

HEIDEGGER AND THE 'END OF ART'

Robert Sinnerbrink

IN AN AFTERWORD to Martin Heidegger's 1936 essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art", one finds a surprising endorsement of Hegel's thesis on the end of art.¹ Hegel makes this controversial claim in his monumental *Lectures on Fine Art*, delivered in Berlin during the 1820s, in which he states that, in the modern world, "art counts no longer as the highest mode in which truth fashions an existence for itself".² Despite his antipathy to Hegel, Heidegger accepts Hegel's diagnosis, remarking that Hegel's judgment on the end of art "remains in force [*in Geltung*]" for us in modernity.³ Whether great art is dead or might yet return is, for Heidegger, a question that remains historically undecided, depending less on us than on the inscrutable destiny of Being in the epoch of global technology.⁴

Julian Young has argued that while Heidegger endorses Hegel's account of great art, and agrees that great art in modernity is at an end, he rejects Hegel's view that such art could no longer return historically. Heidegger claims instead that only the return of great art, rather than philosophy, can enable us to confront the nihilism of the modern age.⁵ In what follows, I shall explore Heidegger's apparent endorsement of Hegel's 'end of art' thesis: his embracing of a quasi-Hegelian 'Greek' paradigm of great art as a *non-metaphysical* mode of truth-disclosure that provides an antidote to the 'nihilism' of philosophical aesthetics. This raises the question of the status of *modern art* within Heidegger's philosophy of art. While Heidegger's official position is that modern art is dead, reduced to what I shall call *aesthetic resource*, certain forms of modern art, notably Van Gogh, Cézanne, and Paul Klee, played a significant role in his philosophical thinking on art. The question I wish to explore is whether Heidegger's conception of modern art is compatible with his diagnosis of the end of art in technological modernity. I shall suggest, *contra* Young, that Heidegger retains an Hegelian approach to the end of art in

modernity, advocating poetic thinking, rather than philosophical aesthetics, as that which envelops, rather than supersedes, modern art construed as aesthetic resource.

I

The influence of Hegel's 'end of art' thesis is unmistakable in Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art".⁶ Indeed, Heidegger judges Hegel's aesthetics to be the highest achievement of Western metaphysical discourse on art precisely because Hegel gives utterance to "the end of great art as such".⁷ I shall therefore commence with a brief interpretation of Hegel's thesis on the end of art before turning to Heidegger's selective appropriation of Hegel's reflections on the fate of art.

Hegel regards art as one of the three forms of absolute spirit: cultural-historical practices disclosing the most binding truths of a culture ("the Divine" or "the Absolute"). Art is most truly art when it takes on the same truth-disclosing role as religion or philosophy, "when it is simply one way of bringing to our minds and expressing the *Divine*, the deepest interests of mankind, and the most comprehensive truths of the spirit".⁸ Yet in the modern world, art, like religion, no longer plays the same culture-defining role as in previous historical periods. This does not mean that art ceases to exist historically, or that artistic innovation is no longer possible. Art in modernity will continue, and we of course hope that it "will always rise higher and come to perfection".⁹ Nonetheless, art can no longer articulate adequately the historical experience of modernity, precisely because it remains a *sensuous* and *singular* way of disclosing truth.

This Platonic demotion of art as merely sensuous knowledge is evident in Hegel's metaphysical narrative concerning the historical development of Western art. For Hegel, art becomes increasingly spiritualised in the course of its history, commencing with the more materially dependent, symbolic and classical art-forms of architecture and sculpture, and culminating with the less materially dependent, Christian-romantic art-forms of painting, music, and poetry. Although less perfectly beautiful than Greek classical art, these romantic, modern arts are 'higher' because they are capable of more complex explorations of human subjectivity. The increasingly reflexive, mediated character of modern experience, however, presents inherent limits to what Christian-romantic art can communicate. For modern

experience is increasingly defined by abstract forms of knowledge and impersonal social institutions—universal law, scientific rationalism, free market economics, governmental bureaucracy—as well as by a fragmented sense of personal identity and atomised social subjectivity. Consequently, Hegel argues, the social, cultural, and historical conditions of modernity are unfavourable to art. With the increasingly reflexive and dichotomous character of modern experience, art, like religion, is superseded by philosophy—a philosophy of art “for knowing philosophically what art is”.¹⁰ Hegel’s *Aesthetics* thereby self-reflexively announces the end of art and its supersession by philosophy at the very time when the ontological vocation of art collapses as a result of its conflicting autonomy and heteronomy.

Heidegger clearly endorses the Hegelian thesis that great art is capable of binding a cultural community by the sensuous disclosure of truth. This is evident in the 1936-37 Nietzsche lectures on the “Will to Power as Art”,¹¹ in which Heidegger praises Hegel for announcing “the end of great art as such”.¹² Agreeing with Hegel’s diagnosis, Heidegger remarks “that art has lost its power to be the absolute, has lost its absolute power” in the modern age.¹³ In a decidedly Hegelian tone, Heidegger observes that art “loses its immediate relation to the basic task of representing the absolute, i.e., of establishing the absolute definitively as such in the realm of historical man”.¹⁴ In the afterword to “The Origin” essay, moreover, Heidegger cites three statements that succinctly formulate Hegel’s thesis:

For us art counts no longer as the highest mode in which truth fashions an existence for itself.¹⁵

We may well hope that art will always rise higher and come to perfection, but the form of art has ceased to be the supreme need of the spirit.¹⁶

In all these respects art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past.¹⁷

Taken together, these statements claim that art, as a form of absolute spirit, is no longer “the highest mode” in which truth is disclosed in modernity, for modernity has reached the cultural-historical stage of self-reflection in which art is superseded by philosophy.

Heidegger parts company with Hegel, however, over whether the Hegelian judgment on the end of art is supposed to be final. As Heidegger asks: “is art still an essential and necessary way in which that truth happens which is decisive for our historical

existence, or is this something that art no longer is?"¹⁸ If art is no longer an essential way of experiencing truth, understood in the 'Greek' sense of *unconcealment* [*aletheia*], then the question is why this should have become the case in modernity. Heidegger's answer is clear: art dies in modernity because of 'aesthetics'. Aesthetic experience, centred on subjective feeling or expression, supplants a more originary experience of art as disclosing truth —of setting up a cultural-historical *world* and setting forth the mysterious, self-concealing dimension of *earth*. Indeed, for Heidegger, this ascendancy of lived experience [*Erlebnis*] is "the element in which art dies," a dying that "takes several centuries".¹⁹

II

Heidegger's striking claim that art, in modernity, dies as a result of aesthetics, demands further reflection. I turn therefore to Heidegger's highly suggestive account of the history of aesthetics, found in section thirteen of his 1936-37 lectures on "The Will to Power as Art".²⁰ In the latter, Heidegger notes that "aesthetics" is the name given, since Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* and Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, to that branch of philosophy concerned with the experience of beauty both in art and nature. Put simply, aesthetics treats the artwork as "the object of *aisthesis*, of sensory apprehension in a broad sense".²¹ *Aisthetike episteme* is knowledge of *aisthesis*: namely, "knowledge of human behaviour with regard to sense, sensation, and feeling, and knowledge of how these are determined".²² Thinking comports itself towards the true, human character and behaviour comport themselves towards the good, while human feeling comports itself towards the beautiful. Thus we have the true, the good, and the beautiful as the objects of logic, ethics, and aesthetics respectively.²³

In the modern sense, Heidegger continues, aesthetics involves the inquiry into our human state of feeling with regard to the beautiful as evoked by art and nature. Beauty itself is understood subjectively in the sense that it is simply that which, whether in nature or in art, can bring forth or elicit the feeling of aesthetic pleasure. Since art is understood as bringing forth the beautiful in this manner, philosophical meditation on art becomes *aesthetics*, oriented towards subjectively experienced beauty grounded in the feeling of 'disinterested' pleasure. According to the aesthetic consideration of art, the artwork is that which can elicit such a universally valid subjective experience of

beauty. It is posited as an aesthetically pleasing "object" for a "subject" in the aesthetic-contemplative attitude, and this aesthetic relationship of *feeling*, of contemplative pleasure, becomes paradigmatic for the aesthetic approach to art from Kant to Nietzsche.

Heidegger thus singles out the emphasis on *lived experience* [*Erlebnis*] as the distinctive characteristic of the modern aesthetic attitude.²⁴ Lived experience becomes the "standard-giving source not only for the appreciation and enjoyment of art but also for its creation".²⁵ This modern emphasis on subjective experience stands in sharp contrast with the originary Greek experience of art as *techne*, where the latter is understood as any means of poetic bringing-forth along with the knowledge that makes this possible. To be sure, the aesthetic approach to art can already be found with the Greeks, but it only emerges, like modern aesthetics, "at that moment when their great art and also the great philosophy that flourished along with it comes to an end".²⁶

In other words, it is already during the age of Plato and Aristotle that the philosophical disenfranchisement of art, to use Arthur Danto's phrase, commences in earnest.²⁷ This disenfranchisement proceeds through the exclusion of art from the realm of truth-disclosure proper, as evinced in Plato's famous expulsion of the poets and demotion of artworks to the level of simulacra.²⁸ In this sense, the emergence of philosophical aesthetics during the Enlightenment is the explicit manifestation of what was already implicitly at play in Greek metaphysics. Art is disconnected from truth and knowledge, relegated to the sensuous realm of mere appearance and degraded imitation, or later, to the subjective realm of private feeling and self-expression, and systematically subordinated as an inferior form of knowledge.

Along with this philosophical disenfranchisement, we find the inappropriate application to the artwork of the conceptual schema of *hyle-morphe*, *materia-forma*, or matter and form. This scheme is derived, Heidegger argues, from our most basic experience of things as items of use;²⁹ for it is in their usefulness for a given purpose—for example the production of a tool for a specific use—that things acquire their definite relation of matter and form. This matter/form schema deriving from produced equipment, Heidegger contends, was subsequently mapped onto the ontological structure of things, and has since become entrenched as the prevailing way of understanding both things and works. Throughout the history of

Western philosophical discourse on art, the matter/form schema remains "*the conceptual scheme deployed in the greatest variety of ways by all art theory and aesthetics*".³⁰ Matter and form become linked with the general conceptual pair of form and content, form becomes correlated with the rational and matter with the irrational, while the rational becomes equated with the logical and the irrational with the illogical. In the modern period, finally, the subject-object relation becomes coupled with the form-matter distinction, as evinced in Kantian aesthetics.

Together, these conceptual elements comprise a metaphysical framework of representation that has dominated Western metaphysics—and the metaphysics of art—for millennia. It comprises "a conceptual mechanism that nothing can withstand".³¹ Heidegger thus aims to deconstruct this metaphysical framework of matter-form relations, with the aim of fostering a non-metaphysical, onto-poetic way of thinking about art. Art is no longer to be understood through the subject-object relation, or as rooted in subjective feeling or lived experience. Rather, art is capable of disclosing truth, disclosing what beings *are*, and of bringing-forth concealed aspects of our experience of world and earth.

One might well ask, however, what is wrong with the aesthetic approach to art? Heidegger's response is to question the manner in which the aesthetic approach passes over the essential nature of the artwork in two interrelated ways: by *decontextualising* the artwork from its specific historical and cultural world; and by *subjectivising* the truth-content of artworks such that they become vehicles for eliciting subjective feeling in a contemplating subject. As a result, the artwork becomes a vehicle for aesthetic enjoyment, but therefore no longer answers an "absolute need" in modernity—art becomes disconnected from knowledge, subjectivised into an aesthetic resource, and thus can no longer sensuously disclose truth.

Let us consider the implications of the decontextualisation of the artwork. The aesthetic attitude requires, as Julian Young points out, a bracketing of the connections between the work and world such that we are left only with the object's purely formal, abstract qualities.³² The context in which the work is meaningful, and which the work makes meaningful in turn, is dissolved in the transformation of the work into a purely aesthetic object. We enjoy the aesthetic state, as Young aptly remarks, because "it is a form of stress relief, a moment of lyric *stasis* in the midst of busyness, a holiday from the anxious world of willing and working".³³ In Heidegger's cutting phrase, such

'aestheticised' art "belongs in the domain of the pastry chef".³⁴ Kantian disinterested pleasure degenerates into designer aestheticism; art as aesthetic resource provides a palliative for our anxious being-in-the-world. New age music, fashion photography, and interior design perhaps exemplify the kind of (ontologically decadent) aestheticism Heidegger criticises in Western consumer culture.

How did this condition come about? Heidegger's answer points to the second aspect of his rejection of modern aesthetics, namely the *subjectivisation* of the artwork. Indeed, it is the modern *metaphysics of subjectivity* that plays the crucial role in explaining the end of art through aesthetics. Heidegger's central claim is that the advent of the modern age, with its emphasis on the self-certainty of the human cognitive subject, fundamentally transforms the manner in which beings show up as intelligible. In modern metaphysics, commencing with Descartes, the certitude of all Being and all truth "is grounded in the self-consciousness of the individual ego: *ego cogito ergo sum*".³⁴ From this perspective, "I myself, and my states are the primary and genuine beings".³⁶ The self-certainty of the human cognitive subject becomes the standard and measure for representing and defining the intelligibility of all beings. Accordingly, meditation on the beautiful in art now shifts towards "the relationship of man's state of feeling, *aesthesis*",³⁷ from which philosophical aesthetics emerges as the dominant paradigm for understanding the experience of art.

Connected with the formation of aesthetics, another historical development emerges that contributes to the end of art in modernity: the loss of any "binding" character to art, which becomes, through its aestheticisation, a matter of subjective taste or arbitrary cultural choice. Following Hegel, Heidegger claims that great art is great in that it is an "absolute need"—it offers exemplary works that evoke a sense of proper dwelling; great art calls upon us and evokes, in an indirect manner, a sense of how we should live. It is not merely the cultivated interest of a professional and social elite, nor a form of distraction, relaxation, or entertainment, nor merely a subjectively chosen option among a plurality of competing cultural choices. Rather, great art refers to works that manifest a culture-defining, community-binding, ontological disclosure of truth—it is great art in this sense that begins to decline and disappear in the modern age.

Although Hegel argued that art is superseded by philosophy, I want to suggest that Heidegger's version of the end of art points, rather, to the transformation of art into an *aesthetic resource*. Great art,

with its truth-disclosing power, disappears. Art loses its specific character as a *work*, not in the modernist sense of reflexively transcending the limitations of its own medium, but in the post-modernist sense of becoming thoroughly assimilated into the global system of the "culture industry".³⁸ Heidegger joins Adorno in criticising the transformation of art into a technical resource deployed for, among other things, private enjoyment, commercial entertainment, institutional preservation, art-market exchange, advertising and marketing, not to mention ideological manipulation. Heidegger's rendering of the 'end of art' thesis thus remains significant as a way of understanding the ironic deflation and subjectivisation of art in post-modernity, an epoch in which the aestheticisation of everyday life in consumer culture goes hand in hand with the disappearance of autonomous art as a legitimate sphere of cultural activity.³⁹ In sum, the end of art occurs when art becomes an aesthetic resource divorced from ontological truth, disconnected from community, subjectivised into lifestyle choice, integrated into a technical system of aestheticised experience, and overpowered by techno-scientific rationalism as the definitive way in which truth is disclosed in modernity.

III

Does this rather bleak thesis—the reduction of art into aesthetic resource—imply that there is no place for *modern art* in Heidegger's philosophy of art? Numerous remarks in Heidegger's post-war writings give one the strong impression that art in modernity has ontologically decayed into mere private *Erlebnis* or technical 'culture industry' resource—and nothing else besides. As Julian Young points out,⁴⁰ Heidegger describes abstract art as having its legitimate function "in the domain of this techno-scientific world-construct";⁴¹ modern art works are "the steering-steered [*gesteuert-steurenden*] instruments of the cybernetic language of information exchange".⁴² Art no longer arises from an ethnic, cultural, or national world but is constructed and lead, rather, by scientific technology, "the universality of [our] ... world civilisation", with the result that the very essence of great art disappears.⁴³ Poetry has become subsumed within the culture industry, instrumentalised into mere "literary production",⁴⁴ while the dominance of film, the industrial-technological artform *par excellence*, exemplifies the powerful hegemony of Western techno-

rationalism, which Heidegger criticises as “the Europeanization of man and the earth [which] attacks at the source everything of an essential nature”.⁴⁵ It is notable that Heidegger refers in this context to Kurosawa’s *Rashomon*, a film that, far from presenting the “enchantment of the Japanese world”, shows the incompatibility of the East Asian sense of world and the “technical-aesthetic product of the film industry”.⁴⁶

Despite Heidegger’s evident scepticism, it is clear that at least *some* modern artworks remain capable of a non-metaphysical mode of truth-disclosure. Indeed, we find a clear endorsement, as I shall presently discuss, of the truth-disclosing power of Van Gogh’s painting of peasant shoes, along with a surprisingly sympathetic engagement with certain modern artists, namely Van Gogh, Cézanne, Georges Braque and Paul Klee. So what is one to make of the tension between Heidegger’s official rejection of modern art as ontologically decadent aestheticism, and his unofficial endorsement of at least some modern art as capable of a poetic disclosure of truth? Julian Young has suggested that this difficulty arises in Heidegger’s account of modern art because of his residual commitment to a quasi-Hegelian, Greek paradigm of great art.⁴⁷ I shall modify his thesis by arguing that Heidegger also remains committed to a transfigured version of the Hegelian overcoming of aesthetics, not through the philosophical comprehension of what art is, but rather through a *recollective poetic thinking* that could foster art as a “saving power” in modernity. To develop this thesis, I turn to one of Heidegger’s most celebrated discussions of art, his description of Van Gogh’s *Old Shoes with Laces*.

This short passage has given rise, in Young’s amusing phrase, to “a baroque foliage of secondary literature that has had progressively less and less to do with Heidegger”.⁴⁸ The overemphasis on this passage, along with the celebrated “Greek temple” passage, has given rise to the view that they provide the keys to Heidegger’s thinking on art. Heidegger’s discussion of Van Gogh’s painting, however, has little to do with a general theory of art or even the ‘true meaning’ of this particular artwork. To this extent Young’s questioning of the scholarly overestimation of this passage is sound. Young even argues that the overestimation of the Van Gogh passage is misplaced because it is simply “a testament to Heidegger’s early love of Van Gogh but almost completely irrelevant to, indeed, ... inconsistent with, the real thrust of the essay”.⁴⁹

As we have seen, the choice of a modern work as an exemplary case of great art, in the ontological sense of truth-disclosure, is indeed inconsistent with Heidegger's general rejection of modern art as lacking such truth-disclosing power. But far from being irrelevant to the argument of the "Origin" essay, I want to suggest that this poetic evocation of the being of equipment and relationship between world and earth disclosed by the work proves central to Heidegger's claim that the work 'works' by thematising aspects of our environmental context and concealed dimensions of our being-in-the-world. In this respect, Heidegger's poetic description of this work serves more than a merely rhetorical purpose.⁵⁰ *Contra* Young's dismissal of this passage, I want to suggest that it provides an important phenomenological, or rather *phenomeno-poetical* demonstration of how a particular artwork 'works'. It provides a performative enactment of the truth-disclosing power of the artwork, and does so by showing the power of a work to reveal the being of a very humble piece of equipment—a pair of old shoes.

The context of this discussion is Heidegger's account of the three prevailing interpretations of the "thingness" of the thing: the thing as bearer of properties, the thing as unity of a sensuous manifold, and the thing as a unity of matter and form.⁵¹ As earlier remarked, the interpretation of the thing as formed matter derives from the originary experience of things as items of use or *equipment* [Zeug].⁵² What, then, of the *equipmentality* of equipment? Answering this question requires that we turn to a (phenomenological) description of the being of a piece of equipment "quite apart from any philosophical theory".⁵³ To this end, Heidegger suggests "a pictorial presentation"—Van Gogh's painting—that will assist in describing a piece of equipment without theoretical prejudice, facilitating its "visual realization" in a vivid pictorial image.⁵⁴

The discussion of the painting aims to describe the being of a piece of equipment in respect of its *utility*, its handiness for use. This usefulness must be sought in the everyday use of equipment, just where we are least likely to notice the equipment *as* equipment (unless the equipment 'doesn't work', in which case the complex web of relational involvements within which this item is meaningful suddenly becomes manifest). The Van Gogh painting, however, is striking in that it offers no clue as to the context of this pair of shoes. We cannot tell where these shoes are or to whom they belong; we are simply presented with a pair of shoes against an indeterminate

background. Despite that, Heidegger points to the poetic power of the image to evoke the *world* in which this piece of equipment is embedded (the harsh but dignified cycles of traditional rural life), and the ordinarily hidden dimension of *earth* that is made manifest through the image (the non-metaphysically or poetically apprehended dimension of nature [*physis*] as self-concealing power of emergence). Heidegger indicates the poetic power of Van Gogh's painting through his own poetic reflection on what this painting is capable of evoking:

From out of the dark opening of the well-worn insides of the shoes the toil of the worker's tread stares forth. In the crudely solid heaviness of the shoes accumulates the tenacity of the slow trudge through the far-stretching and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lies the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. The shoes vibrate with the silent call of the earth, its silent gift of ripening grain, its unexplained self-refusal in the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by the uncomplaining worry as to the certainty of bread, wordless joy at having once more withstood want, trembling before impending birth, and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs *to the earth* and finds protection in the *world* of the peasant woman.⁵⁵

The point is not only that a painting such as this can provide us with 'poetic insight' into a now almost vanished world or originary experience of earth. Rather, Heidegger suggests that it discloses what this piece of equipment *is* in truth—it discloses the *being* of this equipment, not merely its serviceability [*Dienlichkeit*] but its reliability [*Verlässlichkeit*] (wherein the peasant's shoes, with their authentic aptness, differ, presumably, from a pair of generic running shoes). Indeed, Heidegger suggests here that this reliability of the peasant's shoes, disclosed in the painting, is a *more originary* way of experiencing equipment than the merely serviceable, utilitarian character of anonymous, mass-produced goods, or even of useful equipment that is simply available for use (which, interestingly, is how Heidegger discusses the "ready-to-hand" character of equipment in *Being and Time*).

Heidegger's point here, it should be noted, is not to provide a *theory* of art in the traditional sense of an *epistemologically motivated* account of the essence of art; an account that picks out those

characteristics of art that would ensure the objectivity of aesthetic judgments, or which specifies a set of criteria that would enable all subjects in principle to arrive at a consensus of aesthetic judgment concerning the validity of a work. Rather, Heidegger's aim is to provide an "ontological" account of *what art is*; not only an account of the being of the artwork but also the manner in which *art discloses Being*. The artwork works, in Heidegger's view, because it is capable of sensuously disclosing what a being *is in truth*. Thus, in the case of Van Gogh's painting, attempts to show how this artwork can evoke and reveal phenomenologically (or phenomeno-poetically) the being, or truth, of a particular being.

This reliability of the peasant woman's shoes (as distinct from the mere usefulness of standard work-boots) is an integral part of the cultural world she inhabits and its existential proximity to a more poetically experienced sense of earth. Heidegger's contrast here is between the poetic power of disclosure of this pair of shoes, which reveal the reliability of equipment, and the "worldless" character of "mere equipment", in which reliability dwindles and items of equipment consequently acquire their "boringly oppressive usualness".⁵⁶ As Heidegger observes: "World and earth exist for her and those who share her mode of being only here—in the equipment. ... for it is the reliability of the equipment which first gives the simple world its security and assures the earth the freedom of its steady pressure".⁵⁷ In very simple terms, Heidegger's contrast between world and earth is a non-metaphysical version of the traditional distinction between culture and nature, where both are understood in an originary 'Greek' sense. Heidegger points to the power of the Van Gogh painting to evoke this sense of the reliability of equipment, its truth, as embedded within a (now rare) non-metaphysical experience of the relationship between world and earth, or, expressed simply, a non-exploitative relationship of dwelling between 'culture' and 'nature'.

In allowing the painting to evoke this sense of equipment embedded in a particular configuration of world and earth, we experience phenomenologically the disclosure of the truth of a particular being. The artwork discloses "what the shoes, in truth, are"; it shows us, in a pictorial manner, the Being of a particular being.⁵⁸ We should note that Heidegger distinguishes here between *beings* (shoes, people, equipment) and the *Being* of those beings (the horizon of intelligibility in which these beings are disclosed in their presencing for us). As Julian Young observes, we should be

mindful that Heidegger's use of the term "Being" or *Sein* is ambiguous between (1) "being" in the sense of presencing, the horizon of intelligibility in which *beings* [*Seiende*] are disclosed; and (2) "Being" in the sense of concealment, un-intelligibility, the hidden source or "ground" of such horizons of world-disclosure (of "being" in the first sense). Interpretation of Heidegger is so difficult precisely because the Heideggerian *Sein* remains ambiguous between these two senses of b/Being (presencing and the concealed "ground" of presencing).⁵⁹ For Heidegger, it is the play of this "ontological difference" between Being and beings that is fundamental to the truth-disclosure performed by the work of art. This bringing of beings into unconcealment is to reveal their originary truth, the Greek sense of *aletheia*. Van Gogh's *Old Shoes* discloses the being of these shoes as equipment, belonging within a particular configuration of world and earth. So we can say that here there is "an occurring, a happening of truth at work".⁶⁰ The artwork enacts a setting-into-work of the truth of a being.

In this case at least, we have a modern work of art that performs the ontological truth-disclosure definitive of great art. But, as earlier remarked, Heidegger consistently rejects the possibility that modern art can be anything more than ontologically trivial. Heidegger's evocative description of Van Gogh's painting seems irreconcilable with his seemingly total rejection of modern art, construed as mere aesthetic resource. I would agree that Heidegger's alienation from modern art, as Julian Young has argued, is largely due to his commitment to a quasi-Hegelian 'Greek' paradigm of great art.⁶¹ Indeed, it is no surprise that the famous 'Greek temple' passage in the "Origin" essay is taken to exemplify Heidegger's philosophy of art, since such an artwork very obviously exemplifies the essential characteristics of such a paradigm. At the same time, however, it is important to remember that there is no philosophical 'theory' of art, in the epistemologically motivated sense discussed above, developed in the "Origin" essay. Heidegger is not concerned to determine the essential criteria belonging to works of art in order that they may elicit objectively valid aesthetic judgments. Rather, Heidegger attempts to pursue an ontological meditation on the essence of *art as art*, what makes an artwork a work capable of disclosing truth; a meditation guided by the light of, and directed solely towards, the question of Being.⁶² Nonetheless, what is striking here and throughout Heidegger's later self-criticisms is the tension between his claim to reveal the "essence of art", and hence provide some kind

of ontological account of what art *is*, but also to pose the question of the "riddle of art" in respect of the question of Being, and thus leave open the question of whether art has any kind of determinable "essence" as such.⁶³

For all this it remains unclear how Heidegger's exemplary artworks in the "Origin" essay—Van Gogh's *Old Shoes*, the Greek Temple at Paestum, and C.F. Meyer's poem "The Roman Fountain"—can all be regarded as examples of great art. Certainly the inclusion of the Van Gogh painting, which is hardly culture-defining or community-forming, suggests that Heidegger *does not* entirely endorse the Greek paradigm of art. By the same token, it is clear that nearly all of modern art would fail to qualify as 'great' according to the Greek paradigm. Heidegger is therefore either incoherently conflating ancient and modern art, and effectively criticising modern art for not being Greek, or else he must acknowledge that at least *some* modern art is capable of the ontological disclosure of truth, in which case we cannot say that art in modernity is simply at an end.

Heidegger's strong endorsement of the quasi-Hegelian thesis on the end of art thus reaches a crucial juncture. On the one hand, Heidegger appears to dismiss all modern art as ontologically decadent, mired within the triviality of subjectivist aesthetics; on the other, he comes to realise that the Greek model of art must be abandoned in favour of an approach more responsive to the distinctiveness and plurality of modern art.⁶⁴ This is what the later Heidegger attempts to do, largely under the influence of Hölderlin's poetry, and inspired by his discovery of modernists such as Cézanne and Paul Klee. Art is no longer understood through the Greek paradigm, nor through the conflictual strife (Heraclitean *polemos*) between world and earth, but rather as evoking a singular experience of what the later Heidegger called *das Ereignis*—the mysterious appropriative-event of Being that first makes possible the horizon of disclosure, or background sense of world, in which we always already find ourselves. The (now defunct) paradigm of great art, along with Heidegger's harsh rejection of modern art as aesthetic resource, is thus abandoned in favour of a modest retrieval of those cases of modernist art capable of evoking this unique, non-metaphysical experience of *Ereignis*.

One of the most important modern artists in this respect is Paul Cézanne. According to Jean Beaufret, Heidegger even remarked in a 1958 lecture that Cézanne's pathway was "the pathway to which,

from its beginning to its end, my own pathway of thinking responds in its own way".⁶⁵ Above all, it was Cézanne's numerous paintings of Mont Sainte-Victoire—with their progressively attenuated renderings of rock, sky, and forest through thick planes of colour and contrasting blank patches of canvas—that were astonishing precisely because of their vivid evocation of the *Ereignis*-experience. The oscillation between inchoate planes of colour and their resolution into a recognisable world of mountains, light, and fields, a resolution threatening always to dissolve once again into indeterminate patterns of colour, visually renders the play of the (ontological) difference between Being and beings. Cézanne's works are exemplary cases of how modern art might be able to *show*, to render visually, the "vibration" or oscillation between intelligible beings and the event of Being that occurs in the "worlding of world".

Paul Klee is also revered as modernist artist capable of non-aesthetic, post-metaphysical truth-disclosure. This is clearly evident in Heidegger's reported intention, inspired by Klee's work, to write a second part to the "Origin" essay.⁶⁶ Whereas Cézanne's objects or landscapes, however attenuated and planar, are nonetheless recognisable *as* objects or landscapes, Klee's art is far more idiosyncratic, ambiguously occupying, as Klee put it, a "region-between" representational and non-representational art.⁶⁷ Cézanne's primal landscapes evoke the *Ereignis*-experience of a familiar sense of world, now made strange and inhuman through the striking oscillation between world and chaos. Klee's quasi-abstract, whimsical works, by contrast, thematise the mysterious coming-forth of objects out of concealment, and work through the evocation of fantasmatic, indeterminate, dream-like worlds. In this respect, Heidegger remarks that Klee's art properly begins what Cézanne's art prepares: an *Ereignis*-experience of the poetic worlding of unfamiliar, fragmentary, indeterminate worlds.

So at least in these cases, Heidegger acknowledges that modern art has the power to evoke the *Ereignis*-experience, the "worlding of world" concealed from our ordinary experience of beings. Modern art can no longer be great, but it *can*, in singular instances, make the event of truth-disclosure visible to us. Despite his forays into Klee and Cézanne, however, Heidegger never fully developed this paradigm of non-metaphysical art. Rather, he ultimately remained bound to the quasi-Hegelian, Greek paradigm of art as part of his deeper confrontation with the metaphysical foundations of

modernity. Presumably that is why Heidegger never wrote the promised "pendant" to the "Origin" essay: the Greek and modern paradigms remain inconsistent, and Heidegger never found a way to resolve their opposition.

Heidegger's incomplete abandonment of this Greek paradigm, however, should also have meant a modification of his radical critique of the nihilism of technological modernity. For if *some* modern art remains capable of disclosing truth, then the metaphysics of subjectivity, and its manifestation in art as aesthetic resource, *cannot* be as all-encompassing as Heidegger maintains. Given that the horizon of our contemporary being-in-the-world is supposed to be defined by the essence of technology—that is, by the total disclosure of world as en-framing or *Ge-stell*, and of beings, including human beings, as available resources—then there must surely also be modern art that discloses the truth of technological modernity in such a way as to suggest a no longer metaphysical mode of dwelling. Interestingly, Heidegger appeared to find greater potential for such non-metaphysical truth-disclosure in East Asian art, particularly Japanese art and the art of Zen Buddhism.⁶⁸ But apart from these notable exceptions, such art remains largely absent in Heidegger's reflections on the riddle of art, or else is relegated to the status of "worldless" aesthetic resource.

In this respect, Heidegger remains, despite his anti-metaphysical orientation, faithful to the Hegelian paradigm of art. Heidegger simply transfigures the Hegelian claim that art is superseded by philosophy into the esoteric pronouncement that poetic thinking is what shall subtly envelop art in response to its ontological degradation. Heidegger, in his later period, seemed to become aware of this difficulty, realising that his affirmation of some cases of modern art comes into tension with his qualified endorsement of the Hegelian thesis on the end of art. In a 1960 marginal remark, he comments that his quasi-Hegelian statement that great art "dies" in the element of subjective or lived experience [*Erlebnis*] "does not say, however, say that art is absolutely at an end".⁶⁹ On the contrary, that would only be the case if modern art were to remain mired within the metaphysical subjectivism of *Erlebnis* or lived experience. Much like Hegel, Heidegger also maintains that we can hope that art will continue to develop to its highest perfection; but this will only be possible by overcoming metaphysical subjectivism—by overcoming 'aesthetics'—in favour of a renewed experience of the sense of Being:

"Everything depends on getting out of experience and into being-there [*Da-sein*], which means achieving an element for the 'becoming' of art quite other than experience".⁷⁰

The problem is that Heidegger also appeals to art as a "saving power" in modernity, precisely to foster the overcoming of, or recovery from, metaphysical subjectivism; but modern art can only play this role once *already liberated* from the deadening element of metaphysical subjectivism and its degradation of art into aesthetic resource. So art is on the one hand at an end, dying because of its subjectivisation into aesthetic resource; on the other, art is a saving power that will enable the overcoming of modern subjectivism and its pernicious effects on art as such. However, this circularity in the relationship between art and experience in modernity—the end of art in metaphysical aesthetics and the overcoming of metaphysics through non-aesthetic art—does not seem ultimately coherent as an attempt to think the ambiguous essence of art. The fate of modern art thus remains a "riddle" for us, as Heidegger admits, since it seems to have been instrumentalised into aesthetic resource, and therefore lacks the transformative or "saving power" of archaic art, which modern art nonetheless requires if it is to overcome metaphysical subjectivism. But as Hegel clearly saw, such archaic art, or even its romantic renaissance, remains unavailable in this disenchanted age. For the prose of modernity has superseded the poetry of the archaic. And with good reason, since the danger of resurrecting the monumental work, construed as community-defining paradigm, is that we risk affirming an "aestheticisation of the political", conflating the disclosure of truth in the artwork with the formation of the political state as a collective work of art.⁷¹

In this sense, Heidegger arrives at a final endorsement of the quasi-Hegelian 'end of art' thesis, which nonetheless remains undecided, dependent neither on us nor on art, but on the inscrutable history of Being. Heidegger transforms the Hegelian philosophical supersession of art in modernity into its tragic demise through metaphysical subjectivism, the degradation of truth-disclosing modern art into mere aesthetic resource. In a curious Hegelian inversion, only poetic thinking can serve as the "saving power" by enveloping art, retarding its ontological degradation, and keeping open the possibility of a post-metaphysical mode of dwelling. Far from reversing the determinism of Hegel's historical thesis, however, Heidegger's rendering of the end of art in fact

repeats its historical inevitability. For the end of art in modernity, in Heidegger's view, is no contingent occurrence but rather a fundamental symptom of the modern metaphysics of subjectivity and its historical completion in the epoch of global technology. I remark, in conclusion, that Heidegger's implicit commitment to the historical inevitability of the end of art remains a serious problem, since he at the same time insists that post-metaphysical art can serve as a regenerative source, a poetic antidote to technological nihilism. Such art, however, is either fully subsumed into the system of aesthetic resources, or else remains inaccessible until the next unforeseeable change in the historical disclosure of Being. Rather than this unhappy impasse, one would think that a genuine openness to the truth-disclosing potential of modern art, even in the age of its technological disenfranchisement, would be more in keeping with the best of Heidegger's thinking on art.

Notes

- 1 Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 50-52.
- 2 G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. I, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 103.
- 3 Heidegger, "Origin", p. 51.
- 4 Heidegger, "Origin", p. 51.
- 5 Julian Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 14-15.
- 6 Jacques Taminiaux and Julian Young have acknowledged the 'Hegelian' approach to the end of art in Heidegger's "Origin" essay. See Taminiaux, "The Hegelian Legacy in Heidegger's Overcoming of Aesthetics" in *Endings. Questions of Memory in Hegel and Heidegger*, Rebecca Comay and John McCumber, eds (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999), pp. 114-138; and Julian Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art*, pp. 6-15.
- 7 Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. I: *The Will to Power as Art*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1991), p. 84.
- 8 Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 7.
- 9 Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 103.
- 10 Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 11.
- 11 Heidegger, *Nietzsche* I, p. 84.
- 12 Heidegger, *Nietzsche* I, p. 84.

- 13 Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, p. 85.
- 14 Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, p. 84.
- 15 Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 103.
- 16 Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 103.
- 17 Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 11.
- 18 Heidegger, "Origin", p. 51.
- 19 Heidegger, "Origin", p. 50.
- 20 Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, "Six Basic Developments in the History of Aesthetics", pp. 77-91.
- 21 Heidegger, "Origin", p. 50.
- 22 Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, p. 78.
- 23 Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, p. 78.
- 24 Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic account of the role of the concept of *Erlebnis* in the subjectivisation of aesthetics. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989), esp. pp. 64-81.
- 25 Heidegger, "Origin", p. 50.
- 26 Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, p. 80.
- 27 See Arthur Danto's famous essay in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press), 1986.
- 28 Plato, *The Republic*, Book X.
- 29 Heidegger, "Origin", pp. 8-11.
- 30 Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, p. 9.
- 31 Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, p. 9.
- 32 Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy*, p. 10.
- 33 Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy*, p. 11.
- 34 Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 140.
- 35 Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, p. 83.
- 36 Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, p. 83.
- 37 Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, p. 83.
- 38 See Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry" in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso Books, 1979), pp. 120-167.
- 39 See Wolfgang Iser, *Undoing Aesthetics*, trans. Andrew Inkpin (London: Sage Publications, 1997); and Gianni Vattimo, "The Death or Decline of Art" in *The End of Modernity*, trans. Jon R. Snyder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 51-64.
- 40 See Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy*, pp. 120-121, for an account of how Heidegger's "sweeping condemnation" of modern art rests upon his questionable assumption that the absence of a Greek-paradigm artwork in modernity spells the end of art as such.

- 41 Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), p. 20.
- 42 Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1969), p. 64.
- 43 Heidegger, *Denkerfahrten*, 1910-1976 (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983), p. 153.
- 44 Heidegger, *Denkerfahrten*, p. 153.
- 45 Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 16.
- 46 Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 17.
- 47 See Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy*, esp. pp. 64-8. Young argues that it is Heidegger's encounter with Hölderlin's poetry, and Paul Klee's painting, that "educated" Heidegger's thinking about modern art.
- 48 Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy*, p. 5.
- 49 Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy*, p. 5.
- 50 As Young elsewhere acknowledges: cf. p. 70 and pp. 32-33, where he notes the link between the Van Gogh passage and an earlier discussion of a passage from Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*.
- 51 Heidegger, "Origin", pp. 4-13. Hans-Georg Gadamer points out the neo-Kantian context to which Heidegger is alluding here. Gadamer, "The Truth of the Work of Art" in *Heidegger's Ways*, trans. John W. Stanley (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 102.
- 52 Heidegger, "Origin", p. 10.
- 53 Heidegger, "Origin", p. 13.
- 54 Heidegger, "Origin", p. 13.
- 55 Heidegger, "Origin", p. 14.
- 56 Heidegger, "Origin", p. 15.
- 57 Heidegger, "Origin", pp. 14-15.
- 58 Heidegger, "Origin", p. 15.
- 59 See the helpful discussion in Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy*, pp. 3-4.
- 60 Heidegger, "Origin", p. 16.
- 61 See Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy*, pp. 51-61.
- 62 Cf. "Reflection on what *art* may be is completely and decisively directed solely toward the question of *being*. Art is accorded neither an area of cultural achievement nor an appearance of spirit; it belongs, rather, to the eventual out of which the 'meaning of being' (compare *Being and Time*) is first determined". Heidegger, "Origin", p. 55. Whether Heidegger remains faithful to this point is another matter.
- 63 See Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy*, pp. 62-68, for a discussion of Heidegger's need to discover "a middle way between the Scylla of the Greek paradigm and the Charybdis of 'aesthetics' on the other" (p. 68).

- 64 See Young's criticisms of Heidegger's "Graecocentric" reading of Hölderlin, which dogmatically claimed that art and especially poetry must "found" a culture. The later Heidegger turns to poetry as a way of evoking a sense of "festival", of "the holy", as a response to the disenchanted world of modernity. Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy*, pp. 80-83 and pp. 94-96.
- 65 Quoted in Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger 1929-1976*, trans. Kenneth Maly and Parvis Emad (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), p. 143. For a fascinating discussion of Heidegger's relationship with modern art see Petzet's chapter "Heidegger's Association with Art," esp. pp. 140-144 (on Van Gogh and Cézanne) and pp. 146-151 (on Paul Klee).
- 66 According to Otto Pöggeler, Heidegger "wanted to build upon Klee's theoretical writings and images to address the question of art in the age of technology", in his *The Paths of Heidegger's Life and Thought*, trans. John Bailiff (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997), p. 208. See also Petzet, *Encounters and Dialogues*, pp. 146 ff.
- 67 See Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy*, pp. 150-162, for an illuminating discussion of Heidegger's understanding of Cézanne and Klee.
- 68 See Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy*, pp. 147-150; Petzet, *Encounters and Dialogues*, pp. 166-183.
- 69 Heidegger, "Origin", p. 50, fn. 'b'.
- 70 Heidegger, "Origin", p. 50, fn. 'b'.
- 71 See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art, Politics. The Fiction of the Political*, trans. Chris Turner and Ian McLeod (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).