

# CONSONANCE AND RESONANCE IN KANDINSKY AND ODOBLEJA'S WORKS

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## Abstract

The subject itself belongs equally to the fields of psychology, art and philosophy. The conceptual boundaries must be established from the onset by defining the two key words included in the title of this paper. The analysis of consonance and resonance in Kandinsky and Odobleja's works emphasizes the fact that the need for coherence brings them towards searching for a grammar, a language to decode art using the same concepts, by apparently simple means of expression that are in fact complex. The structure and content of the two works we shall refer to, respectively Wassily Kandinsky's "Concerning the Spiritual in Art" and Ștefan Odobleja's "Consonantist Psychology", include similar ideas, resemblances which create the framework of the topic discussed. We highlight certain unique, unusual hermeneutic inquiries concerning art, along with innovative multidisciplinary scientific perspectives. We try to create a virtual, symbolic setting in which to bring the two authors to the attention of the contemporary literature, almost a century later, by means of consonance and resonance.

**Keywords:** *art, aesthetic laws, consonance, harmony, resonance.*

## 1. INTRODUCTORY NOTES. CONCEPTUAL DELIMITATIONS

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Child psychology highlights specific psychopathological elements using exemplifications and the direct applicability of consonance and resonance, drawing and colour being the clinical indicators of this purpose. Consonance and resonance are two fundamental concepts with the aid of which, one may argue a number of ideas and theories, translate apparently indecipherable context, signs and symbols. It is mainly a prospective - retrospective approach, which targets the authors and the stated concepts which operationalizes keywords indirectly (PLĂVIȚU, 2020).

*Consonance* - was defined in Romanian by Lazăr Șăineanu, a Romanian philologist, linguist

and folklorist in the Universal Dictionary of the Romanian Language, Sixth Edition. Renowned for his early contribution to Romanian lexicography, he gave the following meanings to this word: 1. Harmony of musical sounds; 2. Grammar. Sound unit in the ending of words (ȘĂINEANU, 1929).

At the same time, it can be found in the Romanian dictionaries and on the dexonline.ro website: noun, fem., (1) the word comes from music and expresses a harmonious set of sounds or a relationship between two or more sounds which generate harmonious sonority, in a socio-cultural context, namely a union, a pleasant combination thereof, a tonal harmony; (2) in a figurative way: similar ideas, opinions, representing agreement; (3) in the linguistic sense, concerning words, which has a similar ending to another word, meaning resemblance, uniformity of the final sounds of two or more words. Etymologically it comes from Latin (*consonantia*), from *con-* (together) and the verb *sonare* (to sound), but possibly also from French (*consonance*) or German (*konsonanz*) (DEXONLINE, n.d.a.). *Resonance* - comes from French (*résonance*), noun, fem., (1) property of bodies, rooms, etc., to amplify and extend sounds, reverberation; (fig.) lyrics resembling Eminescu's poetry; resonance box, cavity whose volume of air enhances the oscillation and amplification of sounds; (2) effect on one's soul caused by something special, vibration, echo, etc. (OPREA et al., 2009; (DEXONLINE, n.d.b.), definitions for electric, nuclear and nuclear magnetic resonance are added. We shall immediately understand that consonance is opposed to dissonance, whereas resonance is a result of consonance.

Academicians and connoisseurs are aware that both Kandinsky and Odobleja were equally praised and contested in their time. However nowadays it is certain that both of them made their own spiritual journey filled with fundamental questions.

Wassily Kandinsky wrote in 1910 about consonance and resonance in art, mainly concerning colours, in a "small book" as he himself called it, of about 100 pages. This book entitled "Concerning the Spiritual in Art" was first printed in 1911 and there have been many other editions so far. "Consonantist Psychology" volume I and volume II, by Ștefan Odobleja, was edited in 1938 and 1939 respectively, in French, later the edition was published in Romanian in 1982.

Odobleja enhanced access to the systemic understanding of the human soul and the existential universe, being considered, rather late, the precursor to cybernetics (RĂȚOI & ODOBLEJA JR., 2020) or the creator and founder of generalized cybernetics (RĂȚOI & ANIȚA, 2002; RĂȚOI & ODOBLEJA JR., 2018; RĂȚOI & ODOBLEJA JR., 2020), whereas Kandinsky was a precursor to modern artistic movements, pioneer and father of the lyrical abstract art (FRIDE-CARRASSAT & MARCADÉ, 2007). We are surprised by the fact that in Odobleja's case, despite the absolutely impressive bibliography, this book written by Kandinsky is not included in the bibliographical references. In other words, it was not a source in Odobleja's research; and although he was interested in art, it was not his main research subject. This is an unavoidable conclusion, which can be overlooked; it is however beyond reproach, considering that valuable books were not easy to acquire.

## 2. ON AESTHETIC LAWS, HARMONY AND THE AESTHETIC DICHOTOMY OF BEAUTY AND UGLYNESS

Just as the critic and art historian Amelia Pavel wrote in the Foreword to the first Romanian edition, the relationships between music and painting are given special attention in "Concerning the Spiritual in Art". Resonance is defined by the author as an internal necessity and as a basic principle of every creation; not

only is it a technical and artisanal approach, but it also takes an ethical meaning (KANDINSKY, 1994). Kandinsky's book could be considered a true treatise on spiritual harmony. In his view, shape and colour are harmonized according to this internal need to create a painting. A genuine work of art may be born this way, when it's composition really connects with the human soul. If the contact with the soul is authentic, it is consonant and resonance is implicitly established. This coincides with Odobleja's perspective, according to which resonance is the internalized response to consonance, its echo in our being. It cannot precede, it can only be subsequent, being the cognitive and emotional response to consonance.

In Odobleja's view, his theories extend to the heights of the philosophical unknown; the author claims to have reached the "most modern physicochemical philosophy, *harmonism*". In this respect, consonance is validated from above. Art represents a need for beauty and the beautiful, order and balance, coherence and harmony, being defined as an aesthetic emotion, a pleasure or a complementary exercise. Beauty is proportional to mental energy, to the cultural training and aesthetics, a contrast with the previous state, with the existing or triggered consonances. Art represents the product and the expression of the individual, of society, influencing them; the manifestation of reversibility is seen as a corollary of consonance. Beauty therefore, can be divided and it may obey the law of consonance, meaning synthesis, harmony, accord, homogeneity, unity, and thus health (ODOBLEJA, 1982). Consequently, art can be defined as a need for consonance and resonance in contact with beauty and vice versa, given that it is a reversible process.

Wassily Kandinsky considers that what comes from an inner need of the soul is beautiful. Hence, something is beautiful if it is beautiful inside. Each colour is beautiful inside because it causes a vibration of the soul and ennobles it; somehow it imperceptibly enriches the soul. In his view everything that is ugly outside can turn out to become beautiful inside, both in art and in life. Unfortunately, the author noticed that art has undergone a degenerative process, even at that time, to rather target material purposes, to seek

inspiration from the most common topics. That is why art is searching for an answer to the artist's fundamental question which will always concern the issue of the belief in soulless art. Thus, art became intelligible to artists alone, whereas the public becomes more and more indifferent to works of art (KANDINSKY, 1994).

We can infer that there are no longer natural connections regarding consonance, therefore there is an increasing lack of resonance. When only success is fiercely pursued, it often turns into a superficial, somewhat sterile search. Even if he seems to contradict himself, the author points out that the expression of the self, of the inner need of the soul, is always projected, and feedback processes alter one's sensations and representations. Thus, midway between the sensory and the logical, the soul will be a mediator of one's experiences and will determine the aesthetic perception and expression. We adhere to his belief from his book according to which nothing is more important to the human being than the soul.

According to Odojeja, ugliness refers to dissonance, disagreement, conflict, heterogeneity, multiplicity, meaning disease, weakness and that is why it abhors. Both beauty and ugliness trigger emotions of certain intensity and they can lead to physiological, mental or somatic changes, more or less noticeable in a particular existential context, in a certain person. In his view, the contact with beauty has a powerful impact on the mental and physical level, even determining the creator or the receptor of artworks to experience some profound somatic modifications. Aesthetic laws govern fine arts, and the author of consonantist psychology intuits the mechanisms for satisfying the human needs leading us to understand that art is situated at the top of the human motivational pyramid.

Art represents the effect of the aesthetic activity and its virtual cause. It represents the product or the expression of beauty, meaning beauty expressed. Art is a means for communication emotion, a clue to optimal psychic functionality, satisfying somehow a natural tendency for psychic self-preservation (ODOBLEJA, 1982). From a consonantist perspective, the laws of aesthetics are easy to deduce mainly from the laws of psychology and

also from the universal laws. They must be listed: the law of relativity, the law of equilibrium, the law of compensation, the law of reaction, the law of contrast, the law of reversibility, the law of training, the law of alternation. It is also emphasized the idea that beauty is contextual, whereas the subjectivity and relativity of beauty is due to the consonance. However, we cannot feel the beauty and its effect if we do not understand it and we do not live in harmony with it. Therefore, there is a certain processuality and consonantist dynamic in art, whereas in a noetic plan it represents a fundamental spiritual need, which manifests under different forms, ideally in consonance and full resonance, in truth and authenticity, as an intrinsic value.

In different contexts, as Kandinsky points out, the same colour is different, its identity is established accordingly and does not result solely from itself. When speaking of harmony and consonance in a large aesthetic sense, he considers that all the colours and shapes in a composition, in a drawing, combine and form a unitary whole, allowing them to establish relationships. The governing laws follow certain melodic principles which must necessarily be integrated into the compositions and can be divided into melodic, rhythmic, symphonic and other forms of transition. Every construct has its own rhythm which brings it to life, the repetition can only be seemingly fortuitous. Confusing combinations are "arrhythmic" and their division from the "rhythmic" ones is conventional and completely relative (KANDINSKY, 1994).

Strikingly, any process of evolution in art resembles that of music, and these processes are the effect of some hidden governing laws. Kandinsky also points out that there is no clear division between consonance and dissonance. Therefore, some criteria regarding colour harmony which were rejected in the past have been accepted and promoted nowadays; hence, some rules and laws may be obsolete at the very moment they are formulated. The sensorial effect of colour, in his opinion, is somehow of little importance and of short duration, its spiritual resonance is what really matters. Such vibrations are perceived like an echo at the spiritual level, and this delicate emotional resonance cannot be precisely explained, as human language is not able to express it.

### 3. SPIRITUAL MEANING OF COLOUR IN GENERAL AND REGARDING CHILDREN IN PARTICULAR

According to Kandinsky, there is a spiritual meaning of each colour; the colour as well as the musical sounds are a gateway of the soul and each colour has a certain degree of consonance. Dark blue reminded him of the cello and light blue reminded the artist the sound of the flute; he was fascinated by the expressive potential of music improvisation. Kandinsky describes imaginary scenes, stories, referring to folklore and extensively using intense colours, raw shapes, and bold contours. Sometimes he camouflages the subject to allow the colour to reach the expressive potential, in the attempt to reach spiritual renewal in art and society, and the blue rider has become a symbol (FARTHING, 2011). The logic of these concepts makes us understand that when a personal symbol generalizes, it implicitly shows that it is in consonance and resonance with its viewers, so that it is defined anthropologically. Universal archetypes could be created over time through the meaning attributed to the symbols, as these relationships are reversible, and can turn back at any time into personal symbols by retrospective attribution. There is a constant feedback between the eyes of the mind and the surrounding reality. This is a game of consonance and resonance which alarmingly deviates in opposite direction towards dissonance and lack of resonance, on several existential levels.

Kandinsky believes that the colour can express a feeling, an attitude, a need, an idea from the point of view of consonance, each of them having incommensurable meaning and internal significance. This is why the emotional resonance that children instinctively manifest in relation to colours is an important prerequisite in the development of superior aesthetic experiences and preferences. Paradoxically white is the inner sound of black, it acts upon our soul as an extended silence. As for black, the author states that is nothingness with no possibilities, no light, no future nor hope, similar to the sound of eternal silence, it is the colour most lacking in resonance (KANDINSKY, 1994).

However, Brigitte Langevin, a Canadian researcher, author of several renowned books on child psychology, associates black with nobility; as for children, in her view black has nothing to do with sadness, death or despair. Paradoxically, this colour has a calming effect. Even if they fear night-time and darkness, firm, determined contours, suggests willpower and a desire for affirmation. The sharp presence of black may suggest strength and independence. The extensive use may reflect a rebellious personality. Black allows one to hide something, perhaps one's thoughts, and concealing certain secrets. It represents the means and a form of protection, and when the child is undecided regarding what colour to choose, black is handy, matching any other colour. According to the author, adults can perceive it as a discreet colour, and for children it may be rather a means of attracting attention (LANGEVIN, 2012). We notice that some of Odobleja's aesthetic laws are found even here.

Ștefan Odobleja discusses the imitation process, typical of small children, and emphasizes that it is a complex reversibility. Actions may be passed from the adult to the child by creating psycho-reactive consonances with multiple tiers. This can be achieved by means of identification, harmonization, fusion and assimilation. Imitation may be sensorial, representative, cognitive or emotional. However, any creative act changes the mutual relationship between images and ideas, by establishing new consonances or new dissonances. The pleasure of imitating nature, of merging with it, was considered an aesthetic pleasure of beauty. One finds the physical and recreational equivalent of the aesthetic activity through playing. The game is an optimal application of the universal laws, of compensation and response, of balance (ODOBLEJA, 1982). We understand that the ludic activity, implicitly drawing and colouring, is balancing and normalizing. When children, and not only them, are concerned, play eliminates the excess of energy; it may provide counterbalance and it may be cathartic. The drawing game may be a consonant or dissonant exercise. It expresses the child's desire to create, to recreate oneself, and by colour the children express feelings more easily, and adults somehow resonate with them.

In Kandinsky's view, colours sound or resound, while black and white disturb this exterior sound. Implicitly this proximity of noncolours gives them an increased strength and improved resonance or, on the contrary, it can make them immobile, with little and almost unperceptive sonority. The language of colours expresses the deep kinship between visual arts and music, therefore borrowed concepts are not accidental. In other words, the use of consonance and resonance in Kandinsky's artistic language is almost natural, but it is surprising and atypical in Odobleja's psychology, especially since these words are rarely used in the current Romanian language.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

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Even though there is no correlation between some clinical or artistic functional criteria, there is a series of connections, coincidences and similarities between the two authors, which are not to be neglected. They both desire our spiritual abilities to be awoken and they both consider that the need for art must belong to a higher level. The need for beauty may become active after the other basic, lower-level needs are satisfied, in part or entirely. It is the only way in which an aesthetic satisfaction can be achieved, when the noetic spiritual threshold of consonance resonates, and these abilities are absolutely indispensable in the future. This paper may be considered an incentive to know them better, to (re)read these books, a simple form of humbleness and homage to the two authors. Daring to admire them is not dangerous at all, even though some misunderstood them and others even showed open hostility. Kandinsky was aware that he could be considered a theorist justifying his own artistic creation. Odobleja, even during his life, was deeply contested and wronged; he obtained a late academic recognition, post-mortem.

In the general conclusions of the "Consonantist Psychology", the concluding words emphasize that Odobleja's ideal was to consider things from all points of view, by maximum synthesis and analysis, and that his desire was to create a general plan for the twenty or thirty volumes of a comprehensive "Treatise Of Psychology".

Kandinsky hoped that the echo of his ideas would not be lost, and they would somehow take roots over time. The great artist stresses in his little book that this consonance or dissonance is not to remain void or superficial, the soul must be maintained in high tones, in harmony, regardless of any obstacles, and art may protect it from any vulgarity. In his view, there are eyes able to see what science is unable to explain nowadays, somehow seeing through themselves there are minds able to synthesize this, and some ideas have unmatched strength. Ștefan Odobleja echoes decades later with an adage: "We do not see with our eyes but with our mind, and if the mind is empty, the eyes look without seeing" (ODOBLEJA, 2020).

Consonance and resonance are two concepts which still generate epistemic ambiguities, even among specialists in various fields. These words point to the content of the texts which we refer to and bring together the two authors, in this context, almost a century later. As Kandinsky and Odobleja noticed, consonance may only be achieved by means of a specific reversible dynamic, through continuous feedback. The consonantist accord calls for resonance itself as a response. This process is carried out according to certain rules, observing specific laws in continuous interaction. Odobleja goes one step further and explains this process, interaction and feedback laws. Both of them are remarkable pioneers of knowledge. Art is part of their monumental projects; it is vital and defining for Wassily Kandinsky and not at all neglectable for Ștefan Odobleja. Figuratively, their matching ideas and opinions make them consonant, and the echo of consonance and resonance is achieved over time, across real or imaginary boundaries. We are in their future, and they are part of our past, which we bring into the present. The echo of these ideas brings us the hope that art will always revive, it will find its way once more and retrieve what it has lost.

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