

HEIDEGGER'S THEORIES AND THE STAINED GLASS

Ghioldus Andreea, Arch., Phd. Student

University of Architecture and Town-Planning Ion Mincu, Bucharest , Romania

Abstract:

This paper work brings into discussion some of Martin Heidegger theories and analyze the way we can apply them in the stained glass situation. Will they apply in exactly the same way the philosopher says or there are some differences revealed by the different characteristic of the stained glass?

The work is divided in two parts. The first part discuss the Heidegger's theories about technology. The philosopher says that the technology affects the way the people relate to the nature and that they began to think only about the ways to exploit it. Well in this case, about stained glass, this problem is different, because by it's nature, the stained glass making process never change the relationship between the artist and the glass. So, no matter the tools used for making stained glass, the traditional ones or the computer, the creative process remains the same.

The second part analyze another of Heidegger's concepts from his work "The Origin of Work of Art" which are the thing, the tool and the work of art. Heidegger says that an object can be a thing or a tool or a work of art and that it can never accomplished more than one of these characteristics. Well here we can see that stained glass have different rules. It's duplicity allow it to be a work of art and a tool in the same time. And even if it lose the tool characteristic, it always keep the work of art characteristic.

Key Words: Philosophy, Stained glass

Introduction:

In his working papers, Peter Sloterdijk said that we should think "with Heidegger against Heidegger"²⁰². This is an interesting idea, to run counter an important philosopher's concepts, because the fact itself, that he was internationally approved, means that the world had been accepted his theories and used them.

In this paper I will take few Heidegger's concepts and I will put them in an analysis with my doctorate theme, the stained glass, to see their practicability.

The term stained glass can refer to colored glass as a material or to works produced from it. Throughout its thousand-year history, the term has been applied almost exclusively to the windows of churches and other significant buildings. Although traditionally made in flat panels and used as windows, the creations of modern stained glass artists also include three-dimensional structures and sculpture.

Main Text:

1. Heidegger and technology

We can notice that the stained glass had been changing it's significance along time and also it's manufacturing process. The manufacturing process depends of the technological possibilities available at that moment, so it's a sure thing that the process has changed. But how much it's significance has changed and how much depends on the technology we will see below. It is interesting to analyze in which way went the significance changing process and if it's good or not for humanity.

Heidegger proved in his theories that he is against the technological evolution and the way it sees the planet resources.

In the stained glass situation this can not be applied because stained glass technology had always evolved and like that the artist improved their techniques. Here we can not speak about

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Jongen, Marc. *Anthrospheres and Aphrogrammes* Sloterdijk. pg. 4

exploitation in the way Heidegger criticized. In this case, the technology always helped the artist to create, even nowadays when we face the “maximum yield at minimal expense”²⁰³ production.

There are few theories, according to Heidegger's, that sustain the Renaissance stained glass is the most valuable of all and that is the manufacturing techniques that we should keep and apply in our manufacturer. But this is an erroneous theory because, the truth is, the Renaissance Stained glass is the most popular one for the masses. In those centuries many churches were decorated with stained glass, churches that passed the test of time and there are nowadays in the same shape.

But in this case it's no real argument to sustain that affirmation. Analyzing the history of stained glass we can see the fact that the technical improvements were helpful in their developments.

Stained glass – short history

The idea of stained glass started in Ancient Rome, in Caracalla's Baths, where the Romans put a sheet of marble to fill the windows gap. The Romans didn't have the technology to make stained glass, so they used a substitute to create the same effect, the same atmosphere and a colored light.

Later, in XII century the stained glass manufacturer began to develop, they used metallic salts to color the glass and other substances to paint over it. In the Renaissance century the stained glass got an important amplitude and the manufacturers and the artists developed new techniques to create new effects, like using different types of acids and improvement of the lead stripes to make it more resistant to light and rain. On that time every artist made the glass itself, the chemical composition being very well kept secret.

Between XVIII and XX century stained glass weren't used on buildings and it's technology had lost.

But in XX century, stained glass art began to develop again. The industrial revolution influenced the manufacturer and the result were that the artist weren't use a glass made by them, they used an industrial colored glass. The quality of the glass were improved and the difference can be seen at the colors, the way the light pass through by the light, a good luminosity is very well appreciated. The Renaissance technology couldn't been rediscovered, but there were other techniques used instead. Tiffany created it's own stained glass made of several sheets of different type of glass put together at high temperatures. This stained glass quality was so high that, no matter the color, it's luminosity remained at high level.

Between 1900 and 2000 the stained glass technology had been rising and developing much more than the Renaissance's, and through this got a high liberty and free hand to the glass artist. He can choose what kind of glass want to use, he can made his own colored glass or to buy it, the technologies are so many and manifold that the difficulty now is to choose one of them. But the beauty of technology is that the only limit now is the imagination, the power of the artist's mind to create something new in glass art.

The manufacturing technologies had been evolved along the time, based on the evolution of the technology of making glass, and in the Industrial Revolution Ages, on the production machines improvement. Nowadays, the glass technology attain to a point where, to all intents and purposes, anything it's possible. The classic stained glass are still produced in small workshops, but the manufacturing technology goes through efficiency, rapidity and perfection. It come out manufacturing technologies of the decorative serigraphed glass, where the drawing is made on the computer and a machine print it on the glass surface with maximum precision.

Contemporary technology – effects and implications

To make a practical analyze about Heidegger's theory, we must refer to the nowadays glass making technology and it's implications on the master glass maker and the stained glass. Heidegger says that the technology affects the way the people relate to the nature and the whole planet. Says that they begin to think only about the ways to exploit it.

Well, here we can not talk about that, merely because the stained glass it always implies a creative process. No matter if it's still more or less a hand made product because the high advanced

²⁰³ Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology And Other Essays*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977.

technology, the stained glass will always keep the same relationship with the master glass maker. Because the master glass maker is, with no doubt, an artist. And no matter which tools he chose, the creative process remains the same. And in this creative process it happens something interesting. The artist imprint in his work a part of himself, a part of his soul.

How much we can see the reflection of the man in stained glass it's up to the making procedure, the person who designed the pattern and how much does the master glass maker put his print on the work. Because the stained glass is hand made would be wrong to make the assumption that the artist, the master glass maker doesn't imprint a part of his soul in that glass work, even though the pattern is created by someone else. The impress can be saw in the delicacy of the work and the execution details.

“The painting is not a copy of the world, it's a duplicity of senses, the inside of the outside and the outside of the inside.[...] The painting does not conjure anything.”²⁰⁴

The painting is, just like that, a reflection of us, of what we are, of what we feel. After a case study made by myself in a painting studio, I observed that every painter represent himself in that painting work, no matter what's it's meanings. Some people call this the specific print of the personal style of the artist. But the most shocking, or maybe remarkable, is the fact that they draw their own portrait when actually have to draw someone else' s portrait, and they don't even realize this. Of course that, at some advanced level of painting, this phenomenon is harder to notice, only an able and experimented eye have the capacity to notice this.

So, even though the portrait belongs to the posing model, the drawing represent the painter, even if he wants this or not. By parity of reasoning, the stained glass, an artistic handicraft, toe this line, too. In every stained glass the artist is represented, the glass work is a duplicity of him, even though the pattern, the drawing is chosen by the beneficiary.

So, this imprint is so strong that, no matter the technology, the master glass maker will always relate to the glass in the same way. The glass is made in a factory, but is just raw material for the stained glass.

Here we can debate another problem that comes with the technology. Do the contemporary stained glass have the same value for us as the Renaissance ones do? The answer is, of course, yes they have. Because behind any tool is the man that control it. The computer is just another tool that we can use to create masterpieces.

The technology helps the artist in his creations because no matter the tool you use, the important is the man who use it to create a shape, a form and a color. Saying that the art made with the computer is no longer art, it's obviously wrong because the computer it's another tool to use in any art masterpiece. Leonardo da Vinci experienced with different techniques in his painting and we can't say it's no longer an art because it's created in a different method than his contemporaneous did.

However, how does the technology affect the contemporary stained glass value is difficult to say. It inevitably change our values system and the way we are related to works of art. When an object, a work of art or not, is easier made by the medium of technology, we can ask questions about how much does it value. How much can count it's artistic value if we use the computer to made it. However, it would be a mistake to say that an artistic composition is less valuable because it was computer made. The talent and the creative effort it's the same, and sometimes even bigger, because there are many other possibilities, more options we have to choose between when we have various technical resources available.

It will be a mistake to say that only traditional made stained glass are valuable, because being against to technical progress means to be against evolution. The new techniques means evolution, innovation, a larger liberty of expression, and the spectacular masterpieces have been created by the artists who have known use the ideas and the technology which they had, or even to bring themselves innovations.

According to Heidegger we should stay to Renaissance level of stained glass. This is impossible to conceive, because many stained glass masterpiece were created between 1900 and 2000. Furthermore, thinking about Heidegger's ideas, we should stay to Ancient Rome's level. It is true that

²⁰⁴ Merleau-Ponty. *Fenomenology, language and sociology*. Heinemann: London, 1974.

the marble is still used for visual effects in many buildings, but I don't think that anyone would be agree with using only marble in windows instead of stained glass. And I don't think that anyone could say that using glass changed how we relate to marble, or that it is a negative fact. The stained glass technology will always evolve like every part of our lives and it is to the detriment of our world art heritage to stop that.

I don't say that we should forget the Renaissance style of stained glass. It is important to preserve this style and it's technology because it's useful in restorations and important for our history and acquaintance.

The contemporary and the works of art

They say that nowadays the artists can't create such masterpieces like the Renaissance masters. But if we do an honest analysis, we see the fact that art and stained glass also are much more accessible now than few centuries ago, and the result is that many people try to express themselves through this form of art. The professional materials, like the colors, the lead stripe, a large palette of types of glass is now much more accessible and affordable to the ordinary people. These people are more or less talented, but because of mass-media, the network and the social networks their art become known to a large number of people. Now we are surrounded of information, some important or not and the people who choose to publish it are not always the right ones. The absence of a proper education can be seen at the would-be artists and the mass-media would-be curators.

Just like that, the mass-media may create an erroneous idea that we have no more art masters. The artists that we can call masters exists but they are surrounded by mediocrity. We can find them in the notorious art gallery which have some educated curators, able to evaluate a real masterpiece from a less valuable piece of art.

As a conclusion we can say that the technology it's necessary, we must accept it's evolution, use it for our needs but without forgetting the historical methods.

2. Heidegger and "The Origin of Work of Art"

We can ask ourselves to what degree the stained glass is a *thing*, a *tool* or a *work of art*. Although we make reference to Heidegger's concepts, we can't be totally agree with them.

According to Heidegger, starting from the idea that the stained glass is a *work of art*, the concept of a *thing* can be applied to the support material only, like glass and lead stripes.

But the fact concept that the *tool* can't be a *work of art* and vice versa, can't be applied to the stained glass's case. The stained glass accept the both concepts, without changing or transforming anyone of them. The stained glass can be a *tool*, because it's a part of the house envelope, the outside layer, that protect against the bad weather, the intruders, and even the outsider's sight. In the inside of the house, the stained glass is used like a separating element between the rooms, interior spaces and even like a part of the furniture.

The stained glass it's a *work of art*, too. We don't say that because we think of stained glass like a *tool* with an aesthetics value affixed, because that will be wrong. Of course that not all stained glass are *works of art*. To be *works of art*, according to Heidegger, it must complete several criteria.

- "As an work of art, the work of art display a world";
- Proposal of the Earth "What's right, the sculptor use the stone exactly how the stonemason does. However he doesn't make the stone subject to the wear and tear. This is happening to a certain degree only where the work of art is flunked. What's right, the painter use colors, too, but in a way that he doesn't make the color subject to the wear and tear, but contrariwise, to get the glow. What's right, the poet use the word, too, but not alike those who talk and speak as a general rule, having to make the words subjects to the wear and tear, but in a way that only now the word become and stays authentic.";
- "The origin of the work of art is art.";
- "The work of art find it's finality in itself.";
- "The work of art character of the work of art consist in the fact it is created by the artist."

Now let see if stained glass accomplish these criteria.

“As an work of art, the work of art display a world”

Well, we can say that stained glass display at least a physical world, a fantastic world and a subtle, hidden world. The physical world can be represented by the historical stained glass that represents a heritage, an important document that helps us study the past. These can be found in the old churches, especially from the Renaissance Ages and in the medieval castles, which, sometimes, kept the coat of arms on stained glass, for example. The fantastic world can be the world the artist want to expose to us, to guide us to his imagination, to his inner world. The hidden world is represented by the artist's signature, the imprint that he inevitably put on the *work of art*. Because the stained glass, as a *work of art*, represent the master glass maker.

Proposal of the Earth “What's right, the sculptor use the stone exactly how the stonemason does. However he doesn't make the stone subject to the wear and tear. This is happening to a certain degree only where the *work of art* is flunked. What's right, the painter use colors, too, but in a way that he doesn't make the color subject to the wear and tear, but contrariwise, to get the glow. What's right, the poet use the word, too, but not alike those who talk and speak as a general rule, having to make the words subjects to the wear and tear, but in a way that only now the word become and stays authentic.”

The glass master, the artist, use the glass like a prop for his creation, but in a way that the glass is exalted and not wearing out. When we look to a piece of stained glass, we don't notice the glass as a material, but the creation, the composition which enchant our senses, we look at it like we look at Michelangelo's “Pieta”, where we don't notice the marble, but we notice the overwhelming expressiveness of the mother which hold her death son in her arms; like that we look to a piece of stained glass.

“The origin of the work of art is art.”

Every work of stained glass start with a creation process, from the artist imagination, a sketch, the final drawing and then, the stained glass making process. Taking into account that the creative process is a full form of art, we can say that stained glass have it's origin in art.

“The work of art find it's finality in itself.”

Heidegger says that the *work of art* find it's finality in itself, it doesn't have to have a practical role, like the *tool*. The philosopher also says that the *tool* that doesn't fulfill it's duty, doesn't find it's finality anymore, it's worthless. However, if we think about it a little, the stained glass contradict these rules. Because a stained glass displayed on a wall is a *work of art*. In this case it lose it's *tool* characteristics, but it find it's finality like a *work of art*. It is interesting that this duplicity allow stained glass to never lose it's finality. There is no place for confusions here. We don't make the mistake to give it a non-existent characteristic. The stained glass in not like the architecture which, although is an art discipline for some people, and some buildings, *works of art*, it is only a tool. Sometime nowadays for a more thermal comfort, the stained glass is installed near the thermal insulating surface, like the thermal insulating window. In this case the stained glass loses the *tool* characteristic, but keeps the *work of art* characteristic. So, stained glass have the interesting characteristic that it never lose it's finality.

“The work of art character of the work of art consist in the fact it is created by the artist.”

We have to admit that not all the stained glass work are *works of art*. Mostly because they are not created by artists, but amateurs. But the same rule is applied to painting, to music, poetry...the author is not always an artist. Taking into account the works that are made by artists, we can say that we have stained glass works that are *works of art*. The master glass maker is an artist, because he goes through all steps that a canvas painter goes. He just use another tools, like lead stripes instead of paintbrushes and pieces of glass instead oil or water colors.

We can say, without any doubt, that the stained glass can be a *work of art*, too.

Comparing to an usual *work of art*, the stained glass like a *work of art* don't lose it's tool characteristic. We can say that it is one and another. Based on the quality of the art, the stained glass

can be more a *tool* than a *work of art* (in the case of a less good creation), or more a *work of art* and less a *tool*. However its characteristics oscillate between the two concepts, the stained glass never loses the *tool* characteristic when it is used in a proper way.

In the case of a home, we will always notice the creation. The creation it's the one that enchants us, feeds us in a spiritual way. In the relationship that we have with the stained glass the concept of work of art prevails the concept of tool. In an ideal situation, when the stained glass fulfills its duty as a *tool*, we never think about it in this way. Making a comparison, in Heidegger's example, the peasant woman wearing a pair of shoes, the shoes being a *tool*, is very well served by them as long as she doesn't think about the shoes.²⁰⁵ Making an elaboration about this, as long as the shoes fulfill their duty as a *tool*, they are comfortable, don't abrade the feet, don't make calluses, don't break themselves, the users, in our case, the peasant woman, can focus on other duties. So, as long as the stained glass is in a perfect shape, we will think about how beautiful it is, how wonderfully it filters the light, and so on. In the moment that the abnormality shows up, like cracks here by the rain can come into, we will inevitably think at the practical role that the stained glass doesn't fulfill anymore.

Conclusion:

It's interesting to see how the stained glass versatility changes the way we read Heidegger's concepts and ideas.

We could see that, in this case, the technology improvements did not change the way we relate to the earth resources, nor the artist relationship with glass. No matter what tool he uses, he will always see the stained glass creation in the same way.

Also, it is very interesting the stained glass duplicity, because it can be a tool and a *work of art* in the same time. And even if it loses the tool characteristic, it will always keep the *work of art* characteristic. The stained glass never loses its finality.

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