

The Overcoming of Aesthetics

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Abstract: In this paper I will present Heidegger's idea of the overcoming of aesthetics, as a particular manner of a metaphysical way of thinking. The analysis will show that the overcoming of aesthetics is related to the new understanding of philosophy and the new view on thinking, opposed to the modern representational model. Also, I will present Heidegger's interpretation of painting as his attempt to learn about this new thinking following the artistic model of the image. Finally, the analysis proves that the overcoming of the representational image and aesthetics is essentially related to the question of Being and the ontological difference.

Keywords: Martin Heidegger; aesthetics; metaphysics; overcoming; image; painting

One of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century, Martin Heidegger, was also the one to re-define the traditional relation between philosophy and art. Although art was not one of the major issues Heidegger was concerned with during his early lectures and philosophy before *Being and Time*, it has become one of the most significant problems of his later thought, after the so-called turn (*Kehre*), marking the immanent change of his approach to the question of Being. Also, although there are several remarks on the arts in his early thought – the first one ever being the short analysis of Franz Mark's painting *Deer in the Forest* in his *Logik. Die Frage nach der Wahrheit* (*Logic. The Question of Truth*), lectures he held in Marburg in the winter semester in

1925-1926,¹ the German philosopher truly showed interest in the arts during the thirties and after, under the strong influence of Nietzsche and Hölderlin. This, however, was not a matter of small significance; art was not just one of many problems Heidegger was interested in. On the contrary, in his later philosophy, art became the issue upon which Heidegger tried to resolve the question of the true nature and essence of philosophy in a contemporary context. In other words, Heidegger's dealings with art have a special purpose: to question, criticize, discover and redefine philosophy as such.

Heidegger's questioning philosophy has been a mark of his thought from the very beginning. In his early works and lectures, he often pointed out to the institutional context philosophy was situated in at the universities, and he often criticized the consequences of the prevailing hegemony of the positive sciences. Going against such trends, Heidegger was a strong advocate of the autonomy of philosophy; that is, he was of the opinion that philosophy – and only philosophy – can decide upon its essence and determine its own role and meaning in the contemporary world. So much so, that he took over famous Husserl's idea of philosophy as a strict science, claiming that the strictness in knowledge originally belongs to philosophy, and that it has been deviated in the sciences.

However, another important issue of early Heidegger's philosophy was also his strong conviction that contemporary philosophy is strongly – and wrongly – burdened by its past, with its tradition. In other words, Heidegger believed that philosophers today are not just overwhelmed by the ideas and concepts of the tradition, but also, and perhaps more than anything else, with the traditional ways of thinking, especially the ones related to logic and metaphysics. Even when dealing with new and contemporary problems, philosophers think in the way of tradition, therefore only seemingly making any progress at all. Moreover, as it is well known, Heidegger believed that the tradition of philosophy

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Logik: Die Frage nach dem Wahrheit*, GA 21, ed. W. Biemel (Frankfurt am Mein: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976).

has forgotten the most important question of philosophy, the question of Being, thus endangering it entirely.

Having all this in mind, it is hard to reconcile two ideas – philosophy today being autonomous in its self-determination, and philosophy today being unable to freely approach its own essence, due to the inherited conceptual matrices of the past. The problem was resolved in Heidegger's later philosophy, through an unexpected displacement: the essence of philosophy today is to be found and determined through the dialogue with the arts. The famous dialogue between poeticizing (*Dichten*) and thinking (*Denken*) – the neighbourhood of philosophy and art – thus became the light motif of Heidegger's philosophy of art; the task of the philosophy involved in such dialogue is to discover both its own essence and the essence of the arts. Heidegger's later philosophy is filled with examples of the sort, most of which relate to poetry (Hölderlin, Trakl, George and others), but also to painting (Van Gogh, Cezanne, Klee), sculpture and architecture.

Nevertheless, if there is to be any chance to rediscover the essence of philosophy in contemporary context – and to do so in a dialogue with the arts, Heidegger also had to deal with the traditional models of relationship between the two. The question of art in philosophy is not a contemporary one; on the contrary, in this form or the other, art has been an issue of importance for philosophy since the times of ancient Greece. Having in mind Heidegger's problems with traditional philosophy, it is only to be expected that he would disregard such approaches and try to build up a new one. In fact, that is the true meaning of the mentioned dialogue between poeticizing and thinking, with both words being Heidegger's own new terms for the old and the traditional ones – poeticizing for the newly envisaged art, and thinking for the philosophy. However, the new dialogical relation between the two goes hand in hand with the critique of the old one; and that is what the formulation (the formal indication) of *the overcoming of aesthetics* is all about.²

² Marius Johan Geertsema, *Heidegger's Poetic Projection of Being* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 4.

In this paper, I would like to present Heidegger's idea of overcoming of aesthetics, as an example of the way in which he understands the relation between the traditional – especially modern - and contemporary (philosophy). In my opinion, this particular example is both the model of understanding Heidegger's philosophy between the tradition and contemporary thinking, and also the key issue for the project of renewing the question of Being as the main philosophical problem of our time.

I. The overcoming of aesthetics: A metaphysical problem?

Heidegger's approach to the traditional relation between philosophy and the arts is a critique directed to the philosophical discipline of aesthetics; since aesthetics was established in the 18th century by Alexander G. Baumgarten, it is clear enough that Heidegger here deals with the modern philosophy. Although well aware of the fact mentioned before, that art was a philosophical issue of importance since the ancient times, Heidegger still chooses to focus on the very discipline of aesthetics, and thus to proclaim it – in its modern form and idea – as an exemplar of the traditional philosophical approach to art in general. Therefore, the phrase *the overcoming of aesthetics* is meant to cover all traditional relations between philosophy and art, and not just the modern ones; the phrase is to be understood in its wider meaning.

The discipline of aesthetics, however, would have to have some special property which would elevate it as a proper example of all the other similar cases – Plato's critique of arts in *the Republic*, Aristotle's *Poetics*, medieval and Renaissance understanding of the arts, etc. This is the case indeed: for Heidegger, modern aesthetics – although it is *an aesthetics* – is, in fact, *metaphysical*. Or, to put it closer to his words, *modern aesthetics is of a metaphysical character*, and quite obviously so, to be confirmed with the works of its founder Baumgarten. By this, Heidegger means the following: although the subject of this philosophical discipline is, at least according to Baumgarten, beauty, art, and

sensory (aesthetic) experience, the way it approaches and thinks about this subject is metaphysical – it is translated from the metaphysics to aesthetics. Therefore, the true nature of modern aesthetics is not aesthetical, but metaphysical, since regardless of *what* it is concerned with, it always acts in the manner of metaphysics.³

In fact, this is not a novel idea in Heidegger's philosophy, nor is it restricted to the matter of aesthetics only. On the contrary, even in his early works Heidegger claims that the entire traditional philosophy, including the modern one, is metaphysical. To put it more simply, Heidegger says that all the different matrices of philosophical thinking until his own time are merely instances of the one and the same model – the model of metaphysical thought. By metaphysics, therefore, Heidegger does not refer to the special field of philosophy, one of its disciplines, along with aesthetics, ethics, logic, etc. only. On the contrary, he refers to all of them equally and jointly, in the same way previously mentioned regarding the case of aesthetics. So, according to Heidegger, regardless of the subject a particular philosophical discipline is concerned with, traditional philosophy always acts in the manner of metaphysics. Moreover, it is exactly because of this that philosophy has forgotten its most important and primary question, the question of Being: by metaphysical thinking and metaphysics, therefore, Heidegger aims at those philosophies which are marked by the loss of this primary question.

As it is well known, most of Heidegger's early and later philosophy is directed to the endeavor of reclaiming and rediscovering of this primary question, in order to redefine philosophy and, once again, to put it on solid grounds. His remarks on the very first page of *Being and Time*, where he speaks about contemporary philosophy being in a worse position than Plato's, whom he cites, since it has forgotten not only the answer to the question of Being, but the question as such, confirm this. The task he commits himself to is, therefore, the renewal of philosophy which would

³ Gianni Vattimo, "Aesthetics and the End of Epistemology," in *Heidegger Reexamined*. Volume 3: Art, Poetry, and Technology, eds. H. Dreyfuss, and M. Wrathall (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 7-8.

not be determined by the metaphysics; in his later thought, the same task is formulated as *the overcoming* (or *overturning*, *Überwindung*) of metaphysics, and, in some cases, as *the getting over* the metaphysics (or *coming to terms with*, or *winding back*, *Verwindung*).⁴

The overcoming of aesthetics is, thus, to be understood in terms of the overcoming of metaphysics, as an instance of the same process. However, the case of aesthetics is a special one: although it is to be expected that the overcoming of metaphysics implies the overcoming of all traditional disciplines of philosophy, since they all share the metaphysical character or manner of thinking, Heidegger explicitly speaks only about the overcoming of aesthetics. Moreover, if we take into account the important role the dialogue with art is to have in his attempt to rediscover and redefine the essence of philosophy, it becomes clear that the overcoming of aesthetics is also to be considered as a necessary aspect of the overcoming of metaphysics. Namely, if the renewal of philosophy depends on its dialogue with the arts, then the way it approaches the arts has to be changed. However, to change it means to overcome the metaphysical character of the philosophical approach to the arts, and by doing so, to overcome metaphysics at the point where it could be the most dangerous – at the point which, as Heidegger puts it in *The Question Concerning Technology*, *saving power* (of art) is to be found.⁵ And so he says in his second major work, *Contributions to Philosophy*:

The question of the origin of the work of art is not intent on an eternally valid determination of the essence of the work of art, a determination that could also serve as a guideline for the historiological survey and explanation of the history of art. Instead, the question stands in the most intrinsic connection

⁴ Daniel O. Dahlstrom, *The Heidegger Dictionary* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 152; Dominique Jaicaud, *From Metaphysics to Thought* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), 8-9.

⁵ Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. W. Lovitt (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1977), 34-35.

to the task of overcoming aesthetics, i.e., overcoming a particular conception of beings – as objects of representation. The overcoming of aesthetics again results necessarily from the historical confrontation with metaphysics as such.⁶

As we can see, the overcoming of aesthetics is explicitly tied to confrontation with metaphysics, and so it is necessarily related to the overcoming of metaphysics. The quotation also shows more precisely the meaning of such confrontation: the overcoming of aesthetics is directed to *the conception of beings as objects of representation*, which clearly points out to the modern philosophy. Moreover, since metaphysics for Heidegger is characterized by the forgetting of the question of Being, i.e. forgetting of the ontological difference – the difference between beings and Being, it is also clear that the overcoming of metaphysics implies the new understanding of beings, now as different from Being, and – especially in later philosophy – understood in the light of Being.⁷ The case of aesthetics is, therefore, aiming at a particular modus of the equation of the beings/Being difference, at the modern conception of beings as objects of mental representation, or, to put it in terms of modern philosophy, as objects of ideas.

In his seminal work on art, *The Origin of the Work of Art* from the 1935, to which Heidegger refers in the above quoted citation, but also elsewhere in *the Contributions*, he addresses the same issue so:

Almost as soon as specialized thinking about art and the artist began, such reflections were referred to as

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. R. Rojcewicz, and D. Vallega-Neu (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012), 396.

⁷ Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann, *Subjekt und Dasein- Interpretationen zu "Sein und Zeit"* (Frankfurt am Mein: Vittorio Klostermann, 1985), 25; Karl Lehmann, *Vom Ursprung und Sinn der Seinsfrage im Denken Martin Heideggers. Versuch einer Ortbestimmung*, Band I (Freiburg i.Br.: Universitätsbibliothek, 2003), 135.

‘aesthetic.’ Aesthetics treated the artwork as an object, as indeed an object of *αἴσθησις*, of sensory apprehension in a broad sense. These days, such apprehension is called an ‘experience.’ The way in which man experiences art is supposed to inform us about its essential nature. Experience is the standard-giving source not only for the appreciation and enjoyment of art but also for its creation. Everything is experience. But perhaps experience is the element in which art dies.⁸

As we can see, the idea about modern aesthetics being essentially related to a specific understanding of beings as objects of ideas, i.e., representations or sensory apprehension is at stake here too. And it is the same idea which shows the metaphysical character of modern aesthetics: it is defined around the issue of how beings are understood, around the metaphysical matrix which is in advance inscribed in its approach to any particular subject. Contrary to how it may seem, aesthetics is not metaphysically neutral, although metaphysical issues are not its primary concerns. As Heidegger sees it, the fact that modern aesthetics is determined by a rather particular understanding of beings makes it even more metaphysical, exactly because those metaphysical matrices of thinking it activates are hidden and not easily recognized.

Modern aesthetics, of course, is an instance of a specific kind of metaphysical thinking, the one characteristic of modern philosophy in general, such is to be found in Descartes, Leibniz, Wolff, but also Kant or Hegel. In all these cases, regardless of their differences, there is one single idea or a worldview to be found – *the world as a picture*, or, better say, the world as an image, as a representation, as Heidegger puts it in *The Age of the World Picture*. What Heidegger aims at is the general approach of the

⁸ Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. J. Young, and K. Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 50.

modern philosophy to any kind of philosophical inquiry: one has to start with how the world is given to our minds, and to inspect this with regard to the limits, inner function and organization of the cognitive powers (of the soul). In this respect, the cognitive subject is confronted with a problematic outer object, it can never fully reach, because the object is given to the subject only through the mediation of these cognitive powers, that is, his own consciousness. Therefore, the object gradually becomes the image or the representation of the object – *the object as it is given to the subject*. Moreover, the very constitution of the thinking subject, or the thinking as such, is understood in terms of representation, as being grounded in the simplest units of consciousness (ideas), whether their origin is to be found in perception only, or in the autonomous workings of reason as well.

The representational character of thinking, typical for the modern philosophy, is what should be overcome in this particular case; along with it, therefore, the modern metaphysics would be dealt with too. As we can see, the point here is to make an intervention not merely upon the contents and claims of modern metaphysics, but also – and more importantly – upon the way of thinking that results in such positions. So, Heidegger is interested in the new non-representational way of (philosophical) thinking, which he names *Gelassenheit*: such thinking is not constituted by the presence of its object (in the representation), but by its absence.⁹ Also, it is not the reference point of its own legitimacy, as is the case with Descartes, for example. The legitimacy of such thinking comes from the phenomenon to which

⁹ Daniela Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy, An Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 97-98, 102; Kenneth Malby, *Five Ground-Breaking Moments in Heidegger's Thinking* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 189-190; Jean-Luc Nancy, "On a Divine Wink," in *French Interpretations of Heidegger: An Exceptional Reception*, eds. D. Pettigrew, and F. Rafford (New York: SUNY Press, 2008), 179-180; Andrew J. Mitchell, "The Fourfold," in *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*, ed. B. W. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2010), 216.

it is intentionally directed, and which it should follow – obviously, in unpredictable ways. So, *Gelassenheit* is the name for the way of thinking directly opposed to the modern conceptions of thinking as self-determining and a self-constituting activity.¹⁰

However, to get to the new way of thinking – the new method of thinking, we could say – Heidegger needs not only to criticize the core element of modern metaphysical thought, its representational character, but also to offer an alternative to it. In this case, he needs to find a different model of understanding of a picture, or an image – such that would not be related to representations of consciousness. In other words, the new thinking requires a new kind of image it could be determined and defined with; in the case of later Heidegger, and keeping in mind the role of the dialogue between poeticizing and thinking mentioned before, the new image chosen is the artistic one – painting.

II. The overcoming of representation: The saving power of art

Heidegger's philosophy of art, as I have mentioned before, is often and almost exclusively related to his interpretations of poetry and poets. The poetry has a special role in Heidegger's later philosophy indeed, and its predominant status over the other arts has to do with its medium – language, which it shares with philosophy.¹¹ To put it simply, if there is to be a dialogue between art and philosophy, it is only natural for this dialogue to be placed on the ground common to both parties; even the notion of a dialogue suggests the language as the proper candi-

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, "Zur Erörterung der Gelassenheit. Aus einem Feldweggespräch über das Denken," in Martin Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens (1910–1976)*, GA 13, ed. H. Heidegger (Frankfurt am Mein: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983), 51; Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann, *Wege ins Ereignis. Zu Heideggers 'Beiträgen zur Philosophie'* (Frankfurt am Mein: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994), 375.

¹¹ Marc Froment-Meutice, *That is to Say: Heidegger's Poetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 92-93; John J. Kockelmans, *Heidegger on Art and Art Works* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), 188-189.

date in this respect.¹² Heidegger also points out to the etymological relation between the Greek word for arts in general – poiesis – and poetry; on such basis, he confirms poetry as more important than other arts, at least for philosophy, adding that poetry is the origin of every (historical) language.¹³

However, the case of painting also has an important role to play in Heidegger's philosophy of art, as well as in his later philosophy in general. Apart from the famous interpretation of Van Gogh's painting *A Pair of Shoes*, offered in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, painting is severely neglected in this respect, exactly due to the overstressing of the role of poetry.¹⁴ Nevertheless, as mentioned before, the case of painting is closely tied to the task of overcoming of the aesthetics, because paintings – artistically made images – are the possible candidates for the alternative way of thinking about the images. In other words, if there is to be a different way of thinking about the image, due to the struggle for the new non-representational understanding of thinking, opposed to the modern representational model, and if such transfiguration of philosophy is to be achieved through the dialogue with the arts, we should look in the direction of the painting.

Actually, Heidegger was deeply interested in painting, especially in artists and novel ideas of his own time; however, he did not write much about it. Apart from several dispersed comments here and there,¹⁵ one can find four particular examples of importance – the short analysis of Franz Mark's *Deer in the Forest* (*Logik*.

¹² von Hermann, 234

¹³ Kockelmans, *Heidegger on Art and Art Works*, 188.

¹⁴ Denis J. Schmidt, *Between Word and Image: Heidegger, Klee, and Gadamer on Gesture and Genesis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 70.

¹⁵ For example, Heidegger considered Picasso to be a remarkable painter and artist, although he thought that Picasso had no essential role in the development of painting. Heinrich W. Petzet, *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger, 1929-1976* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 144-145; J. Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 164-165.

Die Frage nach der Wahrheit, 1925-1926), an interpretation of Van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes* (*The Origin of the Work of Art*, 1935), two poems on Cézanne (1971, 1974),¹⁶ and the unfinished *Notes on Klee* (1956).¹⁷ These four cases – these four painters and their works – mark and define Heidegger's dialogue with painting, which has lasted for about fifty years. Moreover, his interpretation of Cézanne and Klee belong to the last decades of his work, that is, to his mature efforts to resolve the question of Being.

Characteristic for all four cases is Heidegger's opposition to the modern understanding of art – to the modern representational model of image, valid for both arts and the thinking.¹⁸

Aesthetics treated the artwork as an object, as indeed an object of αἴσθησις, of sensory apprehension in a broad sense. These days, such apprehension is called an 'experience.' [...] Experience is the standard-giving source not only for the appreciation and enjoyment of art but also for its creation,¹⁹

as he says in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. To oppose this, Heidegger continuously speaks about the relation of painting and the question of Being; this is especially stressed in his views on Mark and Van Gogh. For example, in his analysis of Mark's painting he is explicit about it: Heidegger says that artistic representing is about the presentation of a hermeneutic notion, which offer an understanding of being of a thing presented.²⁰ Painting specifi-

¹⁶ Martin Heidegger, "Cézanne," in *Gedachtes*, GA 81, ed. P.-L. Coriando (Frankfurt am Mein: Vittorio Klostermann, 2007), 327, 347.

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, "Notizen zu Klee/Notes to Klee," *Philosophy Today* 61, no. 1 (2017): 7-17.

¹⁸ For example, in his analysis of Mark's painting he confronts three models of understanding the image – as a picture (painting), as an illustration, and as photography – photography here being a symbol for modern understanding of representation. Martin Heidegger, *Logik*, 363-364.

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, "The Origin," 50.

²⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Logik*, 363. The case of Van Gogh is obvious in this respect, since the interpretation of the painting is inherently related to the

cally, as well as the art in general, is to be interpreted with regard to the question of Being, that is, ontologically – but not metaphysically.

However, Heidegger's works on Cézanne and Klee radicalize this tendency, and in the direction of the new way of thinking – the new idea of philosophy. Although the poems on Cézanne are written almost twenty years after the notes on Klee, Heidegger's view of these two artists give precedence to Klee: Cézanne is to be understood as the one who prepares what Klee is actually doing. On the other hand, he is the one who changes Heidegger's views on painting from the positions given within the interpretation of Van Gogh in the direction of the overcoming of aesthetics and metaphysics.²¹

What Cézanne is actually preparing is the new relation between philosophy and painting, the one conceived in the spirit of the dialogue of *Denken* and *Dichten*. Namely, the notion mentioned before – *Gelassenheit*, the notion marking the non-representational way of thinking Heidegger is eager to achieve, has a significant role in both of these poems. In the one from the 1971, in the second verse Heidegger says:

Das nachdenksam Gelassene,
das inständig Stille
der Gestalt des alten Gärtners Vallier,
der Unscheinbares pflegte
am chemin des Lauves.

A similar verse is to be found in the poem from the 1974 as well.²² Now, the notion of *Gelassenheit* is here directly related to Heidegger's description of Cézanne's painting (or paintings). The same notion is in the second poem introduced with fol-

definition of art and the truth of beings represented.

²¹ Otto Pöggeler, *Bild und Technik: Heidegger, Klee und die Moderne Kunst* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2002), 171.

²² Heidegger, "Cézanne," GA 81, 327.

lowing words: “*Gesammelt winkend: / das nachdenksam Gelassene,*”²³ after which again the description of the painting follows.

What this means is that it is the painting that gives signs to philosopher regarding the new way of thinking he is searching for and is striving to get to: the painting is literally winking, pointing out to the direction philosophy should follow in the future. The painting is showing and embodying a certain way of thinking, which is presented to philosophy inasmuch the painting is presented to the philosophy as a specific phenomenon; therefore, the dialogue between painting and philosophy is at work here – Heidegger actually mentions “*ahnenden Bildens und Denkens.*”²⁴ However, this dialogue is not realized within the language, but in-between the language and visibility; so, philosophy is about to learn how to see, and only consequently how to speak.

In the poem from 1974 Heidegger also explicitly compares Cézanne’s painting in general, that is, the core issue of Cézanne’s painting in Heidegger’s opinion, with his own problem of the ontological difference. Namely, according to Heidegger, the key problem of Cézanne’s painting – the single artistic thought presented and articulated with all his painting – is the very ontological issue of the presence. More precisely, Heidegger believes that Cézanne is painting the essence of the presence – the being of the presented.²⁵ Moreover, according to Heidegger, Cézanne’s paintings are overcoming the difference between the presence and the presented, Being and beings.²⁶ And so he says:

Was Cezanne la realisation nennt, ist
das Erscheinen des Anwesenden in der Lichtung
des Anwesens – so zwar, dass die Zweifalt beider

²³ Ibid., 347.

²⁴ Ibid., 327.

²⁵ Young, 155.

²⁶ Actually, he uses the notion of *coming to terms with* (*Verwindung*) – and not overcoming. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, the two notions are closely related and the difference has no impact on the argument here.

verwunden ist in der Einfalt des reinen
Scheinens seiner Bilder.
Für das Denken ist dies die Frage nach der
Überwindung der ontologischen Differenz zwischen
Sein und Seiendem.²⁷

Now, the overcoming of the presence/presented difference in Cézanne's painting is not a sort of artistically articulated loss of the ontological difference, similar to the one Heidegger accused the tradition of philosophy for. On the contrary, this 'ontological' difference is overcome by his paintings; it is not neglected and forgotten, but pushed into the entirely new direction of thinking, one that completely escapes philosophical approaches to the matter. Or, to put it differently: by taking part in the dialogue with Cézanne's painting, philosophy can learn to see things differently, so that it can go a step forward – away from its own tradition, and closer to the ontology which could think Being and beings in their difference and their unity at the same time.²⁸ Such "two folded unity" (*die Zweifalt beider verwunden ist in der Einfalt*) is exactly the model of thinking about the Being of beings Heidegger proposes in his later philosophy.²⁹

The overcoming of metaphysics – that is, the overcoming of the ontological difference – is, however, here still understood in terms of a philosophical task; it is philosophy, that should learn from Cézanne's painting and build the new approach to the question of Being. However, with *Notes on Klee* Heidegger pushes the problem into an entirely unpredictable direction: the overcoming of metaphysics, and, therefore, the overcoming of aesthetics, is now presented as an issue that belongs to the art and which should be resolved within the art. Needless to say, for Heidegger, Paul Klee is the one who is *overcoming the art!*

²⁷ Heidegger, "Cézanne," GA 81, 347

²⁸ Pöggeler, 176.

²⁹ John J. Kockelmans, *On the Truth of Being: Reflections on Heidegger's later Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 83-84, 92-93; Daniela Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger's Contributions to Philosophy*, 30, 40, 92-93.

According to Heidegger's friend and art historian, Heinrich Wiegant Petzet, upon going to an exhibition of Klee's paintings in 1956, Heidegger commented how he should write the second part of *The Origin of the Work of Art*. Petzet also informs us how Heidegger considered Klee to be an exceptional event in art and painting, so exceptional, that no one yet understands it (including himself).³⁰ For Heidegger, Klee is a painter who is trying to inspect, question and understand the painting as such using the artistic media and means of painting; the exemplary case for this, again according to Petzet, is Klee's painting *Bunter Blitz* (1927).³¹

In *Notes on Klee*, one can find several indications that this painter is offering a new understanding of art – at least for Heidegger. For example: “‘Art’ as such [is] of a metaphysical essence” (fragment 13); “Art of today: surrealism = metaphysics; abstract art = metaphysics; objectless art = metaphysics” (fragment 15); “Transformation of art” (fragment 20); “‘Art’ [An X should be placed over ‘Art’ here]” (fragment 22).³² What is interesting here is that Heidegger is speaking of the *metaphysical character of art* – much in the same manner he commented on the metaphysical character of *aesthetics*. In other words, while previously he was focused on the critique of philosophy and its approach to art, demanding for a new way of thinking about the arts, now he claims that the art itself is in the same position, that it is equally problematic as philosophy is. To stress this even more: it is more or less comprehensible that aesthetics, as a branch of philosophy, can be metaphysical, but it is rather confusing to claim that art shares in the character of philosophy.

What Heidegger means is that the same manner of thinking, same view on reality is shared between traditional philosophy and art; the one related to the ontological difference problem. In other words, art is metaphysical because it does not reflect

³⁰ Petzet, 149-151.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 156; Pöggeler, 129.

³² Heidegger, “Notizen zu Klee/Notes to Klee”; Pöggeler, 149.

the difference between Being and beings, because it presents us with the understanding of reality which follows metaphysical worldview. Nevertheless, with Klee Heidegger finds an example of art which is not metaphysical – which is *overcoming the metaphysics within the art*, and with it, *overcoming the art* in its usual meaning and form. The overcoming of art is, then, complementary to overcoming of aesthetics, them being the same issue viewed from two different perspectives. Moreover, if all art is metaphysical, then the dialogue between poeticizing and thinking is futile; for it to become viable again, art would have to change in the same direction Heidegger is trying to change philosophy.

Therefore, if Klee is overcoming the old understanding of art with his paintings, then he also offers a new kind of image – a new mode of picture, which could not possibly be of a representational nature and which could, thus, serve the purpose of inciting philosophy to think in the manner of *Gelassenheit*.³³ Indeed, Heidegger says: “these are not images, but states; Klee is capable of letting attunements be ‘seen’ within the configuration” (fragment 25).³⁴ And also: “Can there still be ‘works?’ Or is art destined for something else?” (fragment 21).³⁵ What this means is that the essence of painting, as it is presented with Klee, is not about the representation of beings – not about the mimesis of any kind or form. On the contrary, the essence of painting is about Being as such: since Being could not possibly be presented in an audible or visible form – since Being is not any of beings – the essence of painting is about presenting (continuously) what cannot be seen.³⁶

Now, since Being cannot actually be presented, Klee is, according to Heidegger, doing the only thing that could be done

³³ Stephen H. Watson, “Heidegger, Paul Klee, and the Origin of the Work of Art,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 60, no. 2 (2006): 345-346.

³⁴ Heidegger, “Notizen zu Klee/Notes to Klee.”

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Stephen H. Watson, *Crescent Moon Over the Rational: Philosophical Interpretations of Paul Klee* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 97.

– he presents it *as unpresentable*, in its absence. Therefore, Heidegger will agree with Klee's own comment how his painting is neither abstract and non-objective, nor objective, but somewhere in-between; exactly this kind of *being in-between* – moving back and forth between objects and their absence – is what allows Klee to present the absence, to make visible what cannot be seen.³⁷ So, Heidegger will gladly support Klee's own credo; "Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible" (fragment 3).³⁸

III. Concluding remarks

Heidegger's view of the relationship between philosophy and art is, as we have seen, problematic, complex, interesting and provoking. His efforts to overcome the traditional ways of philosophical thinking in the direction of the new and yet unseen paths remained a task for Heidegger himself. It was never finished, nor – I may add – could it ever be finished. Nevertheless, the dialogue between the traditional and contemporary philosophy realized in his project of the new thinking is quite remarkable; it leaves us with many points to inspect and, perhaps, follow.

The way the art was involved in this project is, in my opinion, particularly important. Heidegger opposes the traditional idea that art is merely an object for a philosopher to exercise his rational, dialectical or logical thinking, considering himself, in advance, to be able to define the essence of the art more or less easily. Heidegger was the first one to acknowledge the utter mystery of the arts, the utter impossibility of philosophy to ever conquer it. Instead, Heidegger advocates for the relationship between two equals, such that, if there is anything to be learned and claimed from the experience of such relationship, it has to be confined in the realms of the philosophy – it has to be a word on philosophy, and not

³⁷ Schmidt, 91-92.

³⁸ Heidegger, "Notizen zu Klee/Notes to Klee."

on the arts. For Heidegger, the dialogue between poeticizing and thinking is not merely a matter of philosophy exploiting the novelty brought about by the arts. On the contrary, it is about the respect for this strange and wonderful phenomenon, which can never be excerpted, and which is always to be acknowledged as a phenomenon of the highest importance.

Therefore, the prominent role the overcoming of aesthetics is given in Heidegger's later philosophy, in view of his struggle against the metaphysics, should not surprise us. Nevertheless, the fact that his final word about it – again, the acknowledgement that philosophy cannot resolve its contemporary tasks without the constructive relationship with the arts – is pushed one step further with Heidegger's interpretations of the painting. The fact that we can hope for the overcoming of metaphysics only if the art itself overcomes it, with its own means and tools, leaves us in a much humbler position than it was typical for the self-understanding of the philosophy within the tradition. However, it also brings hope: for Heidegger, with Klee certainly *the saving power grows*.

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