses. "To be a work of art means to belong to a tradition in producing artefacts." (Pouivet, 2009: 57) Pouivet claimed that the work of art is an "artefactual substance" (Pouivet, 2009: 57). This is because, as artefacts, the works of art have their principles grounded in the fact that the producer intends to create something with certain materials for some reason. Pouivet believes that an object can become a work of art only if it develops a relationship with works from the past. In other words, if it belongs to a tradition concerning the production of artefacts. We can conclude that certain works of art may become precious objects of admiration for the public while others are only memory experiments.

Another approach concerning works of art belongs to the Romanian philosopher Lucian Blaga, who places the work of art in the revealing horizon. "The work of art, like other cultural creations, is, as is intention, an act that reveals mysteries" (Blaga, 2014: 402) that "remains substantially metaphorical in relation to the mysteries and isolated from those by the abyssal categories" (Blaga, 2014: 402). Here the philosopher talks about the revealing act of art that takes place through sensitivity and through "intuitive concreteness" (Blaga, 2014: 402). For the creation of the work of art, Blaga invokes genius and talent, attributing to the genius "the gift to live with great intensity in the horizon of the mystery and especially the gift of converting mysteries in reviling metaphors and in metaphors with abyssal patterns." (Blaga, 2014: 403) Because of this ontological perspective related to the genius that creates works of art, "[...] the world's mysteries are converted into creations of culture, into metaphors, visions, constructions, embodiments of stylistic seal [...]" (Blaga, 2014: 405). What needs to be particularly emphasised in the theory of the genius and of the artistic creation of Lucian Blaga is the metaphysical aspect. Briefly, the genius is the one who intuitively perceives a completely

different horizon than the existential one. It is about the horizon of the mystery that was born, Blaga says, through a rare ontological mutation. The work of art, as a revelation of mystery, produces aesthetic satisfaction through the fact that it detaches the one who receives it from the existential horizon, from his/her world we could say, and that it projects him/her for a short period of time into another world or to another horizon. As in the case of Schopenhauer, from where he probably was inspired, the contemplation by the genius of the horizon of the mystery is an intuitive act and not a rational one.

In the conception of Arthur Schopenhauer, who expressed his thoughts through his fundamental work *The World as Will and Idea*, the artist has in mind not concepts but Ideas in order to represent them in various works of art. As useful as the concepts may be for science and life, says Schopenhauer, they are nevertheless incompatible with the creative force of the artist. Moreover, in the field of art, concepts can be more harmful than useful.

Only mediocre artists or pseudo-artists start art from a concept; [...] they observe what pleases and affects us in true works of art; understand it clearly, fix it in a concept, and thus abstractly, and then imitate it, openly or disguisedly, with dexterity and intentionally. They suck their nourishment, like parasite plants, from the works of others and like polypi, they become the colour of their food. We might carry the comparison further and say that they are like machines which mince fine and mingle together whatever is put into them, but that they can never digest it, so that the different constituent parts may always be found again if they are sought out and separated from the mixture [...]. (Schopenhauer, 1909: 308)

The German philosopher, in *World as Will and Idea*, states that the only source of an authentic work of art is “the idea” in the Platonic sense. It must however be noted that he reinterprets the theory of Plato's ideas so as not to fall into the sin of imitation or mannerism, which he strongly criticises. The platonic *idea* becomes, for Schopenhauer, the *aesthetic Idea*, accessible to the genius not by reason but by intuition. Hence, the deep unconscious aspect of the artistic creation is emphasised by Schopenhauer in the following manner:

The comprehended Idea, on the contrary, is the true and only source of every work of art. In its powerful originality it is only derived from life itself, from nature, from the world, and that only by the true genius, or by him whose momentary inspiration reaches the point of genius. Genuine and immortal works of art spring only from direct apprehension. Just because the Idea is and remains the object of perception,

the artist is not conscious in the abstract of the intention and aim of his work; not a concept, but an Idea floats before his mind. Therefore he can give no justification of what he does. He works, as people say, from pure feeling, and unconsciously, indeed instinctively. (Schopenhauer, 1909: 308)

Regarding this intuitive aspect of the genius artistic creation, it should be noted that the excess of the memory of the genius in terms of aesthetic Ideas explains both his/her madness, as pointed out by Schopenhauer especially in volume II of his work *World as Will and Idea*. This is as well as the childish aspect, easily noted in the case of recognised artistic geniuses. The childish aspect of the genius, says Schopenhauer in the chapter *About genius*, comes from the fact that he/she sees the real world as something unknown and that he/she fully enjoys the beauty of the ideas that, once discovered, cannot be forgotten. This fixation of the Ideas in the memory, once and for all, becomes aesthetic Ideas in certain circumstances. This is the memory excess from where, metaphorically speaking, his aura of eternal childhood but also madness forms.

II TASTE AND AESTHETIC IDEAS

The *Critique of the Power of Judgment* was conceived by Immanuel Kant as the *Critique of Taste*. Even if ultimately the title was changed, *the taste* is the central theme of the aesthetic conception of Immanuel Kant, especially as the companion of genius is creative faculty.

For Immanuel Kant, the criterion for distinguishing between an authentic work of art and an ordinary product is what he calls the *Aesthetic Idea*. Insofar as we are dealing with human creations bearing aesthetic Ideas, we are faced with true works of art. Otherwise, we are dealing with crafts, at most. According to Kant's philosophy, fixing aesthetic ideas into a work of art takes place with the help of taste, which is the companion of genius (Guyer, 2000: 197).

Taste, like the power of judgment in general, is the discipline (or corrective) of genius, clipping its wings and making it well behaved or polished. But, at the same time, it gives genius guidance as to where and how far it should extend itself if it is to remain purposive. By introducing clarity and order into the abundance of thoughts, it makes the ideas tenable, capable of an enduring and universal approval, of enjoying posterity among others and in ever progressing culture. (Guyer, 2000: 197)

As a result, taste is designed to fix the ideas of the genius in order to achieve sustainable and universal perspectives, thus allowing it to serve others as a model. Without the manifestation of taste in the field of the genius, the latter would seem to be a being with original ideas, not subject to any order. Therefore, in the absence of taste, genius cannot be distinguished from madness. In other words, genius without taste would be absolutely incomprehensible and not integrated into a specific cultural tradition.

Creation involves the transmission of ideas through work, as Kant tells us in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Although the artistic creation, as defined by Kant, is the work of the genius, taste is what enables communication or the transmission of Ideas. They are, as Kant says, difficult to understand even for the genius himself, but in the case of a lack of taste, they would be absolutely impossible to understand. Hence the central role that taste has in building an artistic creation which, to some extent, can be understood by a specific audience. Furthermore, Immanuel Kant emphasises that taste fundamentally contributes to the elevation of the receiver of the work of art through the fact that it mediates the intuition of the aesthetic ideas represented by the genius artist.

The aesthetics of Immanuel Kant, especially his theory about genius and taste, was deeply influenced by the work *Conjectures on Original Composition* by Edward Young, published in 1759, which was translated shortly after in German and which Immanuel Kant read with interest, as noted in the literature. What interests us in this case is the idea of *enthusiasm* that accompanies both the artistic creation of the genius and its reception. Many thinkers of the modern period, from whom Edward Young was inspired, showed that genius creates when “the soul is seized by a divine flame” (Batteux *apud* Râmbu, 2006: 162), which seems to flow over the work. This illumination, transmissible from the genius into the art, is nothing but the spiritual state of *enthusiasm*. The problem with this flame of the soul or with the divine enthusiasm, as Helvetius and Du Bossay stated, is that it is associated with genius but only with reference to artists, and not to geniuses of reason. Genius is a natural endowment with this “divine enthusiasm”, without which the artist would be a simple artisan. This idea is common in modern aesthetics and, in a specific form, it is also present in Immanuel Kant's aesthetic theory, along with a number of ideas from the work of Edward Young. For example, “a work of genius should not be shiny in itself and satisfy its

author, but it must bestow happiness on others.” (Râmbu, 2006: 163) Edward Young’s principle is also affected by the definition of the original of a work, considering that it “[...] spontaneously gushes from the living roots of genius; what *is original* grows naturally, it is not manufactured by an *art*. Imitations are often *manufactured* forms.” (Young *apud* Râmbu, 2006: 164)

The problem of a criterion through which one can distinguish the authentic works of art by the manufactured ones has been raised by Kant and Schopenhauer using almost the same terms as Edward Young. However, unlike him, firstly Kant and then Schopenhauer also offer a precise solution. The aesthetic ideas represent such a criterion for the work of art. From a purely aesthetic perspective, such a criterion is difficult to understand and to accept, with the proof being the fact that too few aesthetic works from nowadays devote a special place for aesthetic ideas, in the sense of Kant and Schopenhauer.

In order to illustrate the Kantian thesis according to which the authentic work of art is the one that bears aesthetic ideas in itself, I shall present a few examples. A work of art from the Renaissance suggesting the idea of “beauty” is the well-known work of Leonardo de Vinci, *Mona Lisa*, where the genius – Leonardo de Vinci – fixed the idea of “beauty” through the proportions of the character and through the new contrast between the individual and nature. This painting awakens new feelings through its unique and strange nature and by having a characteristic effect between the character and the meandering paths. Thus, “beauty”, as an idea of proportionality, taken after the works of the ancient Greeks, becomes a value with the weight of possible remembering. The artistic work of Leonardo de Vinci is a support of the axiological memory and thus the value of “beauty” is recognized by various generations.

Rafael Sanzio’s work, *the Sistine Madonna*, centers on the Virgin Mary with the Child in her arms and on the sides, St. Sixt and St. Catherine are painted. The balance and nobility of this work reminds us of Leonardo de Vinci’s work, which also conveys the idea of “beauty” – *Virgin of the Rocks*. In this case, the compositional center shows the Virgin Mary with her right hand on John's the Baptist shoulder and with her left hand raised above the head of baby Jesus, among them being the angel Uriel.

“Beauty” is also visible in the work of François Boucher – an outstanding painter from the Rococo period, who created works of art for

Madame de Pompadour. The work named as *Madame de Pompadour* is distinguished by a beauty that delights the eye and it is enjoyable simply as a pure necessity. Mikhail Alpatov suggests that the art of the French painter is distinguished by bright spots of bright colors and evident contours, restoring the plasticity of the forms in a gallant style (Cf. Alpatov, 1967). The artist provides details in the painting using a thorough and realistic technique with an attention to detail that shapes the beauty of the illustration, fascinating the viewer even today.

With these examples, to which one could add a lot of other works across all of the genres of the arts, we have intended to show that *beauty*, which rightfully was noticed by the highly educated spirits of all time, is actually an *aesthetic idea* as in the sense given by Kant and Schopenhauer.

All of the works of art bearing a “sublime” quality, arousing through themselves the feeling of “sublime” in the soul of the viewer, are only representations of the *aesthetic ideas* of the “sublime”, as highlighted by the Kantian analysis of the sublime and later by Arthur Schopenhauer in the *World as Will and Idea*. In this sense, I bring to your attention to the work *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* by Caspar David Friedrich, a German painter who sought the “soul of the world” in landscapes, noticing it in every corner of nature. Passionate of high and remote mountains that appear to merge with the horizon, the artist seems to invite the individual to meditate upon his connection with nature and on its greatness. This work is the embodiment of the sublime as an *aesthetic idea* in the Kantian sense of the term.

Caspar David Friedrich “chose to express his philosophy through landscape: he interprets it in a naturalistic and symbolic manner at the same time.” (Châtelet and Groslier, 2006: 698) He executes the work with a thorough application. The message conveyed by the painter in the landscape is not obvious but by resorting to the deep emotions reflected in nature, the work shows that the artist is a true romantic among the other landscape painters. Also, Caspar David Friedrich’s work, the *Chalk Cliffs on Rügen*, depicts the meeting between moments of horror that turn into silence. Impressions passing from fear into pleasurable sensations are transmitted, bringing to the fore the idea of sublime as an aesthetic idea.

Works that also awaken in the soul of the viewer the idea of “sublime” are the sculptures by Auguste Rodin. For example – *The Cathedral*. It is a work in which the French sculptor creates two hands in the form of a

cathedral. It is a work that awakens the state of the “sublime” by exposing the human truth in a subtle and appealing manner. Rodin's *Secret* is, from the perspective of the theory of *aesthetic ideas* of Kant and Schopenhauer, a work of genius, which means that it is bearing aesthetic ideas. In fact, Rodin's *Secret* contains in itself the idea of *secret*, the aesthetic idea of secret or, in other words, the essence of everything that mankind has considered and still considers to be *secret*.

CONCLUSION

In terms of taste, it should be noted that it helps us to discover the “secret” of every authentic work of art that has been created by an original creator. It is important to mention the fact that from Kant and Schopenhauer onwards, this “secret” of the works of genius has a very precise name: *the Aesthetic Idea*.

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