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HEIDEGGER'S VAN GOGH
REFLECTIONS ON HEIDEGGER'S PHILOSOPHY OF ART*

It's certainly a question of
feet and of many other things...

- Jacques Derrida

INTRODUCTION

This essay is devoted to some aspects of Heidegger's philosophy of art as expressed in his essay "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes" (The Origin of the Work of Art), first given as a lecture in 1935 and 1936, and published in *Holzwege* in 1950.¹ Some people would say that the title of my essay is a misnomer and argue that Heidegger never formulated a philosophy of art. Others would claim that Heidegger's most profound thinking on art is contained in the later essays on poetry, especially on the poetry of Hölderlin. Whatever view one takes on the centrality of the *Holzwege* essay, it cannot be denied that "The Origin of the Work of Art" raises many important questions in the philosophy of art as well as about Heidegger's approach to art.

In the next few pages I shall discuss the character and aims of Heidegger's essay. The first part of my essay is devoted to an examination of Heidegger's interpretation of a painting by van Gogh and the critical discussion of Heidegger's use of van Gogh's painting - a debate to which Derrida devoted his essay "Restitutions de la vérité en peinture" in *La Vérité en peinture* (1978).²

* This essay is a revised and enlarged version of the paper "Description, Interpretation and Ontology: Heidegger's van Gogh and Schapiro's", read at the annual meeting of the Scandinavian Society of Aesthetics in Helsinki in May 1989. I am grateful to Dr. Deborah Cook for checking my English and for suggesting improvements.

¹I use Albert Hofstadter's English translation "The Origin of the Work of Art", published in *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger*, eds. A. Hofstadter & Richard Kuhns (New York: The Modern Library, 1964), pp. 649-701.

²English translation: "Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing (Pointure)" by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod in J. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1987), pp. 255-382.

In the second part I discuss Heidegger's elaborations of the view that art works have a world-revealing and world-disclosing nature.

"The Origin of the Work of Art" stands at a crossroad in Heidegger's thinking and marks a change of direction. Whereas the question of Being in *Sein und Zeit* was approached from the horizon of "Dasein" or being-in-the-world (the mode of existence of human beings), in the later Heidegger Being takes precedence over everything else. One could perhaps say that Heidegger's later thinking is an attempt to gain direct access to Being, which is now invested with almost mystical powers.³ As one commentator puts it, Heidegger's thinking is "intrinsically poetizing in its docile response to the language of Being".⁴ In "The Origin of the Work of Art", however, the concept of being, if it can be said to be a concept for Heidegger, does not play a very important role. Notions like truth, the world and the earth dominate his discourse in the essay on the work of art.

There has been considerable controversy among Heidegger scholars about the nature and purpose of "The Origin of the Work of Art". Otto Pöggeler, for example, denies that Heidegger's essay expresses a full-blown philosophy of art and does not think very highly of it.⁵ According to him it expresses a romantic view of art, later abandoned. Hans-Georg Gadamer, on

³The philosophy of being does not enjoy a great popularity in 20th century philosophy and Heidegger has been severely criticized for his use of the concepts of Being and Nothing. Rudolf Carnap subjected Heidegger's inaugural lecture "Was ist Metaphysik" (1929) to a devastating criticism in "Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache" (1932) and objected in particular that Heidegger treats "nothing" as a name for something, which inevitably leads to absurdity. Carnap's strictures have been repeated by many empiricist and positivist philosophers (Cf. W.V.O. Quine, *Word and Object*, Cambridge, Mass.:M.I.T. Press, 1960, p. 133 and A.Ayer, *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, London:Unwin Paperbacks, 1984, pp. 228-9). The trouble with this kind of strongly polemical criticism is that Heidegger's statements are taken out of context and given the "worst" possible interpretation. It is not difficult to make many statements made by analytical philosophers look ridiculous when taken out of context. Nevertheless, Heidegger's philosophy of Being presents logical and conceptual difficulties. His assertion that Nothing (*das Nichts*) is the ground of negation and his contention that the power of reason and logic is defeated when we probe the question of Being and Nothing is indeed difficult to accept, (See Heidegger's "Was ist Metaphysik", 9th ed., Frankfurt/Main:Klostermann, 1965, pp. 36-7). For a thorough and interesting criticism of Heidegger's philosophy of being, see E.Tugendhat's essays, "Die sprachanalytische Kritik der Ontologie", in *Das Problem der Sprache*, VIII Deutscher Kongress für Philosophie, ed. H.-G. Gadamer (München:Fink, 1967), pp. 483-493 and "Das Sein und das Nichts", in *Durchblicke:Martin Heidegger zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Vittorio Klostermann, (Frankfurt/Main:Klostermann, 1970), pp. 132-160. A sympathetic account of Heidegger's aims and "methods" is given by Richard Rorty in "Overcoming the Tradition:Heidegger and Dewey", in R. Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism:Essays 1972-80* (Brighton:Harvester, 1982), pp. 37-59 and in the essay "Self-Creation and Affiliation:Proust, Nietzsche, and Heidegger", in R.Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge:Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 96-121.

⁴Joseph Kockelmans, *Heidegger on Art and Art Works*, Phaenomenologica 99 (Dordrecht:Nijhoff, 1985), p. 77.

⁵Otto Pöggeler, *Der Denkweg Martin Heideggers* (Pfullingen:Neske, 1963), pp. 207-215.

the other hand, regards Heidegger's essay as an original and substantial contribution to the philosophy of art; he calls it "a philosophical sensation".⁶ The most ambitious study of Heidegger's essay is no doubt Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann's lengthy exposition, *Heideggers Philosophie der Kunst* (1980) in which he argues, cogently to my mind, that Heidegger's aim was to formulate a general philosophy of art.⁷

It is perhaps worth mentioning that Heidegger makes a sharp distinction between the philosophy of art or the philosophical study of art on the one hand and aesthetics on the other, objecting strongly to the subjectivist notions that in his view inform aesthetics. It would therefore be misleading to speak of Heidegger's aesthetics although the terms "philosophy of art" and "aesthetics" are often used interchangeably.⁸ Heidegger complains that "aesthetics" takes the work of art as an object and indeed as the object of "aisthesis" and that aesthetic experience "is the element in which art dies".⁹

I agree with von Herrmann's view of the *character* of "The Origin of the Work of Art". This does not however imply that I agree with his *evaluation* of Heidegger's work. Everything that follows presupposes that "The Origin of the Work of Art" is a treatise on the nature and ontology of art in general. Heidegger's aims are, according to von Herrmann, the following: (1) To determine the essence of the work of art, (2) To determine the essence of the beautiful in art, (3) To determine the essence of artistic creativity, (4) To determine the essence of the apprehension (not experience) of art, (5) To determine the essence of art as such.¹⁰

The first and the fifth task may seem to be identical, but Heidegger clearly thinks they are not: "What the work is we can only come to know from the essence of art."¹¹ The essence of art and the essence of the work of art is therefore different.

The following sections are devoted to an outline of and a commen-

⁶Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Die Wahrheit des Kunstwerkes", in H-G.Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke*. Bd. 3: *Neuere Philosophie I, Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1987), p. 252. This essay was published as an introduction to the 1960 edition of Heidegger's "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes" by Reclam.

⁷Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, *Heideggers Philosophie der Kunst: Eine systematische Interpretation der Holzwege-Abhandlung "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes"* (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 1980).

⁸Evidence of the interchangeable use of these terms can be found in many recent works. Cf. the title of Ann Sheppard's introductory work, *Aesthetics: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987) and the first lines of Gene Blocker's *Philosophy of Art* (New York: Scribner's & Sons, 1979) which read "this is an introductory book on aesthetics, or the philosophy of art" (p. 1).

⁹Heidegger, p. 699.

¹⁰v.Herrmann, XIII.

¹¹Heidegger, p. 650.

tary on what I take to be the most important theses about art in Heidegger's essay.

THINGS, WORKS AND THE NATURE OF EQUIPMENT

Works of art have a thingly character, that is, they are things in the way coal or logs in the cellar are things. However, "the art-work is" Heidegger says, "something else over and above the thingly element. This something else pertaining to the work constitutes its artistic nature".¹² In order to get a clear view of the thingly character of the work of art, Heidegger draws a distinction - which already plays an important role in *Sein und Zeit* - between mere things or objects and useful things, called "equipment" (*Zeug*). Heidegger rejects what he believes to be the major interpretations of "the thingness of the thing" in our philosophical tradition. A thing has been regarded as a substance possessing accidental qualities, as the unity of a sensuous manifold or as formed matter. All these interpretations of the thingness of the thing do not elucidate the nature of the thing, Heidegger claims.

To the view that "the thing is the bearer of its characteristics", Heidegger objects that it is too general: "[T]his thing-concept [...] holds not only of the mere thing in its strict sense, but also of any entity whatsoever". Therefore it fails to differentiate "thingly entities from non-thingly entities".¹³ This philosophical conception of the thing as substance, stemming from Aristotle, has become "the ordinary thing-concept [which] always fits each thing", Heidegger says.¹⁴ Such a conception is altogether too general and, like all other traditional conceptions, an encroachment or an attack (*Überfall*) on the thing.¹⁵

With regard to the view that things are to be interpreted as collections of sensations, as they are in various forms of phenomenalism, Heidegger objects that "[m]uch closer to us than all sensations are the things themselves" and he continues: "We hear the door shut in the house and never hear acoustical sensations or even mere sounds. In order to hear a bare sound we have to listen-away from things, divert our ear from them, i.e. listen

¹²Heidegger, p. 651.

¹³Heidegger, p. 655.

¹⁴Heidegger, p. 656.

¹⁵Heidegger speaks of the traditional interpretations or explications (*Auslegung*) of the thing as "Überfall", which could be rendered by "attack" instead of "encroachment"; occasionally he speaks of "Übergriff" which is closer to "encroachment" (M. Heidegger, "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes", in M. Heidegger, *Holzwege*, 4e Aufl., Frankfurt/Main:Klostermann, 1963, p. 14 & p. 19 "Überfall", p. 21 "Übergriff").

abstractly".¹⁶ The abstract and reductionist conception of the thing hinders a proper understanding of the relationship between a thing and a work of art. The interpretation of a thing as formed matter, however, is, according to Heidegger, of some help here. Things are, according to this view, formed matter. This concept "applies equally to things of nature and things of use", Heidegger says.¹⁷ This conception also enables us to answer "the question concerning the thingly element in the work of art", this element being "the matter of which it consists".¹⁸ The artist exercises his skills on the material substrate of the thing, it is "the field for the artist's formative action".¹⁹ The conceptual opposition matter-form is furthermore "*the conceptual schema used in the greatest variety of ways for all art theory and aesthetics*", Heidegger remarks.²⁰ That, of course, is no reason for accepting the distinction between matter and form as final or as well grounded. Heidegger believes that this distinction is not "adequately founded nor that it belongs originally to the domain of art and the art-work".²¹ Nevertheless Heidegger thinks that "matter and form have their proper place in the essence of equipment"²² and in this respect equipment (*Zeug*) resembles works of art:

A piece of equipment, for instance, footgear, also rests in itself as finished like a mere thing, but it does not have the character of having taken shape by itself like the block of granite. On the other hand, equipment displays an affinity with a work of art insofar as it is something produced by the human hand. However, by its self-sufficient presence the work of art is similar rather to the mere thing which has taken shape by itself without being constrained to serve a purpose.²³

Although the interpretation of the thingness of a thing in terms of matter and form is more fruitful than the other traditional interpretations it still represents an "encroachment upon the thing-being of the thing", Heidegger claims.²⁴ What is needed for the clarification of the nature of equipment and the elucidation of the similarities between equipment and works of art is a description of some

¹⁶Heidegger, p. 656.

¹⁷Heidegger, p. 656.

¹⁸Heidegger, p. 657.

¹⁹ibid.

²⁰ibid.

²¹ibid.

²²Heidegger, p. 658.

²³Heidegger, p. 659.

²⁴Heidegger, p. 660.

equipment "without any philosophical theory".²⁵

Heidegger chooses a pair of shoes as an example of equipment. Shoes are familiar to everybody and we know their function. The matter and form of shoes will vary, Heidegger observes, according to the specific uses for which they were made. All kinds of shoes share a fundamental characteristic, which indeed is common to all kinds of equipment, namely serviceability (*Dienlichkeit*). A piece of equipment like shoes is "more genuinely" what it is when it fulfills its function in use, the less it is noticed as an object: "It is in this process of the use of equipment that we must actually encounter the character of equipment".²⁶

A pair of peasant shoes is an example of a piece of equipment and in order to describe the nature of equipment in general - by means of a description of this particular type of equipment - Heidegger uses a "pictorial representation" in order to "facilitate the visual realization of them [a pair of peasant shoes]".²⁷ The representation of a pair of peasant shoes which Heidegger chooses is a painting by van Gogh, who "painted such shoes several times", as Heidegger points out.²⁸ In the painting the shoes stand isolated, there is no pictorial context that might hint at their employment, he notes. Van Gogh's painting shows us a pair of peasant shoes out of context, or as Heidegger puts it "[a] pair of peasant shoes and nothing more".²⁹ To the last sentence Heidegger adds "and yet" and then follows the paragraph Derrida sees as a symptom of Heidegger's "pathetic-fantasmatic-ideological-political investments", a paragraph he moreover finds "ridiculous and lamentable".³⁰

The pair of peasant shoes shows the world of the peasant woman: "From the dark openings of the worn insides of the shoes the toiling tread of the worker stands forth" he writes, and he makes the remarkable claim that "[t]his equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety about the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the advent of birth and shivering at the surrounding menace of death".³¹

²⁵Heidegger, p. 662.

²⁶ibid.

²⁷ibid.

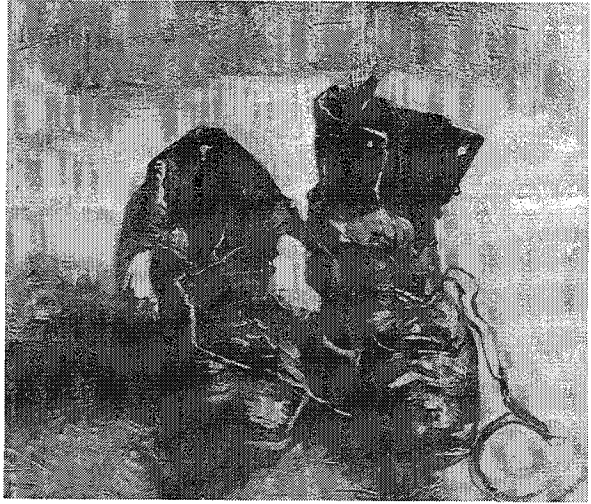
²⁸ibid.

²⁹Heidegger, p. 663.

³⁰J. Derrida, "Restitution of the Truth of Pointing (Pointure)", p. 312; p. 292.

³¹The whole passage reads as follows: "From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toiling tread of the worker stands forth. In the stiff solid heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field, swept by a raw wind. On the leather there lies the dampness and saturation of the soil. Under the soles there slides the loneliness of the field-path as the evening declines. In the shoes there vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening corn and its enigmatic self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety about the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the advent of birth and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the

The essence of equipment, reliability (*Verlässlichkeit*), on which serviceability (*Dienlichkeit*) rests, is revealed through van Gogh's painting. The function of a piece of equipment and its embeddedness in a world to which it points is shown in van Gogh's work: "By virtue of this reliability the peasant woman is admitted into the silent call of the earth; by virtue of the reliability of the equipment she is certain of her world".³²



A Pair of Shoes 1886, (Hulsker 1124)

Heidegger's description or analysis, if that is what it is, of van Gogh's painting culminates in some starting propositions about the function of the painting in question and of art in general. The essence of equipment is revealed, not through an analysis of any particular piece of equipment, but "by bringing ourselves before van Gogh's painting". Heidegger explicitly rejects the suggestion that "our [i.e. his] description" as a "subjective action, first imagined everything thus and then projected it into the painting", on the contrary, the art work "told us what shoes are in truth".³³ In van Gogh's painting the nature of a pair of peasant shoes is revealed and Heidegger says without qualifications that all works of art reveal the truth or truths: "In the work of art the truth of what is has set itself to work" and in the next paragraph he writes: "The essence of art would consequently be this: the setting-itself-into-work of the truth of what is".³⁴ It is clear that Heidegger thinks that a putative work of art is a work of art only in so far as "truth is set to work" in it and that this applies to all works of art regardless of the genre or art form it happens to belong to.

Heidegger's analysis of van Gogh's painting has been criticized by the art historian and van Gogh specialist Meyer Schapiro in a short essay "The Still Life as a Personal Object - A Note on Heidegger and van Gogh" (1968).³⁵

earth and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-in-itself." (Heidegger, p. 663).

³²Heidegger, p. 663.

³³Heidegger, p. 664.

³⁴Heidegger, p. 665.

³⁵Meyer Schapiro, "The Still Life as a Personal Object - A Note on Heidegger and van Gogh", in *The Reach of Mind: Essays in Memory of Kurt Goldstein*, ed. Marianne L. Simmel (New York: Springer, 1968), pp. 203-9.

And Schapiro's remarks have been subjected to extensive criticisms by Derrida in "Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing /pointure/". This debate on the role of van Gogh's painting in Heidegger's philosophy of art is interesting for many reasons. One intriguing aspect is the lack of "proportion". Although Heidegger devotes a mere 5 pages to van Gogh's painting and Schapiro's essay is only 6 pages long, Derrida's essay is very long, not to say perversely long - 125 pages. I will first summarize Schapiro's criticisms and then discuss some of the main points in Derrida's essay.

Schapiro notes that it is not easy to compare Heidegger's description and analysis of van Gogh's painting with the original painting since Heidegger does not explicitly identify the picture he has in mind and there are no less than seven different paintings by van Gogh representing shoes.³⁶ In response to a letter from Schapiro Heidegger replied that the pair of shoes to which he referred in his essay "is one that he saw in a show at Amsterdam in March 1930".³⁷ This painting can according to Schapiro be identified as la Faille's no 255.³⁸

It is remarkable that Heidegger does not explicitly identify the picture he refers to, especially since he chooses the painting in order "to facilitate the visual realization [of a pair of shoes]".³⁹ Heidegger's failure to identify the picture about which he writes explains the curious fact that different writers on Heidegger's philosophy of art reproduce different paintings by van Gogh in order to illustrate Heidegger's reflections on the painting.⁴⁰ It could be argued that Heidegger's failure to identify the picture he describes is of no relevance when judging the adequacy of his general views on art. His description and analysis of the van Gogh painting cannot, however, be regarded as a "Werkanalyse" for this reason.⁴¹

Schapiro is sure he has identified the picture to which Heidegger refers, but he also considers another possible candidate. He claims that none of van Gogh's pictures representing shoes "expresses the being or essence of a peasant woman's shoes and her relation to nature and work" and he concludes

³⁶The paintings are number 1124, 1233, 1234, 1235, 1236, 1364 and 1569 in Jan Hulsker's classification and reproduction (*The Complete Van Gogh: Paintings, Drawings, Sketches*, Oxford: Phaidon, 1980). No 1124 corresponds to F 255 in de la Faille's edition (J.-B. de la Faille, *L'oeuvre de Vincent van Gogh: Catalogue raisonné*, 4 vols. Paris: G. van Oest, 1928).

³⁷Quoted from Schapiro, p. 205.

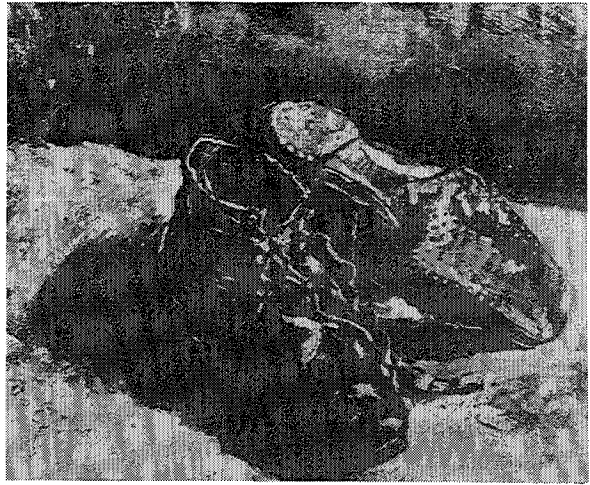
³⁸ibid.

³⁹Heidegger, p. 662.

⁴⁰Usually number 1124 in Hulsker is reproduced, but occasionally 1234 is used as an illustration. Biemel, for example, reproduces the latter, which can only with great difficulty be seen as representing a pair of peasant shoes (See Walter Biemel, *Martin Heidegger in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1973 p. 81).

⁴¹"Werkanalyse" is the technical or semi-technical term in German for "interpretation of an art work". Biemel speaks of a "Werkanalyse" (Biemel, p. 82), but surely it is a strange analysis when the art work being analysed is not explicitly identified.

that "[t]hey are the shoes of the artist, by that time a man of the town and city".⁴² This interpretation of Heidegger's views is questionable. One could argue that Heidegger's view is that even if the painting represented a pair of peasant shoes, it is not primarily their nature that is revealed in the painting, but the nature of equipment in general.



A Pair of Shoes, One Shoe Upside Down, 1887 (Huisker 1233)

If the painting is to reveal "the whole of the earth and world of the peasant woman",⁴³ as Albert Hofstadter puts it, the shoes would have to be the shoes of a peasant woman, I submit. But even if we agree with Schapiro that the shoes in the painting cannot be interpreted as a pair of peasant shoes and that therefore everything Heidegger says about this specific painting is wrong, works of art could nevertheless fulfil all the functions Heidegger ascribes to them. In other words, works of art could still be "the setting-itself-into-work of the truth of what is" and "set up a world". The world that is "set up" and revealed in van Gogh's painting could be, for example, the world of a town dweller.

I think Schapiro is obviously right when he charges Heidegger with misidentifying the shoes in van Gogh's painting as the shoes of a peasant woman. Even Derrida, who is very critical of Schapiro's paper, agrees with him in this respect. There is no reason whatsoever to interpret the shoes in van Gogh's painting as the shoes of a peasant, let alone as the shoes of a peasant *woman* since nothing in the painting indicates anything about the occupation of the owner of the shoes. In fact there are no indications of any "owner" at all, there are just the shoes. Yet, the overwhelming majority of commentators have

⁴²Schapiro, p. 205.

⁴³Hofstadter's introduction to "The Origin of the Work of Art", p. 648.

without the slightest hesitation accepted Heidegger's attribution of the shoes to a peasant woman.⁴⁴

Schapiro accuses Heidegger, not only of misdescribing "the owner" of the shoes in van Gogh's painting, but also of describing the shoes fancifully, of projecting "a moving set of associations with peasants and the soil" into the picture as a result of "his own social outlook with its heavy pathos of the primordial and earthy".⁴⁵ Heidegger has further, according to Schapiro, "missed [...] the artist's presence in the work".⁴⁶ As we have seen he thinks that the shoes are van Gogh's own, but in what way could the artist be present in the work? Schapiro says that van Gogh "makes of them a piece from a self-portrait",⁴⁷ a statement that induced Derrida to speak ironically of "a portrait of the artist as an old thing [italics omitted]".⁴⁸ The meaning of van Gogh's painting (Hulsker 1124) is, according to Schapiro, autobiographical in a wide sense. The shoes in the painting mark "our inescapable position on the earth", Schapiro concludes.⁴⁹ I shall not dwell on the merits and demerits of an autobiographical and "existential" interpretation of van Gogh's shoes, which has struck many art critics and historians as natural,⁵⁰ but move on to Derrida's views on Heidegger, Schapiro and van Gogh's shoes.

Derrida's text is elusive and inconclusive and, although I believe his main contentions could be summarized in a few pages, there is no point in doing that. Any summary would probably be an encroachment, to use one of Heidegger's favourite words in "The Origin of the Work of Art", and in any case much of the subtlety and force of his writing would be lost. Instead I will comment on two dominant themes in Derrida's text, the attribution of the shoes to a peasant and to "a man of the town and city" respectively, and the role of van Gogh's painting in Heidegger's essay.

Heidegger identifies the shoes in van Gogh's unidentified painting as the shoes of a peasant and Schapiro identifies them in the identified painting as the shoes of van Gogh himself, "a man of the town and city". According to

⁴⁴Gadamer speaks of "Bauernschuhe" (Gadamer p. 256), and so does Biemel (Biemel, p. 81). Kaelin speaks of "a pair of peasant's work shoes" (E.F. Kaelin, "Notes toward an Understanding of Heidegger's Aesthetics", in *Phenomenology and Existentialism*, eds. Edward N. Lee & Maurice Mandelbaum, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967, p. 78), William Richardson of "a pair of farm-shoes" (William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, *Phaenomenologica* 13, 2nd. ed., The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967, p. 404), Kockelmans of "a pair of farmer's shoes" (Kockelmans, p. 125) and Michael James of "a pair of peasant shoes" (M. James, *Reflections and Elaborations upon Kantian Aesthetics*, diss., *Aesthetica Upsaliensia* 3, Uppsala: Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1987, p. 78).

⁴⁵Schapiro, p. 206

⁴⁶ibid.

⁴⁷Schapiro, p. 207.

⁴⁸Derrida, p. 370.

⁴⁹Schapiro, p. 207.

⁵⁰Referring to Hulsker 1124 Frank Elgar writes that "[t]hey reveal the plight of the man who wore them out so utterly and, through his adversity, the toil and fatigue of the whole world" (F. Elgar, *Van Gogh: A Study of His Life and Work*, New York: Praeger, 1958, p. 44).

Derrida, both Heidegger and Schapiro are guilty of a naive and precritical attribution of the shoes in the painting to a particular bearer. Schapiro's hasty attribution of the painted shoes to van Gogh himself is "entirely symmetrical or complementary" with Heidegger's naiveté, Derrida says.⁵¹ Derrida even suggests, perhaps playfully, that the shoes in van Gogh's



Three Pairs of Shoes, One Shoe Upside Down, 1887 (Hulsker 1234)

painting might not even be a pair, but two left or two right shoes. The painted shoes are in fact so shapeless that it is not impossible to see them as belonging to different pairs of shoes. Derrida voices the suspicion that both Heidegger and Schapiro hasten "to make them into a pair in order to reassure themselves".⁵² Furthermore, Heidegger and Schapiro had no hesitation about the "pairedness of these two shoes" because they might have been anxious to "exclude the question of a certain uselessness, or of a so-called perverse usage".⁵³ The possibility that the shoes might have a slightly uncouth or diabolic nature is excluded by the identification of them as a pair, he claims.

It is obvious, I think, that the shoes in van Gogh's painting cannot be the shoes of a peasant or the shoes of van Gogh himself unless they form a pair. The identification of the shoes as a pair is a presupposition for the identification of the shoes as "belonging" to somebody. In all probability, the left and the right shoe in a real pair of peasant's and worker's shoes looked identical at the time van Gogh made his paintings of shoes (the 1880's).⁵⁴ They could of course still be members of different pairs of shoes belonging to a peasant woman or to van Gogh, assuming they possessed more than one pair of shoes. But in that case the shoes would hardly "mark our inescapable position on the earth" as Schapiro claims, nor would they show "the toilsome tread of the worker", as Heidegger says. Since van Gogh was not a surrealist, it is not farfetched to assume that the shoes are a pair, peasant or non-peasant.

According to Derrida there is no justification for the identifications made by Schapiro and Heidegger. The unjustified desire for attribution is common to both. "[T]he desire for attribution", Derrida says, "is a desire for

⁵¹Derrida, p. 287.

⁵²Derrida, p. 265.

⁵³Derrida, p. 333.

⁵⁴I owe this information to prof. Sven Sandström who made this point in discussion.

appropriation", something he regards as an "axiom".⁵⁵ This desire presumably leads to unjustifiable and "encroaching" interpretations falsifying the meaning or lack of meaning of a work of art. When Derrida speaks of "identification" and "appropriation", he trades on the metaphorical meanings of expressions like "property" and "possession of qualities" - expressions with a rich history in philosophical thinking. In view of Heidegger's questioning and repudiation of the central categories of Western metaphysics, Derrida finds it surprising, not to say disappointing, that Heidegger should have succumbed so easily to the temptation of "identification" and "appropriation". Derrida speaks here of "the consumerlike hurry toward the content of a representation", of "the massive self-assurance of the identification".⁵⁶

The desire for "identification" and "appropriation" is less surprising in Schapiro, because Schapiro's "attribution remains in the aesthetics of representation [...] of the most empiricist kind".⁵⁷ Furthermore Schapiro's characterization of van Gogh's painting rests, according to Derrida, on three connected but distinct dogmas. In the first place Schapiro thinks that "[p]ainted shoes can belong really and really be restituted to a real, identifiable, and nameable subject", secondly Schapiro believes that "[s]hoes are shoes, be they painted or 'real', solely and simply shoes which are what they are, adequate to themselves and in the first place fittable onto feet" and thirdly Schapiro believes that "[f]leet (painted, ghostly or real) belong to a body proper. They are not detachable from it".⁵⁸

This, I think, goes too far. It is true that Schapiro, referring to the painted shoes in van Gogh's painting says that they "are evidently his own",⁵⁹ but this certainly does not imply that he believes that "they are fittable onto feet". Schapiro realizes after all that the shoes in question were painted shoes. What Schapiro presumably wants to say is that van Gogh painted his own shoes, that they served as a model for the painting, and I cannot see why this claim should be so outrageous. What is problematic is Schapiro's belief that van Gogh in fact used his own shoes as the model for his painting not that it could have been the case that he did. The statement that he did so is surely intelligible, if mistaken.

Derrida also finds fault with Schapiro's criticisms of Heidegger's "intention" (Derrida writes the word within quotation marks) and argues that Schapiro mistakenly thinks that Heidegger is referring to the shoes in the painting when he in fact is analyzing equipment as such: "[I]t is not as *peasant shoes*, but as *product (Zeug)* or as *shoes-as-product* that the being-product

⁵⁵Derrida, p. 260.

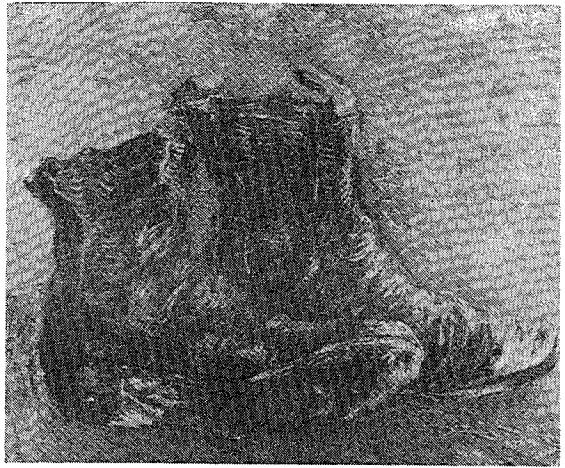
⁵⁶Derrida, p. 292; p. 293.

⁵⁷Derrida, p. 318.

⁵⁸Derrida, pp. 313-4.

⁵⁹Schapiro, p. 205.

manifested itself".⁶⁰ Heidegger is not describing a particular painting, he is not interested in "interrogating its singularity as an art critic would do", Derrida says.⁶¹ Schapiro is therefore "mistaken about the primary function of the pictorial reference".⁶² This is so because the painted shoes in the painting serve only as an example of a piece of equipment, Derrida argues. The "truth" and nature of



A Pair of Shoes, 1887 (Hulsker 1235)

equipment as such could have been presented "by any shoe painting, or even by any experience of shoes and even of any 'product' in general".⁶³ A similar criticism against Schapiro can be found in Kockelmans' book on Heidegger's philosophy of art. But in contrast to Derrida he accepts Heidegger's identification of the painted shoes as the shoes of a peasant.⁶⁴

To return to Derrida's "defense" of Heidegger. It might be thought that "defense" is altogether too strong a word here since Derrida says at the end of his essay that "[n]obody's being accused, or above all condemned, or even suspected".⁶⁵ However, even if Derrida's use of words and phrases like "naiveté", "massive self-assurance", "dogmas" and even "barbaric" procedures - when discussing Schapiro - does not amount to a criminal charge, it certainly does not imply praise, so I will continue to speak of "defence".

As we have seen, Heidegger does not, according to Derrida, describe a particular picture by van Gogh. Derrida's contention rests on a close reading of Heidegger's text. Before expressing my doubts about the correctness of Derrida's "defence" of Heidegger, I would like to mention a different kind of argument employed by Derrida in favour of Heidegger. Derrida asserts that Heidegger "does not claim in all rigor to refer to a picture in general, or to some particular picture" and he continues, "whatever this reference is, it's not essential to what he's saying".⁶⁶ And now comes an argument claiming to show that questions of reference are in general irrelevant when discussing

⁶⁰Derrida, p. 295

⁶¹Derrida, p. 309.

⁶²Derrida, p. 312.

⁶³ibid.

⁶⁴Kockelmans, pp. 127-131.

⁶⁵Derrida, p. 371.

⁶⁶Derrida, p. 322.

Heidegger's use of the van Gogh painting. The notions of reference and referent, Derrida asserts, belong to theories "dominated [...] by the matter-form couple",⁶⁷ which is itself put into question by Heidegger. For this reason and also because Heidegger is "interested here in the truth of truth, which is an indispensable condition for knowing what reference means",⁶⁸ it is presumably irrelevant to raise questions about the reference of Heidegger's discourse on van Gogh or the reference of van Gogh's painting itself.

By this reasoning Schapiro's demand for the specific reference of the painting is shown to be irrelevant, Derrida thinks. Derrida's reasoning is disingenuous, for why should we have to know what reference is before being able to refer to something in all "rigor". I for one do not know "the truth of truth", but I am certain I have been referring to texts by Heidegger, Derrida and Schapiro in my essay. Perhaps in a way which is less than rigorous? And secondly, can any mistaken reference be brushed aside as inconsequential by arguing that we don't know anyway what "reference" means? Derrida's argument is disingenuous also for a different reason. For when introducing the painting that is supposed to "facilitate the visual realization of them [a pair of peasant shoes]", Heidegger explicitly speaks of "a well-known painting by van Gogh".⁶⁹ Not to interpret the quoted phrase as referring to a particular painting renders Heidegger's whole discourse on van Gogh unintelligible. A somewhat similar argument in favour of Heidegger is advanced by Kockelmans, who says that Schapiro's objections to Heidegger's interpretation presuppose "a perspective that Heidegger precisely is in the process of overcoming".⁷⁰ This is like saying that the identification of something as a pair of peasant shoes cannot properly be questioned by someone who does not share Heidegger's philosophical presuppositions. Needless to say, Derrida does not accept Heidegger's identification of the painted shoes as representing the shoes of a peasant woman, so this consideration applies only to Kockelmans' "defence" of Heidegger.

If Derrida's and Kockelmans' contention that Heidegger neither describes nor refers to an actual painting by van Gogh is correct, then the role of the painting mentioned by Heidegger becomes altogether mysterious. Derrida is aware of this difficulty and Kockelmans also seems to sense a difficulty. Both qualify their statement that Heidegger is not describing and referring to a particular painting. In one place Derrida qualifies his assertion that "Heidegger was not trying to describe a picture" by the surprising admission, "[a]t least not simply",⁷¹ and Kockelmans, after saying that "Heidegger cannot possibly have tried to describe the painting which Schapiro

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

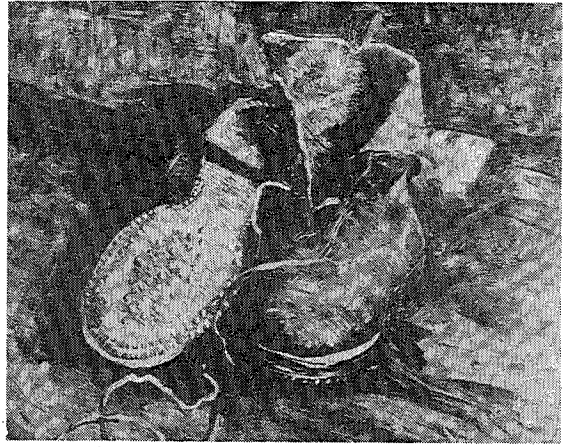
⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Heidegger, p. 662.

⁷⁰ Kockelmans, p. 129.

⁷¹ Derrida, p. 321.

has so skilfully identified", adds, "if the expression 'to describe' is taken in its literal sense".⁷² So Heidegger was perhaps after all describing the painting identified by Schapiro, but "not simply" and not "literally". One wonders what "describing" means here. The function of these qualifying statements in Derrida's and Kockelmans' discourses seems to me, however, to be clear, namely to "save the text".



A Pair of Shoes, One Shoe Upside Down, 1887 (Hulsker 1236)

Heidegger introduced van Gogh's painting as a visual aid for interpreting the nature of equipment. The nature of equipment, Heidegger claims, was found, not "by the description and explanation of a pair of shoes actually present", nor by an analysis of "the process of making shoes", but "by bringing ourselves before van Gogh's painting".⁷³ One might find it a little difficult to reconcile this statement with Heidegger's assertions a few paragraphs earlier that we encounter the character of equipment "in [the] process of the use".⁷⁴ If the nature of equipment is revealed in using it, we may well ask why a work of art is necessary for revealing the nature of equipment. The difference may be one of implicit and explicit showing and understanding, because Heidegger also says that "the equipmental being of equipment first arrives at its explicit appearance through and only in the work".⁷⁵

Presumably not all pictorial works of art are capable of revealing the nature of equipment, but van Gogh's painting certainly does so in Heidegger's view: "Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, is in truth. This entity emerges into the unconcealment of its being."⁷⁶ Since a work of art also "sets up a world" it is natural to relate this assertion to Heidegger's description of the function of the peasant shoes in the world of the peasant in the passage Derrida found so ludicrous and pathetic. In other words, the painting of the peasant shoes shows the nature of this piece of equipment and in doing that it also reveals the world of the peasant. Derrida, however, emphatically denies the propriety of an interpretation along these lines. He says that Heidegger's claim is that van Gogh's painting reveals

⁷²Kockelmans, p. 129.

⁷³Heidegger, p. 664.

⁷⁴Heidegger, p. 662.

⁷⁵Heidegger, p. 664.

⁷⁶ibid.

the nature of equipment in general and that he says nothing about the nature of the peasant shoes. He supports this extraordinary interpretation by appealing to the syntax of the sentence, which "clearly marks the place of the subject".⁷⁷ He is of course not speaking about the grammatical subject of the sentence, but about the theme, or about that of which the truth is revealed in the painting. For he says, "[i]t is a matter of the truth of the product and not of the example, i.e., some particular pair of shoes squeezed into their determination as peasants' shoes".⁷⁸ This argument is quite unconvincing. In the first place, if the "subject" of the assertion is "the product" or "equipment" in general, why does Heidegger speak of peasant shoes at all? In the second place Derrida contrasts a particular pair of shoes with equipment or products in general, whereas Heidegger refers not to a particular pair of shoes but to a kind of shoes, a species of shoes in the sentence analysed by Derrida.

In a passage, which like so many others in Derrida's analysis is rather elusive, he notes that Heidegger "couldn't have said the same thing just as easily [...] with other shoes, those of Van Eyck, Miró, Magritte, or Adami".⁷⁹ This is of course true, but doesn't it prove that Heidegger needed a pair of peasant shoes in order to say what he did say about the world of the peasant woman and claiming that her world is revealed through the work of art? And for a painting to reveal the truth about something, in this case about "the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes", the painting would have to represent, suggest or refer in some manner to a pair of peasant shoes. Since a work of art "sets up a world" according to Heidegger, and "a pair of peasant shoes, comes to stand in the work in the light of its being",⁸⁰ the conclusion that it is Heidegger's view that van Gogh's work reveals the world of a peasant is inescapable. This is also the interpretation advanced by von Herrmann and by Gadamer, who says that the whole world of peasant existence is in these shoes.⁸¹

I think von Herrmann's and Gadamer's interpretations are correct as regards Heidegger's views on van Gogh's painting although I don't agree with their view that Heidegger's interpretation of the shoes is correct. Derrida, on the other hand, seems to me to give an implausible account of the shoes and he evades the fundamental questions about Heidegger's use of van Gogh's painting. Derrida is certainly right in criticizing Schapiro for his unsophisticated biographical interpretation of van Gogh's painting and although Derrida's "defence" of Heidegger is very sophisticated, it is also sophistical, superficially and fundamentally.

⁷⁷Derrida, p. 325.

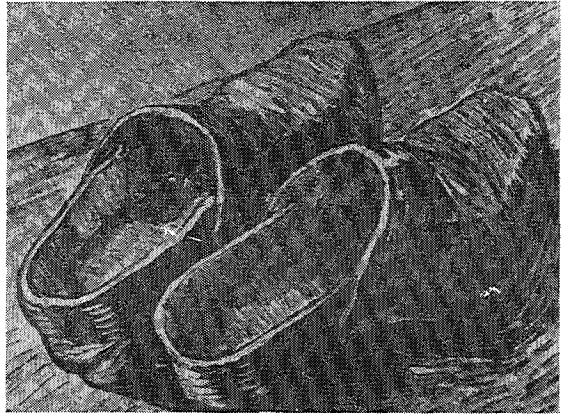
⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹Derrida, p. 368.

⁸⁰Heidegger, p. 665.

⁸¹v.Herrmann, p. 129; Gadamer, p. 256.

Derrida's discussion raises many issues, I cannot comment on here. In particular, his pages on subjectivity and the metaphysics of presence and their different roles in Heidegger's and Schapiro's interpretations of van Gogh are engaging and provocative. But that's another pair of shoes.



A pair of Leather Cogs, 1888 (Hulsker 1264)

TRUTH, WORK AND WORLD

In order to answer the question how truth comes to happen in a work of art, Heidegger again chooses an example. He intentionally chooses an example that, in contrast to the previous one, is not representational. A Greek temple does not represent anything, it has no possible mimetic functions, at least not in the same sense that a painting of shoes can represent shoes. The temple opens up and reveals a world simply by being what it is. Heidegger gives the following description:

The building encloses the figure of the god and, in this concealment, it lets it stand out in the holy precinct through the open portico. It is by means of the temple that the god is present in the temple. This presence of the god is in itself the diffusion and delimitation of the precinct as a holy one.

[—]

It is the temple-work that first fits together and at the same time assembles around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline take on for the human being the shape of his destiny.⁸²

Granted Heidegger's description is adequate and "revealing", how does truth come into the picture? It would of course be quite senseless to try to answer this question in terms of propositional truth. Nothing is being asserted by the work of art. Heidegger's view is rather that the work, in this case an architectural work of art, "defines" a space - we might say a cultural space - in which human beings live. The work of art defines reality and gives meaning to our pursuits as long as the work is preserved, and has not become solely an object of aesthetic contemplation: "The temple, in its standing-there, first gives to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves. This view remains

⁸²Heidegger, p. 669.

open as long as the work is a work, as long as the god has not fled from it".⁸³ Since the work discloses a world the work and the world are interdependent.

What Heidegger says about the Greek temple and its world-revealing mission is reminiscent of Susanne K. Langer's theory of significance in architecture. In *Feeling and Form* (1953) she asserts that "[t]he architect creates [...] a physically present human environment that expresses the characteristic rhythmic functional patterns which constitute a culture".⁸⁴ Furthermore, a temple defines "a religious space" she maintains, and some buildings define an "ethnic domain".⁸⁵ Nevertheless the similarities between Heidegger's and Langer's views on art are not very profound. A major difference is that Langer does not claim that all works of art have a world-disclosing function. Only some works of architecture define cultural spaces in the manner described. But let's return to Heidegger.

Heidegger illustrates the thesis that "to be a work means to set up a world" by introducing the Greek temple. The thesis and the example pose a fundamental problem, "the problem of generality" we may call it. As far as I can see, the thesis about the world-disclosing function of a work of art is quite general and categoric. It is assumed to apply to all works of art, regardless of genre, style and content. As far as I am aware none of Heidegger's followers or commentators have suggested that this thesis is meant to have a limited application, that it applies, for example, only to architectural works or to exemplary works of literature or to so-called "epoch-making" works.

The claim that a work of art sets up a world invites many questions. In what way do literary works disclose a world? The only example Heidegger discusses is a poem by C.F. Meyer, *Der römische Brunnen* ("The Roman Fountain"). How does this work disclose a world, and which world does it disclose? Do novels that describe contemporary realities from different perspectives disclose the same world or do they disclose different worlds? And what about so-called abstract paintings, in what way do they disclose a world? It may be argued that not everything that is customarily called "art", is real art in Heidegger's view. In a recent article, Wayne Froman suggests that we may speak of "foundational art" which is "akin to foundational thought [...] in which the metaphysical foundations of an epoch are worked out in a manner that entails, essentially, a mode of world-apprehension".⁸⁶ Froman's suggestion is apposite and it is possible to understand some of Heidegger's statements about art along these lines. In particular, the statement that the Greek temple is

⁸³Heidegger, p. 670.

⁸⁴S.K.Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from "Philosophy in a New Key"* (New York:Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 96.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 97; p. 95.

⁸⁶Wayne J. Froman, "Action Painting and the World-As-Picture", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 46 (1988), p. 469.

foundational art in this sense is suggestive. I am not saying it is correct.

But I fail to see how van Gogh's shoes, for example, could be interpreted as "foundational art" in this sense. Whatever shoes, painted or not, reveal about the world, I don't see how they could, show "the metaphysical foundations" of an epoch. Nevertheless it is clear that Heidegger thinks that van Gogh's painting discloses a world like all (real) works of



A Pair of Old Shoes, 1888 (Hulsker 1569)

art do. In the section "Work and Truth" Heidegger says that "the peasant woman has a world because she dwells in the openness of that which is" and "her equipment gives to this world its own necessity and nearness".⁸⁷ Heidegger does not explicitly mention van Gogh's painting here, but why should he have mentioned the "equipment" of the peasant woman if he didn't think that van Gogh's painting as an art-work disclosed something about a pair of peasant shoes and therefore something about the peasant world? At the end of same section Heidegger underlines that the fact that truth happens in a work does not mean that something is rightly being represented or reproduced, the truth of a work of art consists rather in the fact that "what is as a whole is brought into unconcealment and held therein" and here he again mentions van Gogh's painting, of which he asserts that "the revelation of the equipmental being of the shoes that which is as a whole - world and earth in their counterplay - attains to unconcealment".⁸⁸

Incidentally, this passage confirms my earlier analysis of Heidegger's use of van Gogh's painting, but what now concerns me is a different but connected problem, the problem of generality. I think we can make sense of the claim that the painting by van Gogh discloses the world of a peasant and reveals "world and earth in their counterplay". It does so because the painting reveals the nature of equipment, in this case a pair of peasant shoes, which is "central" to the world of the peasant. To use a term entirely foreign to Heidegger's way of thinking we might say that the shoes have a symbolic value and although shoes and temples are very different things they can both, depending on the circumstances, suggest and point to a world. However, the

⁸⁷Heidegger, pp. 671-2.

⁸⁸Heidegger, p. 680.

Greek temple - when it was used for the purposes it was built for, as a house of the gods and a house of worship - had a cultural and social significance that a painting of shoes or of anything else cannot hope to achieve. Even if van Gogh's painting - assuming it represents a pair of peasant shoes - can without absurdity be said to suggest the world of a peasant, there are very many paintings where we would be at a loss if we had to answer the question how "world and earth in their counterplay" are revealed. Heidegger does not offer any criteria by which we could decide when a world is being disclosed nor does he wish to offer any. It could of course be countered that the demand for criteria is misplaced because it is based on the dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity or on other philosophical presuppositions rejected by Heidegger. He rejects all subjectivist approaches to art, from Kant onwards, because he holds, as Allan Megill aptly puts it, "that when the artwork speaks, it does so in a nonsubjective, Being-attuned voice".⁸⁹ The ability to differentiate between foundational and non-foundational art, and the capacity to recognize "the voice of Being" must however, be essential to anybody who accords such a high mission to art, unless the charge of obscurantism is willingly accepted.

A work of art is in no way a "static" entity for Heidegger. A work of art is apparently not a work of art forever. Also something purporting to be a work can under certain circumstances become a work of art in a real sense. "There is in the work a happening of truth at work",⁹⁰ that is realized through the creation of the work, Heidegger says. Furthermore "[t]he becoming-a-work of the work is a mode of the becoming and happening of truth".⁹¹

The difficult "concept" of earth plays an important role in Heidegger's thinking about art. The opposition between "world" and "earth" is essential in the work of art. This dichotomy between "world" and "earth" can be seen, as Hofstadter suggests, as akin to the traditional distinction between form and matter.⁹² The "earth" is nevertheless much more than the matter or the content of a work of art. Speaking of the Greek temple Heidegger says that earth is "that into which the work sets itself back, that which it allows to come forth in this setting back of itself".⁹³ Difficult as this sentence is, its sense can be gathered from the description of the world-disclosing function of the Greek temple. The temple, Heidegger contends, "does not let the matter disappear, but rather lets it come forth for the very first time [...] [t]he hill comes to bear and rest and so first becomes a hill".⁹⁴ Truth happens in a work of art only in

⁸⁹Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985), p. 161.

⁹⁰Heidegger, p. 684.

⁹¹ibid.

⁹²Hofstadter, p. 648.

⁹³Heidegger, p. 673.

⁹⁴Heidegger, pp. 672-3.

so far as it appears as the conflict between the world and the earth, Heidegger asserts.⁹⁵

As I have emphasized several times, Heidegger's claims about the nature of art are general, i.e. they are thought to apply to all works of art and to all art forms. If it is possible to understand, as I think it is, what the "conflict between the world and the earth" is in a work of architecture, it is very difficult to see how this opposition could apply to novels, abstract paintings, musical works, the film and the dance. Heidegger does not consider any of these art forms in detail and we are left in the dark how the "lighting and concealing in the opposition of world and earth"⁹⁶ comes to happen in them. Since not all works of art considered as such in traditional art history and criticism are works of art for Heidegger one might think that not all accepted art forms are (real) art forms. This suggestion is implausible, however, for although Heidegger only discusses a painting and a temple in some detail, he mentions literature and music as well and obviously accepts them as proper art forms.⁹⁷

Some of Heidegger's commentators admit that it is difficult to see how the analysis of a work of art advanced in "The Origin of the Work of Art" could apply to music. Von Herrmann, for example, acknowledges the difficulty and considers it a task for the future to subject music to an ontological analysis in terms of the framework laid down by Heidegger. And for good measure he adds, that an ontological analysis of music can *only* be undertaken in the light of Heidegger's general philosophy of art.⁹⁸ It is strange that no Heideggerian has thought it worthwhile to take up the challenge.

Kockelmans, who also recognizes the difficulty, argues that "anyone who selects examples, takes them from the domain that is clearest" and he adds surprisingly, that "it is well-known that it is extremely difficult to meaningfully speak about musical works of art".⁹⁹ So it is, as it is difficult to speak meaningfully about many things and it may be true that every writer selects examples from the domain that appears - the qualification is important - to him or her to be the clearest. It is, however, definitely not true that everybody advances a general theory of art without explicitly considering different art forms and the question of the applicability of favoured conceptual schemes or categorizations.

Heidegger, along with some of his commentators, would have done well to consider Susanne Langer's observation that "it is a constant temptation

⁹⁵Heidegger, p. 685.

⁹⁶ibid.

⁹⁷Heidegger, p. 694.

⁹⁸v. Herrmann, XXII.

⁹⁹Kockelmans, p. 82.

to say things about 'Art' in [a] general sense that are true only in one special domain, or to assume that what holds for one art must hold for another".¹⁰⁰

CONCLUSION

Commentators as different as the historian of ideas, Allan Megill, and the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer have stressed the centrality of "The Origin of the Work of Art" in Heidegger's thinking not only about art but about Being and Truth in general. Moreover they regard it as a work facilitating our access to Heidegger's later philosophy. "It is a nodal work in his career", writes Megill, and it is "free of technical vocabulary and other barriers to comprehension".¹⁰¹ Gadamer, while not denying that the barriers to comprehension are real, believes that Heidegger's interpretation of a work of art as a happening revealing truth is of great significance.¹⁰² Since Being and Truth assume the form of "happenings" in Heidegger's later thinking, we have here an important clue to Heidegger's real concerns in his later works.

Art, real art, reveals truth but there are other ways in which truth appears and happens, Heidegger thinks. Truth appears also in "the deed that grounds a [political] state", in what Heidegger darkly calls "essential sacrifice" and in the "thinking of being",¹⁰³ which is diametrically opposed to calculating, logical and scientific thinking, which in Heidegger's view is not thinking at all. "Truth is the truth of being"¹⁰⁴ Heidegger says and science does not think because it does not deal with Being.

Science is thus not a revelation of truth, it can only attain what Heidegger calls "rightness". That science does not think is one of the most well-known pronouncements of the later Heidegger. Real thinking is thinking whose essence is determined by what thought apprehends, being in its Being. This is the startling claim Heidegger makes in an essay on thinking in 1952.¹⁰⁵ Foundational art and foundational thinking seem to emanate from Being itself. Lest my last sentence should appear to be an unkind exaggeration, I would like to refer to Gadamer's assertion in his essay "Der Weg in die Kehre" (1979) where he says that Heidegger's thinking is not so much a thinking about something (technology for example) but rather "standing in Being itself" (*ein*

¹⁰⁰Susanne K. Langer, *Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 13.

¹⁰¹Megill, p. 162.

¹⁰²Gadamer, p. 258.

¹⁰³Heidegger, p. 685.

¹⁰⁴Heidegger, p. 700.

¹⁰⁵Heidegger, "Was heisst Denken?", in M. Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze 2* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1967), p. 14.

Stehen im Sein selbst).¹⁰⁶ Gadamer's remarks are an unwitting contribution to the portrait of the philosopher as god.

In his efforts to overcome an aesthetic approach to art, infected by the metaphysical oppositions between subject and object, between truth and feeling, form and content, Heidegger outlines a philosophy of art, free from "the calculating ways of thinking [...] in modern science and technology",¹⁰⁷ that can be viewed as "aestheticist" in a deeper sense. This aestheticism Megill describes as "that reawakening of ekstasis, which in the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment view has been largely confined to the realm of art".¹⁰⁸ For Heidegger art assumes a new and unheard of significance. Not even Hegel accorded art such an exalted place in human life.

Reading Heidegger is difficult for more than one reason. One way of approaching him is the way proposed by von Herrmann. He maintains that we have no choice but to read Heidegger "phenomenologically", which means that criticisms of his thinking are seen as impediments to understanding. If we refuse to read Heidegger "phenomenologically" we can only blame ourselves for our blindness and helplessness in front of "The Origin of the Work of Art" and furthermore we will fail to appreciate the precision of his conceptualizations (*Begrifflichkeit*), von Herrmann thinks.¹⁰⁹ I have not been able to follow von Herrmann's prescriptions, and I do not believe that blindness and insight are always opposed. I too believe there are moments of insight in Heidegger's essay on art, but there is also much else besides.

Although Heidegger's philosophy of art is radical in more than one way, it shares two fundamental traits with traditional aesthetics and philosophy of art: the search for essences and "the craving for generality", from which disregard, if not contempt, for differences and particulars result.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶H.-G. Gadamer, "Der Weg in die Kehre", in H.-G. Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 3, p. 281.

¹⁰⁷Kockelmans, p. 77.

¹⁰⁸Megill, p. 342.

¹⁰⁹v. Herrmann, xv1-xvii.

¹¹⁰Cf. Wittgenstein's remark: "Instead of 'craving for generality' I could also have said 'the contemptuous attitude towards the particular case'" (L. Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, ed. R. Rhees, Oxford:Blackwell, 1958, p. 18).

