Hermeneutics and Art Theory

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Revisiting Gadamer's Conception of Works of Art

Abstract

In contrast to Kant's aesthetic, Gadamer proposes a fundamentally different way of understanding our experiences of art. One that is not restricted by the dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity: A work of art is not simply an object created by an artist, but a "world" in which all the "players" participate. This conception of art is inspired by the performing arts; but how much is it relevant to other forms of art? Gadamer never explored this question fully. It is of interest, therefore, to expand the analysis of Gadamer on two fronts: first, new forms of art such as installations and video games; second, artistic practices in East Asia, notably, the Japanese art of kintsugi *and Chinese art of seals (*zhāng*). The analysis of these forms of art not only helps broaden the scope of Gadamer's theory, but shows also that the insights found in his works are more relevant than ever.*

Keywords: Hans-Georg Gadamer, aesthetic, ontology of art, hermeneutics, play, video games, Asian art

Introduction

Questions about the ontology of art, i.e. about the existence of artworks, interest philosophers much more than artists, art critics, and art lovers. Until recently, it was unimaginable for someone from the latter groups to genuinely deny the existence of works of art. The situation has changed somewhat in recent decades. Newer, experimental art forms–such as conceptual art, pop art, the Fluxus movement–has motivated an entire generation of artists and art lovers to reflect on the definition and essence of art. Artists like Andy Warhol and Marcel Duchamp were pioneers in this area because their works blur the line between everyday objects and works of art. Thus, the questions about the ontology of art have gain have gained awareness outside the sphere of philosophy in recent years.

Philosophers have, nonetheless, been instrumental in reshaping our conception of art. In the latter half of the 20th century, there have been important progresses in this regard on both sides of the Atlantic. Nelson Goodman, perhaps more well-known in the English speaking world, has emphatically put into question the usefulness of asking "what is art?" The better question to ask, he suggests, is "when is art?" (Goodman 1972) It is because the experience of recognizing something as art or not depends on the circumstances. Even inconspicuous objects, when arranged in a specific way or placed in an art museum, can become artworks. The question about art has shifted from the object itself to the wider contextual environment that the object finds itself in.

This widening of perspective is shared by the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, who is perhaps better known for his contributions in hermeneutics more than in aesthetics. We must not, however, ignore the fact that in *Truth and Method*, his Magnum Opus, there is a bold declaration: "Aesthetics has to be absorbed into hermeneutics." (Gadamer 1989, 157) There has been no lack of discussions about the meaning of this phrase and the role art plays in his hermeneutics in general. (Gens 2007, 2016; Grondin 1991, 1995, 2016) In short, Gadamer's goal is to reposition the question of art in a wider, hermeneutical context. This is comparable to but much wider in scoop than Goodman's formulation of "when is art?" In fact, Gadamer's works provide one of the most comprehensive account for rethinking the ontology of art in contemporary philosophy. Differing from traditional opinions, he takes for example the performing arts as one of the paradigmatic forms of art. But we can push Gadamer's analysis even further. Since the publication of his works, new forms of art have emerged. Not only can they help us better appreciate Gadamer's foresight, but also address some of the shortcomings in his account.

We will begin, in the first section, by a brief summary of Gadamer's analysis of the experience of art. Then, in the second section, we will look at four new forms of arts and how they can provide new insights to the understanding of the ontology of art.

Against a Subject-Object Dichotomy in Art

The question of ontology of art is, at its core, also an epistemological question. Epistemology has always presupposed a framework where a perceiving subject faces the object perceived. When applied to the study of aesthetics, there is a further consequence. In Gadamer's terms: we suppose, incorrectly, that the subject of an experience of art is an "aesthetic consciousness", i.e. a perceiving subject, rather than the work of art itself. He declares boldly:

[…] the work of art is not an object that stands over against a subject for itself. […] The "subject" of the experience of art […] is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it but the work itself. (Gadamer 1989, 103)

This idea is not at all intuitive and will require further explications. As noted above, the epistemological framework that divides a perceptive act into a subjective pole and an objective pole is long-established; it was already an entrenched idea in Descartes' meditations. With his philosophical skepticism, Descartes tried to doubt the existence of the external world, but he never doubted the ontological separation between the subject and the object. In Gadamer's view, this supposition persists in Kant's aesthetics.

A core idea in Kant's aesthetics is what he calls the aesthetics judgement; the main component of it is a judgement of taste. This judgement consists in a free play of the faculties of imagination and understanding. Without going into too much details, imagination and understanding are two faculties responsible for the perception of objects. Kant outlines their uses in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. There, Kant describes perception as the working together of the two faculties, but imagination can only function under the rules prescribed by understanding. During a judgement of taste, in contrast, imagination and understanding work in a free play of harmony. It is undeniable that Kant's claim is controversial; there are difficulties in correctly interpreting what Kant really means and the possible theoretical difficulties it faces. However, for our current purpose, it suffices to take note of the fact that the "free play" that Kant describes involves the cognitive faculties of a perceptive subject.

Gadamer begins his analysis by re-examining the concept of "play" with regard to Kant's use of the concept. Specifically, he wants to distance himself from the way Kant places "play" within the consciousness of a subject. In short, Gadamer wants to ask: what is really the subject of play? His analysis proceeds in two steps: first, he wants to show that the subject of "play" is not a conscious subjectivity but playing itself; and second, that this same structure is also true of an experience of art–meaning that in creating or viewing art, the actual subject is not the person but the "art" itself.

On the first point, Gadamer draws insights from the metaphorical uses of the word "play"; as he remarked, it is often from the metaphorical or "improper" uses of a term that we can more easily find important clues on its deeper meaning. Thus, he takes expressions like play of light, play of waves, play of forces, and play of colours as examples. In these, the "play" involves no consciousness subject. Instead, what they describe is a "to-and-fro movement" of natural phenomenon or objects. What this means is that the movement is not tied to any intent or goal but repeats itself continuously. But more importantly, Gadamer highlights, "it is irrelevant whether or not there is a subject who plays it" (Gadamer 1989, 104). However, this only shows that there exists a kind of play independent from human

players; not that the subject of play is always the playing itself. We can wonder if these examples of playing as to-and-fro movements only constitute a special case of playing. In fact, Gadamer claims that the most basic structure of play is a continuous movement with no specific end goal. Furthermore, he wants to show that human playing should also be understood in the same way. To do so, he examines two other uses of the word "play": game and theatre. It is because among the many meanings of the word play (*Spiel* in German), these two are particularly important. Let us first examine the notion of game.

Play as Game

This is the central question: is the playing directed by the player's subjectivity or is it the other way around, i.e. the player is constrained by the game? Gadamer builds on Huizinga's analyse; a game is always a contest where a victor is eventually decided. This is true even for games where there is only a single player. There must be something or someone to play against that response to the player; it can be another player or an object like a ball. In other words, there must be contestants in the game. So even when playing a ball game alone, the player engages in to-and-fro movements with the ball which responses to every movement exerted by the player. In this case, the ball acts as a contestant.[1] In sum, the to-and-from movements between the contestants are central to a game.

To support his claims, Gadamer examines again the idiomatic uses of the word "play". We use the expression "playing with possibilities" to say that someone is not committed to a course of actions and is still deciding whether to act in one way or another. But what is really at work when we say someone is playing with possibilities? It is like a game where the player wants to achieve the best outcome, but there is always a risk of failing. The person is not in total control of the possible outcomes but is constrained by external factors. The same situation is perhaps expressed more strongly in idiomatic expressions such as "playing with fire" or "playing with life" where the "players" find themselves in precarious or highly uncertain situations. In these cases, it is more clearly seen that the subjectivity of the person is not what is doing the "playing". The players cannot master the situation and is thus at the mercy of factors out of their control.

Thus, Gadamer suggests that playing is also always "being-played" (Gadamer 1989, 106). The game captivates the player; or inversely, the player loses himself/herself in the game. Here, the classic grammatical structure of a subject (player) acting on an object

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[1] Gadamer believes that this is exactly the allure of ball games. As such, humans have been playing them since time immemorial and will probably continue to do so for a long time.

(game) breaks down. The subject of the game is not the player, i.e. as in the player's consciousness, but the game itself, i.e. the to-and-fro movement of the player together with what is at play. Another way of looking at this is from a grammatical point of view. The active voice–to play–and the passive voice–being played–cannot be separated. This means that the grammatical subject of "play" is also the grammatical object, and vice versa. The traditional dichotomy between the subject and object dissolves in the structure of play.

There is another aspect of game important for Gadamer's argument. A game is always played on a playing field. This latter can be a designated area such as a sport field, an improvised area, or even a space created in the players' minds. What is crucial, however, is that the sphere of play is separated (at least partially) from the everyday world and is governed by a different set of rules and goals. This is obvious in competitive games or sports where there are often clear and strict rules of conducts within the game. Gadamer follows Huizinga on comparing the playing field to a "closed world" (Gadamer 1989, 107). Here, "closed" means something specific: it refers to a separation between the "game world" and the "real world" in terms of rules and goals. The rules of the everyday world are suspended when the players enter the playing field while another set of rules are imposed on them. Thus, it is as if the game and the participating players inhabit a game world separated from the everyday world. However, Gadamer notes, in the "closed world" of games, the player does not act in a way simply to fulfil the goals. Games are playful, the success and failure of actions do not impede on the enjoyment of play. In other words, the purpose of the playing is not necessarily the completion of the tasks imposed; the game is guided by these tasks, but the purpose of playing is to create and maintain the to-and-fro movements, i.e. the interactions between the elements at play. Although Gadamer does not explicitly reference Kant here, there are certainly some similarities between this idea and what Kant calls "purposiveness without purpose".[2]

Play as Theatre

This idea that the playing field is closed off from practical life is equally important for the second meaning of the word "play": theatre. Here, the connection between the concept of play and art becomes apparent. In a theatre, what is happening on stage occupies a

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[2] It is true that Kant uses the expression "purposiveness without purpose" to define aesthetic judgement as requiring the formal structure of purpose. In contrast, Gadamer's juxtaposition between the to-and-fro movements and the defined goals of play has nothing to do with judgement. Instead, it describes the general structure of play. Nevertheless, they both run counter to a kind of classical teleology that attributes purpose to all objects.

seemingly different space than the physical space surrounding it. The actions on stage take place within a closed space separated from but superimposed onto the physical space of the stage. It is for this reason that when an actor on stage breaks character and addresses the spectators directly, we call it "breaking the fourth wall", as if there really is an invisible wall between the stage and the audiences. In this sense, the events and characters in the play inhabit a different "world". When we watch a play and are really engrossed by it, it is as if we are "transported to another world"; conversely when we do not enjoy the play, we say that we could not "get into it". These idiomatic expressions presuppose the same metaphor: a play creates a "world" separated from our everyday practical world, but into which we can transport ourselves. Moreover, this experience is not limited to the theatre; it is similar in almost all forms of arts, although it is more apparent in narrative arts (as opposed to more abstract or conceptual arts). A novel, a poem, a painting, a film, a piece of music, and a sculpture all have the power to help us temporarily escape from the mundane world.

Theatre has a few specificities that make it particularly useful to Gadamer's arguments. Three characteristics are especially important. First, it is very easy to see in a theatre that the "world of play" is not physical. It is because we can see that the person on stage is an actor but, at the same time, also a character in the story. From the point of view of the actor, he can at the same time think of himself as Hamlet and as the actor who is playing Hamlet. In fact, he must keep both in mind because he needs to engage with the story and other characters while not forgetting to position himself correctly on stage. There is but one physical space surrounding the theatre stage, but both the spectators and the actors are simultaneously experiencing two worlds.[3] However, the presentation of these two worlds, i.e. how they appear, is very different. Each action or each word uttered takes on very different meanings depending on if we treat the person on stage as Hamlet or as an actor. It is this "presentation" that is at the core of Gadamer's argument. If the purpose of play is not necessarily always the completion of its make-believe goals, the goal of playing is instead always presenting itself; i.e. its mode of being is "self-presentation" (Gadamer 1989, 108). In a play, the actor presents himself as Hamlet; or, in a game, athletes present themselves as competitors. As such, all of their actions take on new significations. Theatre is an ideal example for Gadamer because it stands at the crossroad between play and art: they are both self-presentation.

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[3] The example of theatre is especially fitting to Gadamer's argument because we can see the two "worlds" at the same time on stage. But it is not the only type of art where this is possible. Edmund Husserl in a manuscript published under the name *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory* examines closely the experience of viewing an image where he describes three different ways of looking at a painting. (Husserl 2005)

Moreover, the idea of "self-presentation" implies that it is always possible for the presentation to be represented to someone else, e.g. there are other actors on stage, other teammates or contestants in a sport, and there are often spectators or audiences in both.[4] This brings us to the second feature of theatre that Gadamer finds important. If self-presentation always has the potential to be represented to someone else, the invisible "fourth wall" between the stage and the audiences in the theatre does not really exist. The audiences also participate in the play; their responses and reactions are as much an integral part of the play as the actions on stage. The atmosphere of the entire theatre changes when the audiences are captivated by the play and react to it. When the audiences collectively hold their breaths in anticipation or when they all let out a sigh of relief together after a climactic moment, the actors are receptive and reactive to the changes in mood. Therefore, the to-and-fro movements of play occurs not only between the actors themselves but also between the audiences and the actors. This interaction between the spectators and the player are also a huge part of spectator sports; the cheers or jeering from the spectators are often a deciding factor in the outcome of a sporting event. "The play itself is the whole, comprising players and spectators." (Gadamer 1989, 109) It is easy to see how this holds true in the performing arts because both the players and the audiences gather at the same place and time, but it is less clear how this is true of the plastic arts where the artist does meet face to face with the viewers of their works. Indeed, Gadamer has focused so much attention on theatre that he does not consider sufficiently the cases of plastic arts, but we will return to this point later.

The last feature of theatre that interests Gadamer is its temporality. Concretely, a play must be performed and it can be performed more than once or many times, even long after the time when it was first written; the plays written by Sophocles are still performed and remain relevant today. This is not to say that only the performing arts have the potential to persist through time. In fact, many important art pieces today are also important cultural heritages. It is for this reason that we often praise artworks as "timeless". What really interests Gadamer, however, is this notion of "timelessness" and what it implies. "Timelessness" does not have a unique definition, but we usually use this term as a synonym for eternal. It is defined by its opposition to the normal flowing of time; what is "timeless" stands above the course of history and escapes from the erosion of time that afflicts everything. However, understood this way, "timelessness" is merely a negative definition that depends on a

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[4] Although theatre is often classified as art while (spectator) sport as game, the two shares quite a few similarities as we have seen. The ground-breaking work of Keith Johnstone on improvisation in theatre and his invention of "theatresport" are great examples of how these two activities complement each other.

pre-existing understanding of time. Thus, we need a more detailed examination of the notion of "time" as it is related to play.

To this effect, Gadamer notes several observations on the temporal structure of theatrical play (which applies also to other performing arts). First, the presentation of play always involves repetitions. But here, repetition takes on a specific meaning. What is repeated must be the "same" in some way (otherwise it would not be repetition) but it is not exactly the same neither. Gadamer asserts that "every repetition is as original as the work itself" (Gadamer 1989, 120). A play only comes into full presence when it is performed. There is no single performance that is privileged in being more "original" than other performances. This might, on first sight, appear false as critiques routinely judge performances as being more or less "faithful". However, in order for a performance to be more or less faithful to the "original", it must already be recognized as an instance of it. In repetition, what remains the same is precisely the fact that each performance can be recognized as a presentation of the original. It is in this sense that "every repetition is as original as the work itself". This brings us to a last point: if every performance is as "original" as the play itself, does the play exist in multiple instances in time? But what about the time in between performances? Does the play cease to exist for a time, then come back into existence when it is next performed?

It is no doubt problematic to imagine something existing intermittently through time. Yet, Gadamer suggests, this problem arises because of an improper conception of time. In everyday life, we ascribe almost unreflectively to a linear conception of time, where time always progress in a continuous straight line from the past towards the future. However, in Gadamer's view, such a conception of time is not suitable for understanding the experience of play or art. In play, there is another kind of temporal relation at work which Gadamer calls: contemporaneity [*Gleichzeitigkeit*][5]. And to better understand this notion, he invites us to think about the temporal structure of festivals.

The temporality of festivals is quite puzzling at first sight. Festivals (at least the ones celebrated periodically) are by nature meant to be repeatable. Each time the festival returns, the celebration is not exactly the same as the last iteration, but it is still the same festival. More importantly, the celebration of a festival is not strictly tied to its historical root. This means that the first celebration of a festival is not any more "real" or "original" than the subsequent ones. In fact, many of today's festivals bear little resemblances to their historical roots, and we would not consider them inferior to the "original". On the other hand, we do

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[5] This term can alternatively be translated as "simultaneity".

sometimes hear complaints of a festival losing its original meaning. It is a question of a festival deviating from its founding "idea".

The concept of "idea" goes back to Plato. In the *Republic*, Plato introduced the influential Theory of *Eidos*, which outlines the relationship between an object and its form or idea [*eidos*]. According to Plato, when a craftsman makes a bed, he does so following an ideal form of bed; the crafted bed is thus an imitation of the *eidos*. (Plato, *Republic* 596b-d) The *eidos* exist independently of any single bed or craftsman and, as Plato asserts, is the most "real" object that exists in a realm separated from ours, i.e. the material realm. Without delving into the difficulties that Plato's theory of form faces, we can already see that the idea (or in today's term "ideality") of an object, of a festival, and of a play is something that goes beyond their creation; i.e. if any craftsman can produce a bed, then the idea of the bed is not contained in any single bed nor reserved by any craftsman. On the other hand, it is difficult to accept Plato's conclusion that these ideas are eternal and given as ready-made. Gadamer rejects the existence of unchanging and perfect ideas [*eidos*]. Instead, he tries to approach the concept of ideality from another angle.

We have seen that repetition plays an important role in Gadamer's theory of "play". It turns out that it is also crucial in his conception of ideality. Recall that, in terms of play, repetition does not mean that the exact same thing is repeated. Instead, each repetition can be different as long as the same identity is recognized. But where does this identity come from? If play is, first and foremost, self-presentation, then it is not a representation of some pre-given ideal, i.e. it is not a physical manifestation of some *eidos*. Rather, it forms its own identity through repetition. The establishment of an identity of play is an organic process. If we see play as continuous to-and-fro movements, we can recognize that, in each iteration of the play, there are movements and patterns that remain the same while others are not. Within this flux of change, the player finds the patterns that are "essential" to the play, i.e. that which is the most important and iconic aspects of the play and that which gives meaning to the actions.

Yet, even these essential characteristics can slowly change overtime, as long as the changes are not so abrupt as to render the identity lost. This is clear with festivals. Not all celebrations and festivals are recurring, in fact most are one-off that are soon forgotten. However, when a festival is celebrated for a second time, people have to decide what part of the celebration should be kept the same and what should be changed. In short, the participants are deciding what the essential characteristics of the festival each time it is celebrated. It is not after one or two celebrations that an agreed upon fixture emerges. Instead, it takes a long time and many repetitions for a tradition to take shape. This is not to say that this tradition–the characteristics deemed essential to the celebration–are fixed in stone. A

festival evolves with each new iteration, even the "essential" characteristics can change, as long as the participants can identify it as the same festival. The ideality of the festival is therefore not something that exists outside its celebrations. Rather, it is through the repeated celebrations, i.e. self-presentation, of the festivals itself that its ideality or tradition emerges.

With this conception of ideality, we can more easily make sense of the temporal structure of festival and theatrical play. The temporality of festival is only strange if we consider its essence as separated from its celebration. The same holds true for play and art. Gadamer suggests further that, "the work of art occupies a timeless present." (Gadamer 1997, 125) The essence of a play only comes into full presence when it is being played. As a result, there can be different interpretations of a play, but it remains the same play as long as the participants can still identify it. Not all participants need to agree on this. As the "idea" of the play is not fixed once and for all–not even by the original author–, it continues evolving after the play's initial conception. A play from ancient Greece could mean something very different to today's audiences than it did to the audiences of the epoch in which it was originally written. In this way, the interpretations–a performance is necessarily an interpretation–of the same text can be different. As soon as interpretations are involved, we can no longer speak of one true way of performing a play. This exactly what we observe in theatre: audiences and critics can debate whether an interpretation of a play is better than another. The very fact that this kind of debates is meaningful shows that these different interpretations of the same play are valid. Or rather, it is precisely because they are valid that we can have meaningful discussions about them. Gadamer says unambiguously that "neither the being that the creating artist is for himself–call it his biography–nor that of whoever is performing the work, nor that of the spectator watching the play, has any legitimacy of its own in the face of the being of the artwork itself". (Gadamer 1989, 124) This means that everybody participates in determining the meaning of the work.[6]

We have seen, in this section, three areas in which play, understood as drama, is decisive in understanding Gadamer's proposal for investigating the experience of art through that of play. These are areas in which play and art (at least for performing arts) share common underlying structures. First, play is enclosed within a "playing field" that functions like a world closed off from the practical world of everyday lives. Furthermore, this separation is not delineated by any physical border. Secondly, the participants of play are not restricted

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[6] As an example, there have been innumerable readings, interpretations, adaptations of Antigone both in theatre, in philosophy, and in films. From the different interpretations by philosophers like Wilhelm Hegel, Jacques Lacan, Judith Butler, Slavoj Žižek, to the many threatral productions, to film adaptions, such as the 2019 film by Sophie Deraspe, although these works differ greatly from one another, they are all parts of the corpus that has formed for this work.

to the players that directly engaged in the playing; the spectators or audiences are as much an integral part of play as the players. It implies that the creator of an artwork does not have exclusivity in deciding the identity of the work. Finally, the temporality of play cannot be understood as a linear progression. It is because linear temporality is only suitable for describing objects where its identity is, more or less, fixed and persists through time. Instead, a play is contemporaneous with all its audiences. It comes into full presence only when it is performed and seen. As such, its ideality is shaped as new audiences view and receive the work. This implies that not only is the meaning of an artwork beyond its original creator, it is even beyond the epoch in which it was originally created. The important link among these three areas noted above is Gadamer's proposed notion of ideality. Here, ideality is that which gives the play its identity and meaning. But more importantly, Gadamer suggests, the notion of ideality is also at work when play transforms into art.

The Transformation of Play into Art

We have seen that Gadamer defines play as to-and-fro movements, and that its mode of being is self-presentation. As such, play seems to have only a transient existence. In contrast, arts, as mentioned above, are "timeless". How then does play become art? Gadamer's answer: it is when play achieves ideality. He calls this moment: "transformation into structure" (Gadamer 1989, 110). To understand fully this formulation, we need to tackle the two terms: "transformation" and "structure" first.

Gadamer means by "transformation" an abrupt and radical change, i.e. a sudden and total change where something becomes something else entirely, in contrast to alteration where what is altered remains partly the same. As for the second term "structure" [*Gebilde*], it means something that has permanence and exists by itself. Hence, by "transformation into structure", Gadamer aims to describe the difference between subjective playfulness and art in the proper sense. An artist can "play" with ideas creatively or trying out new techniques or materials. These are not yet arts, but merely playing within a subjective consciousness. In the course of playing, the artist might abandon or modify some ideas. In short, there is no permanence in "playing" with artistic ideas.

The crucial moment is when this kind of subjective free-play achieves ideality, i.e. when it becomes identifiable and repeatable. Gadamer calls this a transformation because the player–e.g. the artist, playwright, poet, composer, etc.–no longer exists in a very precise sense: the player's subjectivity no longer exists as a determining factor for the play. Instead, the play itself attains its own existence. It is worth reading Gadamer's own words on this point:

[...] play itself is a transformation of such a kind that the identity of the player does not continue to exist for anybody. Everybody asks instead what is supposed to be represented, what is "meant." The players (or playwright) no longer exist, only what they are playing. (Gadamer 1989, 111)

In other words, when play transforms into art, the play frees itself from the subjective consciousness of its initial creator and gains an existence of its own. The work can now be seen and interpreted by others. Moreover, each time that the work is seen and is interpreted, it comes into existence again as its ideality is continuously being reshaped. Hence, the permanence of the work and the strange temporality of play are two sides of the same coin. Gadamer stresses not only that "play is structure"–meaning that the play forms a meaningful whole that can be repeated–but, at the same time, that "structure is play"–meaning that the work only comes into full presence when it is played. (Gadamer 1989, 116)

It is important to note, however, that the meaning of a work being freed from its original creator does not lead to the conclusion that all interpretations of the work are permitted. It is because interpretations are not totally free; they are still bounded by tradition, i.e. the accepted meaning of the work. Gadamer speaks of this process in the theatre:

Here [in theatre] there is no random succession, a mere variety of conceptions; rather, by constantly following models and developing them, a tradition is formed with which every new attempt must come to terms. [...] But this has nothing to do with blind imitation. Although the tradition created by a great actor, director, or musician remains effective as a model, it is not a brake on free creation […] (Gadamer 1989, 117)

In this sense, a performance is both bounded and free, i.e. even though it builds upon norms set by predecessors there is still room for creative modifications. There is another way to look at this same idea. We noted above that, in a game, the player is at the same time playing and being played. It is the same in art. When we encounter an artwork, it captivates us; it has something to say to us. At times like this, we say that we are "drawn in by the work". It is as though the artwork creates a closed world around it, in the same way that a game is enclosed in the playing field. Hence, rather than saying we interpret an artwork, it is better to saying that we participate in the interpretation of the artwork.

Moving beyond Gadamer's Account

One significant advantage of Gadamer's argument is its ability to highlight the proximity between the structure of play and that of theatre. This allows Gadamer to describe the experience of art (at least for the performing art) in a new way. On the other hand, being so

focused on analyzing theatre, we must wonder how well Gadamer can make sense of other forms of art.

Gadamer is certainly not blind to this potential problem. He speaks also of literatures and poetry (especially the epics).[7] However, these are all related to theatre. After all, they written text and reading a text is much like a "performance"; it brings the text into presentation. This is especially the case for poetry, where poetry reading is often performed in front of audiences. The difficulties that Gadamer faces, however, are whether his theory makes sense for plastic arts and other visual art forms. There is in fact a section in *Truth and Method* where Gadamer tries to tackle the problems presented by the plastic arts. He is fully aware of the problems; two are noteworthy. First, "pictures [i.e. paintings] apparently have nothing about them of the objective dependence on mediation that we emphasized in the case of drama and music" (Gadamer 1989, 130). Second, plastic arts, such as painting and sculpture, cannot be reproduced like literary arts and performing arts; i.e. the original piece has a value incomparable to any reproductions of the work.

However, his response to this problem is only preliminary. He tries to argue that the viewing of a work is the same as its self-presentation. Thus, what holds true for theatre also applies to the plastics arts. (Gadamer 1989, 141) However, he spends relatively little time in supporting this claim before moving onto another form of art: architecture.

Gadamer follows earlier German thinkers such as Wolff, Kant, and Hegel in considering architecture as a form of art, but for different reasons. Architecture is important to Gadamer because it exemplifies the idea of art as self-presentation; and it does so in two ways: first, the purpose of architecture is to facilitate a certain way of life, and, second, it gives shape to its surrounding space. (Gadamer 1989, 150) Concerning the first point, a building is built in response to some needs, e.g. it can serve social or religious functions, or is a dwelling place. In other words, for an architecture to really exists, i.e. to serve its purpose, it must be habited and used. On this point, architecture is similar to theatre. As to the second point, a building does not consist simply of its walls. Rather, it is the space created between these walls that is essential to the functionality of the building. It is this space that makes a building habitable. Stepping into an architectural space is like entering a different "world". Architecture superposes meanings onto the physical space, just as drama superposes meanings onto words and actions. However, although architecture is a good example

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[7] See, for example, "Text and Interpretation" (Gadamer 1997, 156-191) and *Truth and Method*, p. 125-129, 153-157.

that supports Gadamer's theory of art, it sidesteps the problem at hand because it is not normally considered as a visual art form.[8]

Thus far, we have only touched on a part of Gadamer's thoughts on art; for example, we have only glimpsed at his views on literary arts and we have not examined at all his exegesis on the Greek concept of beauty [*kalon*][9]. That being said, we can, at the risk of being over hasty, at least identify some limitations to Gadamer's account of the experience of art. First, although Gadamer's approach of associating the experience of art with the experience of play works very well in terms of the performing arts, the applicability of the same approach toward the plastic arts remains questionable.[10] Second, despite his original approach in conceptualizing the being of works of art, all the examples that Gadamer chooses remain very classic.[11] Considering these shortcomings, we have newer forms and experiences of art today that can help not only in enriching Gadamer's account but also in verifying how well it holds up. In the following section, we will look at four art forms that do not appear at all in Gadamer's account. Two of which are newer forms of art: installation art and video game. The other two are arts from the extreme orient: *kintsugi* from Japan and the art of seals/chops (zhāng) as they appear on traditional Chinese paintings and calligraphies.

Newer Models of Art: Installation Art

For a long time, paintings and sculptures are considered the main staple for a fine art museum. We might sometimes find potteries and tapestries, but they are usually included for their historical values. Gadamer has noticed this phenomenon and theorizes its cause as a devaluation of decorations. (Gadamer 1989, 152) It is for this reason that Gadamer favours architecture overs other visual art forms. Certainly, the question of decorative arts has important implications, but it is only a part of the story. Installation arts, which has nothing

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[8] Gadamer does try to argue that architecture and other "pure" plastic arts, such as painting and sculpture, are not as different as first sight; and that the function of decoration is inherent in all of these art forms. (Gadamer 1989, 152)

[9] See, for example, the closing pages of *Truth and Method* and "The Artwork in Word and Image: So True, So Full of Being!" (Gadamer 1997, 192-224).

[10] We might even go further, as Michael Fried did, and assert an antagonism between theatricality and art in general. (Fried 1967)

[11] He only very briefly mentions pop art near the end of *Truth and Method*: "[...] when 'anti-art' – such as pop art and the happening – became the rage [...] hermeneutic reflection must ask what is the point of such pretensions. The answer will be that the hermeneutic conception of the work remains viable so long as such productions can be described as identifiable, repeatable, and worth repeating." (Gadamer 1989, 579-80) He does not go into any detail how this "hermeneutic reflection" is deployed.

to do with the decoration, has become more and more widespread in art exhibitions and it seems to point toward a new direction that visual art forms are heading. Installation art is a rather loose category that includes a diverse variety of works. But through this diversity, there are a few characteristics that are pervasive: they are often site-specific and temporary; they are usually large scale and designed to be an immersive experience; and they are sometimes multi-media creations.

In this way, installation arts blur the boundaries between multiple art forms. Contrary to traditional visual arts like paintings and sculptures, they are not meant to be displayed permanently. They are exhibited temporarily like performing arts. When the occasion arises, an installation art can be setup again at the same or different location for another "performance". Second, these often large scaled installations are designed to let spectators walk inside or through its space. In this aspect, it is comparable to architecture. Finally, artists are not afraid to combine different media in creating installations. For example, there is a trend of transforming everyday objects into the artistic elements[12] or of incorporating light, wind, video and audio projections into a part of the whole immersive experience[13]. Like architecture, installation arts often shape the surrounding space in such a way that the spectator can immerse themselves into another "world"; some even go as far as letting the spectators interact directly with the work itself[14].

In 1991, just before the inauguration of his installation "The Bridge" at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, Ilya Kabakov was asked about his thoughts on the difference between installation arts and more traditional forms of visual arts. Kabakov's answer was rather poetic:

In essence, installation rests on the idea of a man walking along the shore with one foot on the ground, while he dangles the other in the water, which has to do with the idea of security. He is, as it were, on the border between the museum and the space beyond the museum. [...] Here, the trick is that they are invited to walk through unfamiliar territory–for what is an installation? It is a place for walking, in which every point is related to a new level of danger. (Kabakov et al. 1999, 72)

Kabakov speaks of the danger of the unknown. As art viewers, we have been long accustomed to the setting (and ritual) of an art museum or gallery. The paintings hanging

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[12] For example, the works of Carlos Bunga that uses cardboard and packing tapes to create architectural shapes.

[13] The works of Sarah Sze that often incorporate video recordings, light projections, and mechanical moving parts is a good example. Another example is Gabriel Dawn whose work are created with different coloured light.

[14] "Test Site" by Carsten Höller is one such example.

on mostly empty walls and sculptures places on pedestals surrounded by open space. Installation art is able to break the ingrained expectation of the experience of viewing art. We step into the installation as if we are stepping into a new space that is both familiar (it is still in the art museum) and alien. Here the experience described by Kabakov of viewing an installation is very similar to the experience of play as described by Gadamer, because, first, it involves risk and, second, it invites the player to enter a world. Furthermore, Kabakov believed that installation was part of a trend in the visual arts that tried to distance itself from older forms like paintings and sculptures. Hence, it is not that Gadamer's account is unsuited for the plastic arts. Rather, the popularization of installation arts shows that the traditional conception of the plastic arts was very limiting.

Goodman has also discussed the art museum and our expectation of it. He speaks of the difficulties in how the modern art museum structure the space in which artworks are displayed. (Goodman 1984, 174) But just like Gadamer, Goodman has not considered the case of installation art. This latter bridges the gap between painting and architecture in that it is both presented inside a museum but contribute actively in shaping the space around it.[15] The museum, and by extension architecture, does not configure its space alone without regard to the works housed inside. Installation arts show us that the artwork and the museum are not really two separated entities, but work together in creating a space. In fact, the same can be said for the other plastic arts. We only need to think of the Status of David standing prominently in front of the apse in the Galleria dell'Accademia or the frescoes on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel that became a part of the building. The plastic arts and architecture have always been intimately related, it is thanks to installation arts that we can more clearly see it today.

Video Games

Let us on to another newer form of art, or at least creative works, as it has remained controversial whether or not video games are arts. Nevertheless, the medium of video game presents a new perspective for looking at the relationship between play and art that Gadamer has not has the opportunity to consider. Whether video games are arts form has become a question for some time. But the event that really brought this question into the public's eyes is the series of critique published by Roger Ebert, a longtime film critic, starting in

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[15] In this regard, sculptures also fit this role. In particular, the works of Eduardo Chillida are adapted in configuring and shaping spaces. His collaboration with Heidegger on exploring the concept of space is especially important.

2005. In one of these pieces, he even categorically declared that "video games can never be art". (Ebert 2010) However, his arguments often rely solely on his sense of taste as he deemed no video games worthy to be called art. Despite this, he raised two points that are worth considering in more details.

On the first point, Ebert says that "video games by their nature require player choices, which is the opposite of the strategy of serious film and literature, which requires authorial control" (Ebert 2005). Secondly, Ebert points out: "one obvious difference between art and games is that you can win a game." (Ebert 2010) These two points are related, in that they signal some functional differences between games and arts. In fact, Gadamer did consider these differences, but maybe not sufficiently. Recall that one of the pivotal argument in Gadamer's account is that the fundamental function of play is not the completion of its make-believe goals (i.e. winning the game), but lies rather in self-presentation. It is because Gadamer analyses play in a general sense, where games played by humans are only a small subset. Similarly, Gadamer rejects the notion of "authorial control", advocating instead that all the participants (including the authors and the viewers) contribute collectively to the "idea" of an artwork. Indeed, Gadamer's strategy is the establishment of play as the underlying structure of both games and arts. But as a consequence, he underplays the difference between the two. In reality, video games are a peculiar case.

On the one hand, video games exhibit perfectly some characteristics that Gadamer identifies as being essential to play. For instance, video games create a game world into which players can immerse themselves. In fact, interacting with the game world requires a drastic change of behaviours that is only possible by immerse oneself in it. For example, bodily movements such as walking, running, or jumping are most often performed by manipulations of a control device (e.g. buttons, joystick). If a player still thinks in terms of "pushing a button", they will struggle with navigating the game world. Instead, they must immerse in the game and "walk", "run", or "jump" directly. It is a matter of transforming certain habits–in both sense of the word: to accustom and to inhabit. It is like how an actor has to "get in character" for a performance.

On the other hand, there really seems to be a fundamental difference between arts and games; and it is not limited to video games. We do not consider competitive sports or chess as arts, but as games. Yet, if the essence of play is really the to-and-fro movements as Gadamer suggested, then competitive games are actually a derivative of genuine playing. Or in other words, competitiveness is not really a core feature of playing. This idea might not be as strange as it seems as, for instance, the Olympic Games strongly promote fair play and sportsmanship, despite its inherently competitive nature. Winning is only one part of the game. In short, competitive game is only one way of playing.

It is the same for video games, as "video game" itself is a rather vague category. Not all video games are built around the mechanics of winning and losing; indeed, some video games are a test of skills, some focus on interactive storytelling, while others give players a lot of freedom to decide what to do on their own. This last type of games are called "sandbox games". Minecraft, created by Markus Persson in 2009, is an iconic example. In sandbox games, the players are usually not given any specific goals to accomplish; instead, they are thrown in a game world and given a set of tools to interact with or to manipulate the objects in this world. Thus, the players can set their own goals and rules, or even just "play around" with no end-goals. Minecraft, for instance, allows players to construct various furniture, buildings, or even machineries with the materials harvested from the environment. As a result, communities have sprung up where players create mega structures, sprawling cities, fantastic landscapes, curious contraptions to share with other players.[16] It has also been used as a tool in political activism, a function that has, for a long time, been closely linked to art. A collaborative project called The Uncensored Library aims to create a virtual library in Minecraft hoping to bypass stringent censorships in some countries and to help promoting press freedom.[17]

All these creations are not very different from architectures or installation arts, they just exist in a game world instead of the physical world. If we consider these creations as arts, does the game become an artistic tool? Or can it also be considered an art? A distinction might not really be necessary; it can be both, just as the building that houses an art museum can be an artistic architecture itself while, at the same time, it is a place for displaying art works.

In any case, digital technologies have enabled novel ways for people to express their creativities. We can categorize and name them differently: video games, interactive media, interactive storytelling, etc. The important point is not whether a game produces a victor, rather it is a question of whether the participants can engage with the play. While critiques can argue about definitions, video games as a medium have already garnered acceptance as an art form. In 2006, video games were recognized as an art in France legally for financial purpose; and in 2017, the minister of culture, Françoise Nyssen, reaffirmed the government's commitment in saying that video games are arts and an important part of French culture. (William 2017) On the other side of the Atlantic, the MoMA acquired video games as part of their collections, 14 in 2012 and 7 in 2013. For them, "interaction design"–i.e. the design elements that facilitate interactions between the player and the game–is the main

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[16] Many such creations can be found on the website: https://www.planetminecraft.com/
[17] Information on this project can be found at the website: https://www.blockworks.uk/the-uncensored-library

artistic element in video games. (Antonelli 2012) These recent recognitions of the importance of interaction in arts are confirmations of Gadamer's insight in defining art as play.

Arts from the Far East: Kintsugi

We have only examined, as did Gadamer, arts from Western traditions. Although it is impossible to survey all the diverse forms of art in the world, there are two art forms from the Far East that are of particular interest to our current study. We will first look at *kintsugi*, the Japanese art of mending ceramic with lacquer and gold powder.

The word *kintsugi* is composed of two parts: *kin* (gold) and *tsugi* (joint), it refers to ceramic objects (e.g. usually bowls or plates) that were mended by accentuating the damage with golden colour. The technique of creating *kintsugi* is called *kintsukuroi*, literally means "gold mending". The exact origin of this art form was lost to time, but a legend says it started in the 15th century. (Santini 2019) After the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa broke his favorite tea bowl, he tried to send it back to China–where it was originally made–for repair. However, what he received back from China was a crudely repaired bowl held together by metal clasps. Disappointed, he entrusted local artisans with the task of finding a better way to repair the bowl. The artisans carefully glued the pieces together with lacquer, and instead of hiding the cracks left behind by the repair, they accentuated the lines where the pieces were joint together with by covering the wet lacquer with gold dust. When the lacquer dried, it melded with the gold dust forming a brilliant line that seems to streak across the surface of the bowl unpredictably. Thus, *kintsugi*, an art that embraces the flaws and imperfections of an object, was born.

Kintsugi is, at the same time, a craft and an art. It is a craft for mending objects that people hold dear while it elevate them into works of art. But instead of locking these objects in a museum, most repaired objects are meant to be used and to resume their former function. This resonates with Gadamer's understanding of the concept of decoration. Decoration is not supposed to be something external to the object, as if the function and the beauty of an object are independent of each other. Instead, Gadamer understands decoration as the presentation of the object itself, as the appropriateness of the object in its environment. (Gadamer 1989, 152) This challenges the supposed distinction between art and craftsmanship found in certain Western traditions. As we have already noted above, an artistic object does not own their existence or ideality to a stroke of genius by its creator. It also serves a function, belongs in an environment, and has a past and a future. Many objects

exhibited in the art museum today are taken from their original environment (in the West, mostly from churches or monasteries[18]). With regard to these objects, Gadamer says that:

Even if their place is only in museums as works of art, they are not entirely alienated from themselves. Not only does a work of art never completely lose the trace of its original function […], but the work of art that has its place next to others in a gallery is still its own origin. (Gadamer 1989, 119)

This passage might appear a little puzzling because the objects placed in the museum are usually so far removed from their original settings that it is almost impossible to imagine their original function. Whereas, in the case of *kintsugi*, the link between the art work and its original function is made explicit. In a way, Gadamer's ideas are more exemplified in *kintsugi* than in the works that are found in art museums in the West.

Nevertheless, the art of *kintsugi* has recently gained some recognitions in the Western world. There were exhibitions focused on *kintsugi* at the Freer Gallery at the Smithsonian in 2009 and, in 2008, at Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art whose curator, Ellen Avril, explained the philosophy behind this art form:

Mending in a way that calls attention to the brokenness of an object became an expression of the Zen spirit of *mushin* ("no mind")—nonattachment and the acceptance of given circumstances. It also offered a kind of rebirth to an object, transforming its appearance and imbuing it with greater honor than it might have enjoyed in its undamaged condition. (Avril 2008)

This aesthetic ideal that celebrate imperfection runs counter to the long Western aesthetic tradition that equates beauty with perfection. Is an object art because it conforms to a certain aesthetic ideal of beauty? Whose aesthetic ideal? In a way, Gadamer has already anticipated this kind of questions. Recall that Gadamer opposes what he calls "aesthetic consciousness"–the idea that a subjective consciousness judges whether or not something is an art. Art is not an object, whose identity is already fixed, waiting to be judged by a subject. What is the object of a *kintsugi*? Is it the original bowl? Did it disappear when it was broken? Was it the same object resurrected or a newly born object when the bowl was mended? Gadamer's answer is that these questions are misguided. Understanding a piece of art is not to fixate on it as a standalone object. We have seen Gadamer explaining that the subject and the object cannot be easily separated in the experience of art. The work of art is

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[18] Take, for example, "The Wedding Feast at Cana" by Veronese that now hangs in the Louvre. Its original function was to "decorate" the refectory of the San Giorgio Monastery, where to monks could contemplate the story of the miracle performed by Jesus Christ as they have their meals in silence. It fitted in perfectly in its environment and performed its function. It was, in fact, an inseparable part of the refectory.

not created at any one instance in time, it evolves and changes through time. We see this evolution through time more clearly in *kintsugi* than other arts because it does not cover up its own history. For example, we cannot see the sketches an artist made underneath a painting, nor the restoration works done on an old painting. In contrast, we can see at plain sight, in *kintsugi*, that a ceramic piece was damaged and subsequently repaired (probably by a different artisan). It is through its history that identity of the artwork emerges.

This is also related to the question of temporality that Gadamer has discussed. A work of art is contemporaneous to the many people participating in its "play". This is very visible in *kintsugi*: an artisan can breathe new life into an old and/or damaged ceramic piece with the technique of *kintsukuroi*. In reality, a very similar, yet perhaps invisible, process occurs in all forms of arts. Now that commissioned art has become rarer, after a painting or a sculpture is completed, it is then displayed in a gallery, or bought by an art collector. A work is hardly an art sitting unknown in the corner of an artist's studio. This is why we sometimes say that the works of an artist are "discovered" or even "rediscovered"–i.e. when we have a renewed appreciation for an otherwise forgotten artist. An art critic or a curator of a museum can "revive" an artwork much in the same ways an artisan of *kintsukuroi* can revive a broken ceramic piece. An artwork has always been something that is inherited and transformed by many people.

The Art of Seals (*Zhāng*) in Chinese Paintings

There is another artistic practice from the Far East in which the history and heritage of the work is a prominently displayed. The art of seals/chops (*zhāng*) is a highly complex traditional Chinese artistic and cultural practice. It had implications in many aspects of the ancient China, from political[19] to personal, from commercial to artistic. Even the carving and design of the seals themselves are considered an art form on its own. However, we will only be able to focus on a tiny aspect of this practice: the seals as they appear on Chinese paintings or calligraphies.

A seal is akin to a signature; it is a proof of identity. Just as there are often the painters' signatures on Western paintings, seals are always present on Chinese paintings. There are some crucial differences, however, as there are usually multiple seals placed on each scrolls; and they are often not by the same person, sometimes not even people of the same

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[19] The Imperial Seal of China was a symbol of the emperor's power.

time period; some scrolls can even have dozens of seals.[20] Generally, these seals can be categorized into two types: artist's seals and collector's / connoisseur's seals. (Tang 2007)

An artist would "sign" a piece with one or more seals, bearing their own name, the name of their studio, or even a moto or a favorite saying of the artist. These function in a similar way as an artist's signature in Western paintings. Then, there are also seals placed on the painting or calligraphy by collectors or connoisseurs, which have no equivalents in traditional Western plastic arts. A collector would stamp their seals (bearing their name, that of the studio, that of the collection, or a combination of the above) on a piece of artwork to mark it as a part of their collection. Similarly, connoisseurs would stamp their seals on an artwork, simply to record their viewing the work or to show their approval for it. In this way, these seals tell a story of the acquisitions and viewing of a piece of artwork. Although these kinds of records can also be found for Western art pieces, the crucial difference is that they appear directly on the Chinese painting itself. In the West, this would be considered vandalism and disrespectful to the original artist.

This was perceived very differently in ancient China. There was a general rule of thumbs of placing the collector's/connoisseur's seals as unobtrusively as possible, in order not to disturb the composition of the piece. However, these seals are accepted as being a part of work. Perhaps the method of mounting of a piece of Chinese painting or calligraphy plays a role here. Instead of a wooden frame, Chinese paintings are mounted on a scroll. So, there is a margin of paper in between the painting and the edges of the scroll. Although some seals are placed directly on the painting itself, some are placed on the margin or spanning the space between the margin and the painting. There are simply more empty spaces on Chinese scrolls. Today, the seals, both the artist's and the collector's, on an artwork become an important source of information when evaluating a piece of work. It can help, for example, to date a piece of work, to determine its authenticity, or to judge its value (both artistically and financially), etc. Sometimes, a collector's name commands such high esteem that their seals on an artwork become more important than the artist's.

The Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty was a prolific collector and connoisseur of arts; his most prized collection of arts is assembled under the name Shiqu Baoji. Artworks in this collection all have a set of seals on them: 5, 7, or 8 seals. The number of seals depends on the period it was added to the collection and where it was stored. (Tam 2016)

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[20] A notorious example of this is a copy of *Lantingji Xu*, which is deemed the best replica of a Wang Xizhi's calligraphy of which the original has already been lost. Housed in the Beijing Palace Museum, it has more than 180 seals stamped on.

These seals bear the name of the collection, the name of the Emperor[21], or the name of an imperial palace. The works in this collection sometimes have the seals of other connoisseurs (even other emperors) stamped on.[22] As a result, these works have become very important historically, culturally, and artistically; no doubt because of the merits of the pieces themselves, but also partly thanks to the added pedigree of Emperor Qianlong's name. In the West, people of power also had extravagant private collections of arts, but the difference is that in China, this history of collecting and viewing is visible on the work itself. It is a reminder to us, as Gadamer has also shown, that the status of a work of art is not determined solely by the artist. It involves a continual interaction of connoisseurs, viewers, critics, collectors, etc. It is easy to overlook this "play" in western plastic arts, but it is highly visible in Chinese scrolls of painting and calligraphy.

Surprisingly, we are seeing a somewhat similar practice emerging in today's digitally connected world, i.e. on the internet. The convenience of the internet has facilitated the interactions between a large numbers of people. Today, there are many platforms on the internet for sharing creative works[23] that function also as social media platforms. They usually have some or all of the following functions. First, they allow other users to leave comments or feedbacks on a work. These comments are often displayed alongside or underneath the work (some platforms have more innovative ways of embedding these comments into the work itself, usually for video and audio contents). Second, the user can "like" or "dislike" a work indicating their approval (or lack thereof) or "share" it with other users as a recommendation. Finally, based on the volume of interactions (comments, likes, etc.), some works are given more visibility and thus wider audience reach. These platforms that combine the sharing of creative works and social media are like a modern version of the traditional Chinese practice of seals stamping on paintings. For a modern internet user, the social media aspects are integral to the experience of art itself, much as the seals were a part of the painting itself.

We see that the community plays a huge role in these new channels of sharing and viewing arts; even more so than the Chinese art of seals. And in a strange way, the importance of the original creator of the work has both increased and decreased. It has increased because most of today's art sharing platforms facilitate interactions between the creators and their audiences. The audiences can leave feedbacks on the work and the creators can respond immediately. In this way, the works are not really "out of the hands" of

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[21] For example, the inscription on one of the seals reads: "Valued collection inspected by Emperor Qianlong".
[22] The aforementioned copy of *Lantingji Xu* is also a part of Emperor Qianlong's Shiqu Baoji collection.
[23] To name a few: YouTube, Vimeo, SoundCloud, DeviantArt, Pinterest.

their creators once finished. Their creators can now play a more active role in promoting, discussing, or even defending their works than it was possible in previous ages. But at the same time, as the community involved with the reception of an artwork grows larger and larger, the influence of the original creators seem to diminish. It is because many of the factors for the reception of an artwork are now out of the control of its creator. For example, a celebrity sharing or approving of a work can have a huge impact of its reception.[24] But in both cases, the original creator participates in the "play" of the artwork in the community.

Seeing these two practices, i.e. the Chinese art of seals and the sharing of arts on the Internet, we can now better understand Gadamer's thesis on the importance of community in art. As Gadamer pointed out, the identity of an artwork, even in the Western tradition, has always depended on the history and the community surrounding it. The vital role of the community is much more visible in the East and in today's world. Instead of thinking in terms of "creator" and "viewer" of art, a more appropriate category is "participant". Besides the "creator" and the "viewer", there are many more different ways to participate in the creation of the identity of an art work. For example, the role of the art collector and the connoisseur, and even the commenters and the people sharing their likes on online platforms. All these experiences confirm Gadamer's thesis.

Conclusion

We have examined, in the above, Gadamer's account of the ontology of works of art, which suggests that art exists essentially as a "structure of play", i.e. as the to-and-from movements of play transforming into a permanent structure through repetitions. We have also noted a few shortcomings of this account, most notably regarding its inadequate discussions on the plastic arts. However, by looking at two newer forms of art and two artistic practices from the Far East, we are able to renew our appreciation of Gadamer's theory on art. On the one hand, his theory can elegantly make sense of these newly emerging art forms. On the other hand, these novel experiences of art help us to identify the advantages and shortcomings of his account.

Most notably, we can better understand Gadamer's seemly puzzling choice of focusing his attention on architecture instead of other more traditional plastic arts. We see today, more clearly than before, the close links between architecture, sculpture, installation arts,

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[24] Although it should be noted that endorsement from prominent figure has always been a powerful factor in the reception of art works and artist. Take, for example, Picasso's enthusiastic backing of Henri Rousseau, whose works were largely unknown at the time, and his subsequent recognition.

and paintings in their ability to shape the surrounding space. This ability is at the core of Gadamer's argument when he speaks of architecture as a paradigmatic form of art. Furthermore, we have seen that newer forms and practices of art foreign to 20th century Europe create new kinds of experience of art that, although not discussed by Gadamer, are in fact compatible with his account. In particular, the increasing relevance of the communal aspect of viewing and sharing art in today's world confirms Gadamer's thesis of understanding the fundamental structure of art as a form of play, where there is always a history and a community of participants.

In a way, Gadamer's biggest contribution is perhaps his invitation to broaden our perspective or "horizon" of our conception of works of art. Instead of focusing all of our attention on the piece of art as an isolated object, we look at our experience of it. That is to say, of entering into the space, the world that it opens up and to participate in the emerging of its ideality. Gadamer calls this framework of examining our experience philosophical hermeneutics. It is thus in this sense that we should understand his claim that "aesthetics has to be absorbed into hermeneutics." Not only is it able to make sense of some experiences of art that did not exist in 20th century Europe, it is also thanks to this broader understanding of aesthetic that, by examining these novel experiences of art, we are able to look back and gain a better understanding of the insights found in Gadamer's works. As even newer forms of experience of art emerges, there will be continuous need to reexamine our conception of arts. And as the four examples above show, Gadamer's framework builds an excellent foundation to further reflect on our conception of works of art.

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