

## In Defence of a Hermeneutic Ontology of Art

GEORG BERTRAM\*

**ABSTRACT:** The paper analyses Gianni Vattimo's hermeneutic conception of art. It primarily focuses on the claim that art should be understood as a happening of truth (Heidegger) and thus as a practice of transformation. It argues that the claim has important ontological consequences, supporting this argument with references to Heidegger and Gadamer. In turn, this argument prompts an ontological investigation of art. The proposed ontology has at least four elements: first, works of art, which challenge producers and recipients; second, interpretive activities performed by those who engage with works of art in order to follow the configurations actualized by artworks; third, everyday activities that are transformed through the interpretative activities in question; and fourth, activities of art criticism that recipients use to evaluate the impulses they get from works of art. The being of art is constituted by a practice that brings together these elements in their relations to one another.

**KEYWORDS:** art, artworks, art criticism, interpretation, transformation.

In his 1967 book “*poesia e ontologia*”, Gianni Vattimo offers a powerful defence of the hermeneutic ontology of art. Now, one may wonder what I mean when I say “the hermeneutic ontology of art”. For everyone familiar with the book, it is clear that Vattimo's primary interest was not the ontology of art per se, but in using ontology to understand the origins of art. He thus speaks of the “ontological foundation of art” (Vattimo 2008: 90), claiming that art can only be understood if it is conceived of as being rooted in human existence. And from this it naturally follows that hermeneutic ontology is the best method to grasp it. It thus seems that Vattimo might find a study on the ontology of art as such problematic, because for him, art can only be understood in the context of a form of life that exceeds the limits of art in many ways. The most important characteristic of the human form of life is no doubt the fact that language pervades it. Thus, following Gadamer, Vattimo says that above all else, every ontological inquiry must be an analysis of what it means to live in language (cf. Gadamer 2004, part 3).

This said, I am aware that my inquiry into the question of what an ontology of art might look like deviates from the path paved by Vattimo's

\* Professor of Philosophy at the Freie Universität Berlin ([georg.bertram@fu-berlin.de](mailto:georg.bertram@fu-berlin.de)).

research. But what does it mean to speak of an “ontology of art”, and, more importantly, how can speaking of art in terms of ontology help us better understand art itself? In my view, an ontology of art is an answer to the question “What is art?” Ontology in general tries to explain the meaning of the statement “there is x”. Thus, in the case of art, we want to explain what we mean when we say “there is art”. So much for terminology. But why should one be interested in the ontology of art, given that hermeneutics has already taught us that art has its foundations in human existence?

My answer is twofold: Firstly, it is crucial that we remain aware of the risks inherent in conflating ontology in general with the ontology of art. If we conceive of human existence as an existence defined by artistic creativity (as the early Nietzsche wanted to do, for example; cf. Nietzsche 1999), we end up watering down the specificity of what constitutes art. Instead, we should insist on the fact that what constitutes art has its own specificity, and should recognize that uncovering it necessitates ontological inquiry. So, secondly, it seems important to me that we analyse the specific ontology of art — important, because the ontology of art often founders on a problematic ontological assumption. Although the temptation to assume that artworks necessarily stand at the centre of an ontology of art is great, this temptation quickly leads us to the assumption that understanding what art is demands a detailed analysis of the specific properties of artworks. But, to say it with Vattimo, this somewhat myopic view causes us to lose sight of the fact that art is a bearer of truth — a source of experience in the sense that it has the potential to change our world. But what could possibly make up the core of an ontology of art if it isn’t the artworks themselves?

In what follows I will try to answer this question and in doing so will try to lay the groundwork for an ontology of art. I begin with two of Vattimo’s claims that are fundamental for an ontology of art (part 1). I then develop a basic outline of such an ontology by drawing on the works of Heidegger and Gadamer (part 2). In the third part of my paper I will address the worry that the hermeneutic ontology of art fails to account for the specificity of what constitutes art because it is too general.

Dispelling this worry will make clear the ways in which art is a specific practice distinct from others, and why it cannot serve as a paradigm for human practice in general (part 3).

## 1. Two Basic Claims

I would like to take up two of Vattimo’s claims as a starting point for the following reflections — two claims that are, in my view, very important for understanding what art is. Vattimo shares these claims with the major

hermeneutic philosophies of art, namely the philosophies of art of Heidegger and Gadamer. The first claim goes something like this:

(1) Artworks develop their own laws.

How artworks do this might be explained in the following way: Every work of art determines for itself how its elements are related to one another. This might be easier to understand if we detail some of the concrete ways elements are related to one another in works of art: there are relations between words, between harmonies, between colours, between bodily postures, between different objects in an installation, and so forth. Such relations define the configuration of elements in a given work. For their part, these relations tell us quite a lot, because they unfold their own mode of meaning. They contrast with one another, establish boundaries between each other, repeat, form transitions, and much more. These relations are formed in a different way in every single work of art.

Thus, we can understand many, if not all artworks as structures that connect different elements in a unique way; that is, as structures that connect words, tones, colours, or all of the above. What characterizes such connections is the fact that individual elements only acquire their value through their relations with other elements. In other words, in a work of art, the identity of an element is defined through the relations it has with other elements. This is also true in cases where the artwork is made up of elements that also exist independent of the work itself. Let us take the example of a poem. A poem is, in most cases, made up of words within a natural language, and hence draws on elements that, at least in some respects, precede it. But the semantic compositions of individual words are transformed in the poem. They do not merely have the meaning assigned to them in ordinary language, but take on new meanings.

The way a work of art configures its elements is decisive for its relation to its genre. Even though many artworks belong to an established genre, such as the string quartet or the novel, the genre as such does not wholly determine the form that individual works ultimately take. The attempts of Noel Carroll and others to provide necessary and sufficient conditions that must be satisfied by specific art forms like film have ultimately failed (cf. Carroll 1996). The reason for this failure is simple: It lies in the fact that every artwork reinvents the art form it belongs to and in doing so alters the very form itself.

Vattimo refers to Luigi Pareyson when he writes that an artwork has to develop its “forming form” (Vattimo 2008: 83), which gives it its own law independent of the rules of the genre. According to Pareyson, art is a specific mode of formativity that every work of art actualizes in a new

way (cf. Pareyson 1988). One could think of Adorno's concept of the "law of form" here, too (Adorno 2002: 3ff.). The law of form is a concept used to describe the ways in which an artwork constitutes its own identity and thus — as Vattimo emphasizes — its own individuality. Since works of art are not made out of concepts, judgments, and propositions, they cannot use concepts to form their individuality. This is why Adorno claims that the mimesis that constitutes the identity of individual works of art is "their resemblance to themselves" (Adorno 2002: 104). Through the relations established between their elements, works of art imitate themselves in all of their parts. Their parts are formed in such a way that all of the parts are integrated into the artwork as a whole. So much for the first claim.

The second claim is:

- (2) The experience of art is transformative in the sense that the act of engaging with a work of art has the capacity to change the world of the recipient.

Vattimo articulates the second claim by defining the experience of art as a happening of truth. "There is an experience of truth when the person who undergoes the experience is truly changed as a result of it." (Vattimo 2008: 132) In the aesthetics of Heidegger and Gadamer, works of art make it possible for recipients to have an experience in the robust sense of the term. A happening of truth thus has a negative dimension. It does not leave the world in the state it was in before the event. The artwork confronts the recipient with a different world. This, in turn, brings about a change in her world. After engaging with the artwork, the recipient's world appears differently to her. In short, art is a practice of transformation, and the transformation in question can be understood in a very concrete way: Works of art make recipients see in new ways (like the paintings of Manet). They make recipients move in new ways (like the music of Stravinsky). Or they alter recipients' emotions towards others (like Flaubert's novels).

Following Gadamer, Vattimo lays his primary focus on the linguistic aspect of what a world is, which in turn guides his inquiry into what it means that happenings of truth form a new world. But if one thinks of the works of Herder or Merleau-Ponty, to name just two examples, one might also consider the role that perception or bodily movement play in the formation of a new world. Our engagement with works of art not only changes how we speak, but also how we perceive or move. This conception of the transformative dimension of art makes clear that different works of art effect changes in different ways: Some works of art change the way we see; others the way we hear; and so on.

How can these two claims serve as the foundation for an ontology of art? For those who share the hermeneutic convictions articulated by these

claims, it might seem that there is nothing left to do. But this is misleading. It is far from obvious how both claims can be brought together. The following question might make the problem clearer: How does an object that adheres to a self-given law shared by nothing else in the world at large effect a change in that very world? At first sight, it seems as if a law that only applies to the very object that brings it into being has absolutely zero potential to have an effect on anything else. However, I think it is possible to maintain both the claim that art gives itself its own laws and that it is a practice of transformation. Nevertheless, we have some more work to do before we can explain how it is possible to combine them with one another. And the work to be done lies within the purview of the ontology of art.

## **2. Basic Features of a Hermeneutic Ontology of Art**

There is a general tendency to conceive of the ontology of art as an ontology of objects. Since art is realized by objects, it seems natural to view the question of what artworks are as the fundamental question of the ontology of art. The first claim outlined above might even give support to such an approach. If every work of art develops its own laws, then inquiring into the specific constitution of the work of art might seem to be the best way to illuminate what art is. One might thus be tempted to define the specific constitution of what art is in terms of the specific constitution of the work of art. But we should resist this temptation. Because if we prioritize the work of art, it becomes impossible to understand art as a transformative practice. I have already touched on the reason for this: If we conceive of artworks as objects bound by laws that apply to nothing else in the world beyond the individual work, it is far from obvious how they can have an effect on anything else. Thus, if we take the specific constitution of the work of art as the foundation of an ontology of art, we will be forced to think of art as a practice that has no effect on the rest of the world. This might lead us to conceive of art as a practice of pure enjoyment or pure play — a conception of art that Vattimo and many others reject for good reasons. Thus, we should not start with the first claim alone. Rather, we should take both claims as starting points for the construction of a viable ontology of art.

This provisional conclusion sheds light on both Heidegger's and Gadamer's aesthetics. Neither Heidegger nor Gadamer ground their respective ontologies of art in the conception of artworks as objects, even if Heidegger is not very explicit here. "The Origin of the Work of Art" begins with a critique of the seemingly intuitive conception of the work of art as a neutral thing that simply has special properties. Heidegger asks whether we have

a firm understanding of the concept of a neutral thing that makes such a conception possible (cf. Heidegger 1971, part 1). And, as is well-known, he answers in the negative. Nevertheless, Heidegger's contribution to the ontology of art is ambiguous. It can be summed up in the claim that the specific constitution of the being of art cannot be explained in terms of the specific being of artworks as objects because we don't have the concept of a neutral object that we would need in order to construct the ontology of art in this way.

Gadamer is much more explicit in his rejection of the idea that the ontology of art should be conceived of as an ontology of artworks as objects. He writes: "[...] this was precisely the experience of the work of art that I maintained in opposition to the levelling process of aesthetic consciousness: namely that the work of art is not an object that stands over against a subject for itself. Instead the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it." (Gadamer 2004: 103) Gadamer's reasoning is clear: if we think of art as something reducible to artworks, then we have no way of conceiving of art as a practice of transformation.

Gadamer, and to a lesser extent Heidegger, thus confront us with the following question: How is it possible to construct an ontology of art that does justice to the claim that art is a transformative practice? The answer to this question seems easy to me: We should conceive of the ontology of art as the ontology of a practice of transformation. So, what is art *qua* practice of transformation? I would like to detail what such a practice of transformation might look like by analysing three further claims.

(3) Artworks are inseparable from recipients' interpretations of them.

Vattimo stresses several times that recipients and their interpretations are constitutive for every work of art (cf. Vattimo 2008: 116ff.). I wholeheartedly agree with him, but I want to underscore the fact that we have to understand this as an ontological claim. Gadamer's concept of play might be helpful here. In stressing that art has to be understood as a practice of play, Gadamer claims that artworks and their recipients are inseparably bound up with one another. There is no play if there is no way for the play to be played (cf. Gadamer 1986, esp. part 1). Thus, the being of the play is co-constituted by the players. Without them there would be no play at all. According to Gadamer, we have to conceive of art in the same way. Without producers and recipients there would be no works of art. This allows us to make a slight correction to our first claim. Even though it is true that every artwork establishes its own laws, this is only half the matter. Rather, a more complete understanding of the claim might go something like this: Works

of art construct their own laws in order to challenge their producers and recipients. That is, a work's laws are not ends in themselves. Their very singularity allows them to pose a challenge to their recipients, and in this way they can have an effect on the world beyond their own boundaries.

How does an artwork challenge its recipients? It does so by compelling them to engage in a series of specific activities. I call the activities in question interpretive activities (cf. Bertram 2014: 121ff.). An interpretive activity is an activity that articulates the configuration of elements in a work of art by reformulating this configuration in a different medium. Engaging with a work of art is a form of articulation because it demands that one allow one's own actions to be guided by the relations contained in the work itself. In this respect, we can say that artworks demand a certain mode of behaviour. Using one of the central concepts from Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, we can characterize this behaviour as "mimetic" (cf. Adorno 2002: 112ff.). A mode of behaviour that recognizes things by allowing itself to be guided by the structure of those things is mimetic. We would understand the notion of mimetic behaviour falsely if we thought of it as being mainly passive (as Adorno sometimes suggests). Recipients have to become active in order to be guided by the artwork, such that aesthetic practices always have two sides: on the one hand, they reflect the fact that a specific dynamic is founded in the work of art itself, and that recipients allow their interpretive activities to be guided by this dynamic. On the other hand, every engagement with a work of art allows these interpretive activities to play out in different ways. In other words, recipients bring new approaches to the table every time they engage with a work of art, and intervene in the practices of others in different ways every time they confront them with an interpretation.

Simply saying that the act of reception is an interpretive activity remains, however, too general. An adequate conception of the transformative nature of art necessitates a more precise account of the practices that enable recipients to articulate the constellations of elements in specific artworks. Which activities are involved? That is, which activities are interpretive activities? I will approach this question by roughly sketching out a schematic distinction between four types of receptive activity: bodily, perceptive, emotional and symbolic:

- a) in explaining interpretation, bodily activities usually get left out. Nevertheless, in dealing with many artworks, they play a central role. They typically come to bear in the reception of music, but also in works of architecture and the plastic arts.
- b) unlike bodily activities, we often pay attention to the role of perception when discussing artworks. However, such accounts usually do not pay proper attention to the active quality of perceptions.

- c) another form of activity has recently gained prominence as an object of theoretical inquiry. Recipients find their emotions constantly challenged when engaging with artworks, and with narrative artworks in particular.
- d) as stated, we usually consider the symbolic, and, in particular, linguistic dimensions of interpretation, although we often run the risk of losing sight of the way these activities articulate the configurations actualized by works of art. Recipients often follow artworks through linguistic articulation, or in the case of music, through singing along or other forms of vocal articulation.

With all such activities, recipients articulate the constellations that unfold themselves in artworks. They develop these activities in the face of challenges posed by artworks. It would burst the confines of this paper to analyse each of the forms of practice mentioned. Thus, I would simply like to make the functional similarity between them clear, since this is something that is often overlooked in discussions on aesthetics. We usually consider interpretation as being an articulation in words, and often conceive of it as a distanced, cognitive way of dealing with the artwork. Such an understanding may be common, but it is problematic in a double sense: first, a linguistic interpretation of an artwork is not necessarily a distanced, cognitive way of dealing with the work, since an interpretation can only succeed if a recipient is able to allow her interpretation to be guided by the constellations contained in the work itself, without allowing it, as something that is independent of the work in many respects, to gain the upper hand. Second, such linguistic articulation is only one form of interpretive practice. In order to gain a full notion of these practices, we have to consider linguistic interpretation in its relation to other practices.

If we step back for a minute, it becomes evident that none of the explanations of artworks and interpretive activities given thus far really offer a sufficient solution to the problem that occasioned our inquiry in the first place. They do not explain the transformative dimension of art. But one might object that this is precisely what they do. If I say that recipients are part of the very ontological constitution of the work of art and that recipients engage with artworks by means of certain activities, then it clearly follows that recipients are transformed by artworks. One could bolster this claim by again drawing on Adorno's concept of "mimesis". As already stated, interpretive activities have to be understood as mimetic activities: They imitate the structures manifested by the work of art. Even though I agree with all of this, this does not mean that the concept of interpretive activities alone provides a sufficient account of art's transformative dimension. Because addressing the way a work of art guides and alters the recipient's



interpretive activities still leaves unanswered how this might change the recipient's world. Think, for example, of one of Cézanne's paintings. These paintings provoke a very specific mode of perception. Their very structure compels recipients to see in a particular way. But while this might enable the recipient to perceive a new world, it does not change the world itself. Thus, so long as our ontology of art remains founded in the way the work of art guides the recipient's interpretive activities, we can't say much more.

But we can easily develop the explanation further. We just have to say that interpretive activities have an effect on other practices that the recipient engages in outside of the work of art. This enables us to say what we wanted to say: Engaging with Cézanne's paintings changes the way the recipient sees the world at large. The artwork teaches her new modes of seeing that are not only important for her engagement with art, but for her everyday practices as well. Simply put:

- (4) Interpretive activities change our everyday activities in the world at large.

This claim makes it clear that art is not just one practice added to other everyday practices. Rather, everyday practices are constitutive for the practice of art. This insight has significant consequences for our conception of the ontology of art. Art is not only constituted by artworks and interpretive activities. Art as practice is constituted by works of art, interpretive activities, *and* other everyday activities that are transformed by our engagement with works of art. Artworks teach us new rhythms. They prompt us to find new words or experience different emotions. As such, engaging with a work of art changes the world of a recipient. The ontology of art has to be formulated in terms of the ontology of a transformative practice that encompasses artworks, interpretive activities, and everyday activities.

But our explanation is still not complete, because it still lacks a robust account of the transformative dimension of art. Let's take another look at the fourth claim: Interpretive activities change our everyday activities in the world at large. But what does it mean that interpretive activities effect changes in the world at large? Does every interpretive activity automatically effect changes in our world? Are artworks manipulating us? I think it is important to make it clear that recipients remain free in their engagement with works of art. This can be done if we bring the recipient's critical activities to the fore.

- (5) The being of the work of art is always also determined by the recipient's evaluations of it.

In his book, Vattimo underscores the importance of interpretation and criticism in art. As far as the latter goes, he writes: "Criticism, understood

in its most general meaning, as a discourse on the work that starts from the work itself, is an essential mode of enjoying the work, insofar as it is not an accidental addition, grounded, as it were, on an encounter that would happen at the level prior to discourse [...]” (Vattimo 2008: 55). For Vattimo, the importance of criticism shows that art always has a linguistic dimension and thus can only be adequately understood through hermeneutic ontology (in Gadamer’s sense). I completely agree, but I would like to draw another lesson from the importance of criticism for art in general. Art criticism is a practice that allows recipients to take a step back from the initial impulses they get from the work of art and gives them occasion to ask whether they value these impulses or not. Recipients reflect on whether the artwork makes a valuable contribution to their everyday lives and their self-understanding. The way we evaluate works of art takes many forms, ranging from short conversations while reading a novel to long discussions after a film, blog entries, interpretations in art research, and — finally — art criticism in the narrower sense. In all these forms recipients articulate what they perceive to be the value or lack of value of the work for their world and their everyday lives.

The practice of art criticism thus rounds out the ontology developed thus far. It makes clear that recipients are not manipulated by works of art but are — at least to some extent — free to determine what they deem to be valuable in a work of art. The decision as to whether a work of art is a success or failure is thus left to the recipient. The freedom of recipients to make judgments about a work is an essential element of art as practice of transformation, and, even further, of the development of the arts themselves. In other words, a crucial aspect of art as practice of transformation is the fact that recipients make judgments about whether a specific work makes a valuable contribution to their world and their everyday practices. And by discussing art, producers and recipients constantly redefine the arts. Thus, art must be understood as a self-conscious practice in the sense that works of art are always accompanied by reflections on what art is, how it works, and why it is valuable. In a nutshell: Art is always bound up with reflections on the concept of art. Here, “reflection” should not simply be understood as the abstract practice of asking “What is art?” The reflection that is constitutive for art is always concrete. It takes the form of questions like: “Is this poem melodic?” “Did you notice the tensions in the sonata’s first movement? Do they really work?” By asking questions like this, producers and recipients reflect on the poem and the sonata as forms through which art is realized. They reflect on art in its concrete realizations.

In sum: What does it mean to develop an ontology of art as an ontology of a practice of transformation? It means that we distinguish between different elements of the practice of art that are irreducibly bound up

with one another. As we have seen, the ontology of art as a practice of transformation doesn't just boil down to an analysis of a set of activities. Nor is it exclusively a matter of analysing artworks or aesthetic experiences. Rather, the ontology of art as a practice of transformation encompasses a variety of different objects and practices, such as artworks, interpretive activities, everyday activities, and activities of art criticism. The being of art is constituted by a practice that brings together these elements in their relations to one another. This is the basic claim of the hermeneutic ontology of art.

### **3. Art as Object-Centred Practice of Reflection**

However, one could object that the hermeneutic ontology of art fails because it is far too general. Because isn't the proposed ontology of art in the end just another general hermeneutic ontology? According to Gadamer, the general structure of understanding can be explained in terms of the hermeneutic circle in which objects, self-understanding, and reflections on self-understanding are irreducibly bound up with one another (cf. Gadamer 2004: 267ff). Thus, it might seem as if my discourse is destined to be nothing more than an exposition of a slightly specified general ontology. Have we lost sight of the specific constitution of art in our attempt to develop a hermeneutic ontology of art? I think the worry is completely justified, but I also think it can be overcome, which I will try to do by adding two final claims. The first is negative. It admits that it is not possible to define art as practice in a way that would entirely distinguish it from other everyday practices. The second claim is positive. It shows that we might better understand what distinguishes art from other forms of praxis by defining it as a practice of reflection. In doing so, it clarifies why the search for an ontology that would provide a clear-cut distinction between art and everyday practices is bound to run into a dead end. The negative claim goes like this:

(6) Since art is a constitutively unstable practice, its ontology does not explain that which defines it in a way that would allow us to positively distinguish it from other everyday practices.

Following Vattimo following Pareyson, I made the claim that every work of art formulates its own laws. This is why a work of art cannot draw on some set of general rules that would prescribe how it has to be formed. There is no recipe for producing successful works of art. Every work of art has to justify the rules it gives itself on its own. This is why art is an essentially unstable practice. It is unstable because every work of art has to

determine anew what it means to effectively pose a challenge to established human practices. The practice of art is a constant struggle over how artistic impulses can reshape our world and which ones are most apt to do so. The instability of art has two important aspects: Firstly, art is always changing. It is not a practice whose boundaries could ever be established once and for all. Rather, art's boundaries are in constant flux. As I have already pointed out, art is always concerned with itself. Art criticism and artworks themselves always reflect on what art is. But the reflection in question has no object that would somehow be independent of the reflection. In other words, reflection on what art is is not founded in a cognitive distance to the object reflected upon. Rather, the reflection changes its object. By making claims about which works of art succeed as art and which do not, art criticism in its various guises becomes part of the determination of what art is. Thus, the objects, forms, features, and activities that distinguish art as a specific form of practice are always changing. Conceiving of art as a practice of transformation thus means that that which defines what art is is always being determined anew. Secondly, the boundary between art and everyday practices is itself an object of art's reflection on itself. Works of art reflect on the ways in which they distance themselves from or engage with the world at large. In this way, the boundary between them is internal to art itself. Thus, as I said above, the search for a definition of art that would define it as something wholly distinguished from everyday practices is bound to run into a dead end. The ontology of art cannot define the being of art in this way precisely because art as practice lacks the very stability that would make such a clear-cut distinction possible.

However, it does not follow from this that we have to give up every attempt to define what art is. That would only follow if we demanded that every attempt to define art provide clear criteria for distinguishing what art is from what it is not. But this is only one way of delineating the definitive features of art, and thus is only one way of constructing an ontology of art. A different conception of what an ontology of art should accomplish might be put like this: The ontology of art should aim to explain the function art has within the human form of life. It does not necessarily need to provide criteria for what art is and what it is not. It simply provides criteria for the determination of what role art plays internal to a constellation of other human practices. And these criteria are based in the following claim:

(7) Art is a practice of reflection founded in objects that force subjects to reshape their everyday practices.

The last piece of the puzzle merely consists in making explicit what has been implicit all along in the ontology of art proposed here. Even though it

might seem as if the proposed ontology is not far from being just another general hermeneutic ontology, a closer look shows that this is not the case. I claimed that art as a practice of transformation is co-constituted by both interpretive activities and everyday activities, and tried to account for the way they are connected to one another by saying that interpretive activities move recipients to alter their everyday activities in the world. Further, I added that recipients reflect on the changes in question through art criticism understood in a broad sense. Why do they reflect on the impulses they get from works of art in this way? Recipients take art as a medium for determining who they are in a new way. This gives us a hint as to what kind of practice art is. Art is a practice of reflection. Subjects reflect on their own self-understanding by engaging with works of art. Art doesn't just provoke some generic transformation. Rather, art occasions a transformation of the recipient's everyday practices through specific objects that are produced with the aim of giving new impulses to human activities and are themselves the objects of critical discussion. In short, the transformations occasioned by art are the results of a specific mode of object-centred reflection. Thus, the claim that art is a practice of reflection has to be further qualified. What is specific to art as a practice of reflection is that in art, the reflection is prompted by objects (in contrast to, say, linguistic forms of reflection in psychotherapy or philosophy). In art we put our energy into objects, not for the sake of the objects themselves, but for our own sake.

So, is the objection I posed at the beginning of the last part of this paper justified? Is the hermeneutic ontology of art too general? I think my response to this objection shows that it is based on an erroneous conception of how we should define what art is. According to the hermeneutic explanation put forth here, constantly questioning the boundary between art and everyday practices is itself an element of art as practice of transformation. This is why it is false to demand that every explanation of what constitutes art account for the boundary between art and everyday practices. An explanation of what constitutes art should provide something quite different: It should provide an explanation of why art is a valuable practice within the human form of life. I have tried to give such an explanation by claiming that art is an object-centred practice of reflection. Defined as an object-centred practice of reflection, art has the value of affecting recipients in unforeseeable ways, spurring them to change their everyday practices. By extension, it thus has the value of occasioning new forms of practice within the human form of life, and thus bears the potential to change the world in general. Another way of explaining the value of art might go something like this: Art is a practice that allows us to develop indeterminacy within the human form of life and thus enables us to retain an openness towards the future.

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