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Philosophy East and West, Volume 58, Number 2, April 2008, pp. 244-266
(Article)

Published by University of Hawai‘i Press
DOI: 10.1353/pew.2008.0018

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NOTHINGNESS AND THE WORK OF ART: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO EXISTENTIAL PHENOMENOLOGY AND THE ONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF AESTHETICS

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Existential phenomenology has played a major role within Western philosophy in the attempt to overcome the dualistic conception of the world in which an ideal or metaphysical realm exists separately from everyday reality. To understand the extent to which it has not completely succeeded in this attempt is one of the main purposes of this essay. Here I will work through a critique of some of the basic assumptions of Heidegger and Sartre regarding art, being, and truth, and demonstrate the existence of a strong relation between nothingness and works of art that has been mostly neglected in their philosophical output. My contention is that in their efforts to achieve a consistent application of the phenomenological method to the various dimensions of human existence, both Heidegger and Sartre failed to take the evidence of the negative ground of reality to its ultimate consequence, where art would appear endowed with a specific function within a larger context of being. Such a function I will call the ontological function of art—a structurally underpinning meaning and goal of all artistic endeavor that, as we shall see, is perceptible only through the benefit of a particular concept of truth where the ultimate purpose and reality of being is understood as being’s indefatigable search for its own contradiction.

I will begin by contextualizing in the history of aesthetics some of developments by Heidegger that are central to our inquiry. The understanding of his major achievements within the purview of a broader philosophical context will be central to our posterior critique of what we perceive as the main shortcomings of his assumptions. Only after such an effort has been undertaken will we find ourselves in a position to bring Sartre’s ideas into question and, through a comparative approach, point to the possibility of a development toward a new conception of being that, while springing from the very tenets of existential phenomenology, engages some specific aspects of Eastern philosophy in the explanation of the relation between art, truth, and nothingness.

For our purpose at hand, the main accomplishment of Heidegger’s theory of art lies in his attempt to re-endow the work of art with a specific function within the realm of Western philosophy and civilization. Such a function, in Heidegger’s sense, can be subsumed under the heading of the capacity of art to promote the disclosure of truth. Heidegger’s notion of truth, however, is not simply determined by the coincidence between a subject and a predicate within a proposition, a notion that
amounts to that conveyed by the Latin word *veritas*, but implies the immediacy of perceived phenomena. As such, it is tinted with an emphasis on the overcoming of two major Western philosophical disciplines, namely aesthetics and metaphysics. In the following paragraphs I will show how both of these instances imply a separation between humanity and the world that is incompatible with Heidegger’s concept of truth as the immediate presence of being.

The very concept of aesthetics emphasizes the senses as a mediating element between the human being and the world. As the realm of *aesthesis*, the aesthetic presupposes a fissure in the heart of being that in order be surpassed must be bridged by a third, sensory element. Sensation becomes, then, that which, although initially intended as the common ground between subject and object, confirms the existence of their dualism in the first place.

The dissatisfaction with the concept of aesthetics, it must be noted, has a fairly long history in Western philosophy. Right at the beginning of his *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1831), Hegel writes: “the word aesthetics, taken literally, is not wholly satisfactory, since ‘aesthetics’ means, more precisely, the science of sensation, of feeling.” While Hegel accepts to use the term only tentatively, Heidegger proceeds to a critical/etymological analysis of it in his series of lectures published under the title *Nietzsche* (1961). Heidegger’s dissatisfaction with the concept, however, goes beyond that of Hegel’s. While Hegel is primarily concerned with taking the notion of art beyond its mere relation with beauty and proceeds to emphasize its implications in human history as a whole, Heidegger departs from a deep-rooted distrust of the senses as a means of apprehending reality and providing reliable access to truth.

The separation implicit in the sensory implications of the traditional concept of aesthetics remits us to another element that perpetrates an equally dualistic conception of the world. Metaphysics appears now as the second factor that instates a fissure in being through its claim of the existence of a realm located beyond being, a realm to which truth pertains in a way that makes impossible its disclosure in and as being. Here we should be attentive to how both aesthetics and metaphysics pertain to the dominion of Cartesian dualism. The Cartesian cogito instates the separation of both subject and object, which separation is allegedly to be bridged by the sensory as well as the material world and a metaphysical realm, which can be bridged only by *re-ligare*. The main point here is that the cogito must itself be understood as a metaphysical entity separated from the world.

At any rate, we should notice that the shunning of the senses as a reliable means of access to truth precedes the reflections of Heidegger in the development of existentialist thought. I am thinking here of Kierkegaard, and how his description of the individual development toward authenticity downplays the aesthetic as an inferior stage in that pursuit. Although Kierkegaard’s circumscribing of the aesthetic mode of life as inferior to the ethical and the religious carries no direct reference to art, if we follow his considerations and place the aesthetic in a sphere where authenticity and truth are inaccessible, we will conclude that art is capable of providing access to truth only when pertaining to a realm that is beyond that of the aesthetic. Beyond such a realm, however, art will not exist for its own sake, and dealings with it will
be defined according to ethical or religious ends. In other words, beyond the aesthetic, art is endowed with function.

Repeating Kierkegaard’s distrust of the realm of the purely aesthetic, and consequently of sensory apprehension as a whole, Heidegger writes:

Much closer to us than all sensations are the things themselves. 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 abstractly.3

To “listen abstractly” means to deny the communion and identity with the world that exists at a non-mediated level. Sensations, then, are perceived as incapable of providing direct access to reality: only through a communion with being will its truth be disclosed. If we look closely at Heidegger’s denial of sensation as a feasible entrance door to truth, we will then be able to perceive that what underlies his attitude is the attempt to overcome metaphysics.

Following our argument that art can be endowed with function only when pertaining to a realm that is beyond the aesthetic, we must now recur to the history of art to be reminded of how the process of aestheticization that took place during the second half of the nineteenth century was conducted precisely as an effort to undermine art’s function. The emphasis on the purely aesthetic nature of a work of art represented a singular development where Modernity’s de-sacralization of the world, its highlighting of the individual, and its obsession with the positive sciences and technology was reflected in art’s loss of a purpose outside itself in a paradoxical way. At the same time that the work was disendowed with a specific role within human existence, be it ethical or religious, through a severe process of reification it came to concentrate within its physical boundaries something akin to a metaphysical realm. The work of art became a world in itself separated from human reality; as such it came to incorporate metaphysics and its inherent fissure between the individual and the world.

To re-endow art with a particular function and thus overcome its metaphysical character was the task to which Heidegger set himself. In order to instate a role distinct from the one in which art points toward a realm separate from human life, Heidegger inverted art’s position within the framework of human history: art’s function is no longer one of end, it is now one of origin. As art will no longer lead the human being either to an absolute realm outside life or to a reified one inside an object, something akin to an ethical role is in fact recovered: the great work of art, so contends Heidegger, is the one that changes your life. So art now becomes capable of bringing humanity into an authentic relation with its existence on earth, and in so doing it becomes also the foundation of each possible world: art is hence understood as a turning point, the origin of a new development in the life of an individual or a group.

In his bestowal of a foundational function upon the work of art Heidegger is clearly repeating on a grand scale the Husserlian cry for essences. As Husserl called for a return to a pre-mathematized world free from the bias of the positive sciences,
Heidegger, in his corresponding dislike for modern technology, discovered the primordial moment of art right at the foundation of Western civilization. The Greek paradigm appears for him, then, as the one of no beyond: right there, at the beginning of it all, metaphysics is overcome, for the gods are here and now.

But did Heidegger overcome metaphysics? We shall demonstrate that he did not. In order to do this, we will follow his thoughts. We agree with Heidegger that without metaphysics human life is on the way to recovering the sacredness within itself that it had once forsaken. And without metaphysics, the disclosure of being promoted by a work of art is one of total radiancy. The work, without question, becomes that which shines forth as pure presence; it becomes a mirror that reflects the very truth of human life, and nothing beyond it. As we have seen, such truth, albeit not the same as Kierkegaard’s, is also not that which is apprehended by the senses.

So it is true that art is now placed in a realm beyond that of the aesthetic. And as aesthesis is transcended, art now appears as a means of access to truth. For truth, for Heidegger, is *aletheia*, the life-assuring shining forth of presence that will awaken the human being to a renewed and radiant mode of existence.

Such shining radiancy, however, must be qualified. My contention is that the very truth of being as presence, which Heidegger correctly discerns as accessible only through a work of art, hides a deeper truth that Heidegger insists on overlooking. In order to arrive at a description of this truth, however, we must consider Heidegger’s own theory of language. Where we can gather from his assertions in “The Origin of the Work or Art” that for him all art is essentially poetry, and poetry is essentially language, his notion of language, I will contend, does not account for the dimension of truth that will be described here because it lacks the moment of negativity. Going beyond the status of a mere instrument of communication to become that which “alone brings what is, as something that is, into the Open for the first time,” language appears as the embodiment of Dasein’s thrownness and projection—two characteristics that, although posited by Heidegger as essential, necessitate a further reduction.

The pure positivity of Heidegger’s account of the disclosure of being/truth through language as projection hinders any further inquiry into how such a projection is possible, and on what basis it is it carried out. Something similar can be perceived in Heidegger’s presentation of the movement that proceeds from naming to saying to poetry and then to language. Here, the description of the setting up of the world of the human being is severed from a consideration of negation as indispensable to such an enterprise. As naming appears as the first moment in the creation of the Open, we are left with a pure positivity that gives no account of the basis on which the truth of being can be disclosed through poetic language. Even in his notion of *Streit*, which, as we shall see, at first glance seems prone to opening a space for contradiction and negativity in the heart of the relation between world and earth, pure positivity still remains the rule.

In order to appreciate more fully the scope of this positivity in Heidegger’s thought we must turn to a later work where language is again conceived as primarily
affirmative. In The Basic Problems of Phenomenology (1975) Heidegger’s investigation of the phenomenon of assertion is carried out as a description of the primary structure of language, and as such of the human world. Notwithstanding his attempt to ground the concept of assertion ontologically, Heidegger stops short of a thorough, eidetic description that would bring to light the necessity of grounding the concept in a negative structure. Here, although his resorting to the Aristotelian logos apophantikos does bring him to avow that each logos, as assertion, is either true or false, and as such implies a certain negativity, he again neglects undertaking a consistent inquiry into the fundamental possibility of such a falsehood. When he affirms that the judgment is the vehicle of truth (and a judgment consistently implies an assertion), he does not go on to question what is the necessary foundation for any judgment at all to be carried out. Nevertheless, Heidegger does realize that something has to be already disclosed in order for Dasein to name, judge, or assert anything about such phenomena. He writes: “Assertion does not as such primarily unveil: instead, it is always already related to something antecedently given as unveiled.” If something is already unveiled, however, this “something” is already in truth, that is, its being is already uncovered (in the case of things), or disclosed (in the case of Dasein). Thus, Heidegger’s affirmation that unveiling (which comprises both uncovering and disclosing) “is the basic function of assertion” is inconsistent with his previous avowal of assertion as dependent on something antecedently given as unveiled.

As Daniel Dahlstrom points out, Heidegger “attempts to do justice to the particular relation of assertions to some sense of truth, without losing sight of Aristotle’s insight that the definition of an assertion presupposes a concept of truth.” The question then becomes whether or not we are on the right path by pursuing a concept of truth that, in order to be valid, depends on another, prior concept of truth. At any rate, if we are willing to perceive an inconsistency, I would like to point out that such an inconsistency springs from a fundamental difficulty in Heidegger’s ontology, namely its lack of the dimension of consciousness. Without such a dimension Heidegger loses intentionality as a vital element that would bring to the forefront of the discussion of truth the question of how the disclosure of being is actually carried out. Although Heidegger does mention that truth is not in things, but lies “in the middle ‘between’ things and Dasein,” and that “unveiling has an intentional structure,” without a thorough phenomenological description of consciousness and of its engagement with the world (be it through separation or through continuity) Heidegger’s concept of intentionality becomes weakened for an effective explication of the disclosure of truth as unveiling.

Heidegger’s shunning of the dimension of consciousness from Dasein is clearly a corollary of his insistence on being-in-the-world as the beginning of any inquiry into human reality. As Dahlstrom suggests, “Heidegger replaces intentionality with being-in-the-world but retains the transcending character of intentionality yielded by Husserl’s various analyses (e.g., his analyses of categorical intuitions, time, and kinesthesia), analyses that doom any representationalist or mentalist conception of human subjectivity.” Dasein is always already in the world, and consciousness,
in a way, is before the world; that is, it is something that in being a prerequisite is also prior. It is clear that the Husserlian conception of consciousness as enmeshed in a transcendental ego provokes a dualism to which Heidegger refuses to fall prey. One can infer from this that Heidegger’s apparent dissatisfaction with and avoidance of the concept of consciousness is determined in fact by his adhering to the Husserlian concept, which would not be challenged until as late as 1937, with the publication of Sartre’s The Transcendence of the Ego. It must be said that once the dimension of consciousness is denied to the Dasein, as it is from its very dawn in Being and Time (1927), it becomes impossible for Heidegger to recover it later.16 And without consciousness, Heidegger’s theory of language and poetry cannot reach the level where naming, saying, assertion, and truth are conceived under the umbrella of a more basic linguistic element that instantiates the human relation to the world. This element, I contend, is questioning.

The difficulty with Heidegger’s theory of language, then, is that it overlooks the fact that the elements he considers as foundational, such as, for instance, assertion and naming, are only secondary to the positing of a previous question. Although his Dasein is defined as the being to which its own being is question, Heidegger is not attentive to the fact that if one asserts something like “the door is closed” or “the day is clear,” such assertions depend, respectively, on the questions “what is the present state of the door (open, closed)?” and “what is the day like (clear, cloudy, rainy)?” Also with the concept of naming, the same lack of a further reduction is clearly at hand. For to name something a chair, for example, implies first the positing of the question “What is this?—A chair, a book, a table?”

Such shortcomings ensue, again, from the undeniable positivity of Heidegger’s conception of language. In that sense, what is at stake here—more than the recognition of mere truisms—is the necessity of the appreciation of the negative moment as indispensable to a coherent theory of language that will be capable of elucidating the phenomenon of truth. Here it is important to keep in mind that the negativity that Heidegger forsakes operates, first and foremost, at the level of difference. For the act of, for instance, naming implies, in every case, determining the thing being named as not being something else. Here the very movement of perception is called into play, and naming appears as contingent on the primary differentiation between background and foreground. For to “name” something means to bring such an entity to the foreground on the basis of denying its identity with what becomes the background. Intentionality, at this point, appears embedded in a constant denial of that which is not to be called forth to the foreground in any act of perception. Such a notion of intentionality as negation is consistent, as we shall see, with a theory of consciousness defined as the corollary of an unconditional flight of Being from itself.

At this point, however, it is important to restate that if language is expected to be capable of disclosing the truth of being, such a capability is contingent on it being also capable of bringing phenomena from the background to the foreground. If this bringing, however, can be accomplished only on the basis of a negative moment (difference), such negation, then, would have to pass through a thorough phenom-
enological description in order to disclose the very process through which truth comes to the world. It is in this sense, that is, under the aegis of a purely positive notion of truth, that Heidegger fails to account for the primordial element of language as negation and, as such, to reach an understanding of negativity as the specifically human mode of being-in-the-world. We shall shortly see how such a failure is reflected in Heidegger’s inability to overcome metaphysics.

At the moment, however, we must attend to another branch of existential phenomenology and take into consideration the fact that the grounding of language and human reality in the activity of questioning is thoroughly undertaken by Sartre. Here the dimension of consciousness is consistently raised back to the privileged position it held in the thought of Husserl. Nevertheless, something akin to the dualistic nature of the “rift” between earth and world presented by Heidegger in “The Origin of the Work of Art” (about which more shortly) appears still at play in Sartre’s attempt at an all-encompassing concept of Being that in its unity is nonetheless divided into two distinct regions. Of importance to our inquiry is the fact that the virtual separation of Being into the for-itself and the in-itself is what brings the phenomenon of questioning into the world. The question is now correctly construed as the characteristic relation between the two regions, and also as inexorably contingent on the phenomenon of negation: in order for a question to be posed, so explains Sartre, the possibility of a negative answer has to be at hand, for otherwise the question itself would be unnecessary. Nonbeing enters the world, then, at the moment when consciousness, or the for-itself, projects itself into the barrenness and contingency of the in-itself.

Sartre proceeds from traditional Husserlian phenomenological grounds where Cartesian dualism is allegedly overcome. In his inquiry, consciousness appears as being always the consciousness of something, that is, as the indissoluble encounter of subjectivity and the world, two entities that are (conveniently) conceived as existing in a subtle relation of continuity. What separates consciousness and the world, then, is nothing but a slight, infinitely delicate film of negation that envelops the world through the very presence of human reality. For if consciousness does not exist without an object that it is the consciousness of, in and of itself consciousness amounts to nothing. The being of human reality, then, is defined as the being through which nothingness enters the world. And nothingness can enter the world only through the act of questioning. Sartre insists that, just as with the Dasein, the for-itself is a being that, in its being, has its being in question. However, he goes a step further to assert that in order for the for-itself to be capable of putting itself in question, the for-itself must be separated from itself; that is, it must not be in total identity with itself, for otherwise the question would be, again, unnecessary. The for-itself, then, is separated from itself by nothingness, that is, by its very condition as consciousness.

Although Sartre’s concept of nothingness is not directly expanded into the realm of aesthetic inquiry, the philosophical implications of its relation to the work of art invite reflection. The connection of art and nothingness could actually be surmised from Sartre’s account of the question as the fundamental relation between humanity
and the world. In *Being and Nothingness* (1943), he writes: “every question supposes that we realize a withdrawal in relation to the given, which becomes a simple presentation, fluctuating between being and Nothingness.” From this perspective, we might ask ourselves if such a “presentation,” and conversely the question from which it springs, could not be identified with the work of art itself. Here it is important to have in mind that the notion of art as a question is not new in the history of philosophy of art. In comparing the beauty of art and nature in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel writes that the work of art “is essentially a question, an address to the responsive breast, a call to the mind and the spirit.” If we accept Hegel’s formulation and observe it in connection with Sartre’s aforementioned thesis of question and presentation, then we may be on our way to place the work of art in a realm that, as a question, fluctuates between being and nothingness.

Sartre’s idea of the realization of a withdrawal from something that then becomes a “presentation” is conspicuously akin to his notion of abstraction, defined as “the revelation of a nothingness of being beyond being.” This “revelation” is the product of a double external negation where the for-itself appears first as transcendence, that is, as engaged in a withdrawal from the world as ground, and subsequently as the source of a second negation that will establish difference between the “this” and the “that.” From this difference springs the possibility of understanding quality as the result of a basic form of abstraction. Primarily, every quality of a being is not at all separated from the totality of that being. Following this idea, Sartre states that “the apprehension of a quality does not add anything to being except the fact that being is there as this.” Here we have a withdrawal, and a presentation. Qualities reveal aspects of being through a process of abstraction that adds nothing to it. As with any other qualities, then, aesthetic qualities would be mere abstractions with no real existence in and of themselves.

But besides acknowledging that aesthetic qualities are not independent beings, we need to recognize that an investigation of the relation between art and nothingness must lead us beyond the mere assertion of the insubstantiality of aesthetic impressions. In fact, it must make us overcome the aesthetic and the sensory as a whole. For even as a question that fluctuates between being and nonbeing, if we understand its posing as dependent on a specific material medium, then art will still be caught in the materiality of the work. But if we are otherwise willing to understand it as indivisible from nothingness, then art’s ontological ground has to be found somewhere outside any object. Only by going beyond aesthetic qualities altogether—that is, only in a position where the work itself is not perceived as indispensable—can art be granted entrance to the no-place of nonbeing.

In order to speculate further on the relation between art and nothingness in the thought of Sartre we would have to proceed to a detailed analysis of his notion of imagination. Since such an endeavor cannot be carried out here, it suffices to say that for Sartre what is apprehended in aesthetic intuition is always an imaginary object and that, for him, the imaginary means “the negation of the world in its essential structure.” But if imagination is a negation of the world, then what would imagination be if not a projection of being toward nothingness?
Here we arrive at an ontological question that cannot be eschewed in our inquiry. The problem of how nothingness comes to the world appears now as fundamental to an understanding of the nihilation process that we perceive as inherent in art. If we are willing to take matters to the foundation of real beginning, then we must start at part two of Being and Nothingness, where Sartre deals with the ontological structure of temporality. There, Sartre approaches the problem of birth in a way that, I contend, falls short of a thorough phenomenological description that would bring to light a tentative answer to the question of how nothingness appears in the world. The moment of the upsurge of consciousness, which Sartre perceives through the shocking realization that suddenly consciousness comes to “inhabit” the embryo, is construed as the nihilation of the in-itself. In Sartre’s own words, “it is as the nihilation of the In-itself that the For-itself arises in the world.” What we miss hearing from Sartre is that such a nihilation of the in-itself can only have started with the in-itself itself. This basic understanding would be the most fundamental element of an ontology that understands Being as inseparable from Nothingness. If the nihilation of the in-itself comes from the very in-itself, and if such a peculiar in-itself (the human embryo) is in fact inseparable from the totality of the in-itself (for difference can come to the world only through the for-itself), then what we have at hand is the totality of Being (in-itself) arriving at a peculiar region where it becomes capable of nihilating itself, that is, denying itself. Human-reality (or the for-itself), then, would be a particular region of Being that is able to get a glimpse of its (Being’s) own contradiction. This contradiction is nothingness—and I am trying to demonstrate that it is also art.

But before we can account for art as a withdrawal into nothingness (and a consequent reversal back into being) we must linger a little longer on Sartre’s phenomenological ontology and allow a certain degree of circularity in order to reach an acceptable description of the problem at hand. Sartre maintains that “the human being reposes first in the depths of being and then detaches himself from it by a nihilating withdrawal.” This idea, I contend, is inconsistent with his view that the in-itself is the realm of self-identity, while the for-itself is incomplete and in a perpetual search for the very same self-identity. If we follow Sartre’s thought, we will have to agree that the for-itself wrenches itself away from the in-itself just in order to begin immediately an effort to go back to it. Although Sartre himself denies this interpretation—for he recognizes that this would mean the total annihilation of the for-itself—we are left with no real option if the emphasis on self-identity is to be placed in the in-itself.

The problem here is clearly of an epistemological order. The definition of the in-itself as being what it is, as opposed to the for-itself, which is forever incomplete, produces a fissure in Being that comes very close to a repetition of basic Cartesian dualism. It not only disregards the fact that, as we have seen, the for-itself has to be also an in-itself, but inordinately places the realm of stability where only impermanence can be detected. To believe that the in-itself is stable is to overlook the undeniable contingency, irrationality, and absurdity of Being. In the same vein, to affirm that the for-itself wishes to achieve the stability of the in-itself is inconsistent if, as we
have seen, “the human being reposes first in the depths of being and then detaches himself from it by a nihilating withdrawal.” For it is hardly reasonable to think that the for-itself would detach itself from the depths of being if it were just “reposing” there in the first place. Although one could contend that such a detachment occurs precisely as part of what we have just called the universal contingency of being, we could provide a counterargument by saying that if the in-itself were in fact stable and existed in total self-identity, and if in spite of it the upsurge of consciousness occurred as a profound mistake carried out at the level of the in-itself to its own detriment, in such cases human reality not only would be reduced to a mere undesirable condition of the in-itself, which at large hardly amounts to a real difficulty, but would also amount to something worthy of annihilation, that is, an annihilation that would take place for the sake of the in-itself’s own and prior integrity.

This logic, however, would obviously be inconsistent with Sartre’s avowal of the absurdity of the for-itself’s self-annihilation. In other words, if the in-itself is in fact the realm of stability and self-identity, and if the for itself wishes to achieve such self-identity, then the annihilation of the for-itself could be regarded only as a desirable and noncontradictory event. It must be noted that something like the will to live would hardly be granted the slightest appearance in this kind of ontological theory.

It must be avowed that in some places Sartre does qualify his assertions to a view where the for-itself is posited as looking for stability in what he calls the in-itself-for-itself. This view repeats the notion of the human being as the wish to be God. Here we would be inclined to agree with Sartre, were it not for the fact that the initial dualism is still present (and as such a metaphysical conception of reality). What we fail to find among Sartre’s assertions is a true overcoming of the Cartesian dichotomy, where not only human reality would be defined as the wish to be God, but the totality of Being would be understood as such a wish, a wish in which the human reality would be conceived as nothing more than a particular moment.

Another difficulty that issues from Sartre’s inability to overcome dualism is that, again, by perceiving the in-itself as stable, he is clearly taking the point of view of the for-itself. Failure to step away from such a standpoint makes Sartre overlook his own contention that outside human reality there is only indeterminacy. Without a human witness there are no trees or dogs or rivers, but just instances of the total contingency of Being. This contingency, in its turn—and here is where Sartre’s inquiry leaves off—is the expression of a total movement where trees become ashes that dissolve into rivers that become clouds that turn into water that is drunk and becomes part of dogs and so on. This kind of movement can very well be avowed as existing independently of a human witness.

If we could speculate, then, on “how,” or even on “why,” nothingness enters the world, that is, how or why the upsurge of consciousness / the for-itself occurs, we would be inclined to imagine that if nothingness is understood as the contradiction of being (that is, if being precedes nothingness), if being is contingent and unstable (in perpetual movement), and if the for-itself looks anxiously for stability, then, taking into consideration that the for-itself has to be a part of the totality of being (so that we overcome basic dualism), the upsurge of consciousness could only be
the result of the totality of being’s (unstable) effort to achieve stability in its own con-
tradiction (nothingness).

It is clear that we have approached a region of uncertainty and sheer speculation
that will lead us to very difficult questions about the accessibility of the mind-
independent world. But as an inquiry into such complex issues is not within the
scope of this essay, it will suffice to say that the step outside human reality that we
demand of Sartre appears to be one of the greatest difficulties for Western thought in
general. This difficulty is clearly based on the West’s dualistic concept of reality (that
is, on metaphysics). Heidegger’s notion of world and earth, for example, falls into a
dichotomy similar to the one that construes the upsurge of consciousness as the re-
result of the division of Being into in-itself and for-itself. Similar to Sartre’s conception
of the for-itself as a longing for a never-attainable self-identity, Heidegger’s notion of
world and earth also points to the human being as standing against an earth that it
tries to surmount. Although Heidegger skillfully defines world and earth as two enti-
ties that are “essentially different from one another and yet are never separated,”26
his very assertion of such entities can only spring from a perspective that does not
really consider them to be inseparable. If Heidegger were willing to perceive world
and earth from a thoroughly general and inclusive perspective, that is, as the world
issuing from and pertaining to the earth, his assertion in “The Origin of the Work of
Art” that “the world, in resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it”27 would forc-
ibly be translated as “the earth, in resting upon itself, strives to surmount itself, from
which endeavor the world, as nothing but a reflection of earth’s attempt to reach its
own contraction, ensues.” The difference here is very clear: by giving earth a priority
over the world, one has to speculate on a rationale for earth’s turning itself into the
world.

Again, similar to Sartre’s notion of the for-itself’s search for self-identity in the in-
itself, Heidegger’s concept of Streit is clearly indicative of a dualism that attempts to
be resolved in an oddly backward way. While the for-itself tries to go back to a sta-
bility that it formerly possessed, Heidegger avows that “in the strife the unity of
world and earth is won,”28 a unity that must have been there in the first place if the
earth is to be given priority to the world, that is, if the world is to have ensued from
the earth. It is clear that our speculations will make very little sense if we are not
willing to consider the existence of a peculiar teleology implicit both in Sartre’s up-
surge of the for-itself as well as in Heidegger’s origin of the world. In spite of the fact
that the world and the for-itself, as two entities that are inseparable from the earth
and the in-itself, necessarily share, in such instances, an irrationality and essential
lack of purpose, their wrenching away from these initial states must be considered
from a logical standpoint if we are to engage in what is called philosophy. My con-
tention is that both the for-itself’s search for self-identity and the world’s Streit issue
from the same situation of unrest and instability, and cannot be resolved back into
the in-itself or the earth without some important qualifications. Once again, the
world’s and the for-itself’s search cannot be for a realm that exists beyond the earth
or beyond the in-itself. Their search has to be for the contradiction of the in-itself and
the earth, a contradiction that supposes both instances as preexisting.
Only by adhering to this view will metaphysics be overcome. For here we no longer have a desired realm of beyond, nor a (veiled) separation. We have instead reached an impasse. For although the search for being’s contradiction cannot be carried out without the presence of being, this presence must be not at hand. The contradiction of being can be achieved only through being’s absence, although its presence is indispensable. Being’s absence, then, must be understood as nothing other than the abstraction of being. This abstraction is the nothingness of being.

We have undoubtedly reached the point where dualism is done away with. We now can recognize the essential undifferentiatedness of being and nothingness. From this, we gather that to look for the contradiction of something is not to look for its annihilation, but to search for its denial. The for-itself and the world, then, can be nothing but the result of the in-itself and the earth’s attempt at its own negation, or, to use Sartre’s term, its own nihilation; such nihilation, defined as world and for-itself, is not simply expressed in human life, it is human life.

To put it in other words: nothingness, as the nihilation of the in-itself, can be found only in human life (consciousness); the world, as the nihilation of the earth, can be found only in the experience of that nothingness (human life). Through nothingness, then, metaphysics is overcome; hence, nothingness is life affirming.

A clear distinction between being and nothingness is what lies at the heart of metaphysics. Metaphysics, by equating the material world with being, and by not taking into full consideration that nothingness cannot be differentiated from being, sets nothingness in opposition to it. Through a further miscalculated move, metaphysics, then, equates human life with being, which, from the start, is correctly perceived as contingent. Life, then, is not understood as the very attempt to contradict such contingency, but is construed as simply inherent in being’s contingency. The overcoming of this contingency, then, appears to metaphysics as possible only outside life in general. What is detectable in this process is the hidden belief that the contingency of being can somehow be overcome. Metaphysics appears, then, and for the most part, as humanity’s childish conviction that there is a better alternative to life. So the key to overcoming metaphysics is a very simple one: human life is nothing but being’s failed attempt to contradict its own contingency. There is nothing, and there will never be anything beyond that.

From this standpoint we would promptly acknowledge the incontrovertible truth of Hölderlin’s observation that “Life is death, and death is also life.” For only through life does nothingness, as the contradiction of being, come into the world as the attempt at a cessation of instability; death, as a going back to perpetual contingency, is thus not an end but a continuation.

Metaphysics then, un-endows human life with any sacred quality. And we should remember that metaphysics, as Octavio Paz correctly perceived, is the path taken by the West since Parmenides. The history of the West, in consequence, appears as the history of an error. This error is entrenched in the essentially materialistic nature of metaphysics. For its dualism calls for a vision of reality that opposes mind to body, subject to object, for-itself to in-itself, earth to world. In Heidegger we encounter this form of materialism in a theory of art that cannot completely tran-
scend the notion of the work of art as encased in some sort of object. Although, as we have seen, his conception of the work of art as a thing-like element is qualified by a definition of the “thing” as something much closer to us than the very sensations through which it can be approached, Heidegger’s identification of the work as embedded in language still carries the mark of metaphysics. That Heidegger’s thought does represent a major step toward the overcoming of metaphysics is indisputable. However, I will argue that his emphasis on language brings art, and with it the entire world of the human, back to a separation between subject and object, nothingness and being.

For language is nothing other than the very expression of that separation. Albeit founded in a negative moment, and as such inherent in nothingness, language must be seen as the reification of this nothingness. As such it operates as a barrier between nothingness and being. Language brings nothingness into opposition with being, and proceeds to materializing and reifying this nothingness. It looks for a place of stability in a concrete realm of nothingness beyond being, instead of simply disclosing nothingness in being. As the realm of reified absence, then, language is also the realm of the ego: it is always in the world and appears only as posterior to the fissure between earth and world, in-itself and for-itself. And the realm of the ego is that of separation. Language, then, can be conceived only as mediation. It can be conceived as nothing but a bridge that in trying to connect two entities that were never really separated ends up working as a hindrance to their communion.

We have reached the point were we can account for our initial contention that existential phenomenology was unsuccessful in overcoming metaphysics. Here we perceive that both Heidegger and Sartre fall short in this enterprise for not being capable of transcending Western dualism. By regarding language as the main locus of human activity in the world, they both resolve their phenomenological investigations back to the realm of the ego. The emphasis on language takes Heidegger to equate the origin of the work of art with the origin of a particular nation or people. His investigations thus retreat to a realm of separation defined by national identity and linguistic circumscription. We do have to allow that at a later moment Heidegger does conceive of a more secure place for human life and art, where concealment, in a way similar to absence and nothingness, becomes a place of tranquility and stillness.

Nevertheless, his primary emphasis on the historical nature of Dasein and the implications for language that such an emphasis entails are far from his considerations. Sartre, through a similar move, directs his theory of nothingness toward value, action, and freedom. As nothingness becomes the ground of the for-itself’s insurmountable inability not to choose, political engagement is called forth as the proper locus of artistic endeavor. In this sense Sartre also falls back to a realm of separation where the ego ends up reappearing in opposition to a world inside which it is now enlisted for political strife. Both Sartre and Heidegger fall for the basic fallacy of history as a structural category of human reality. By relying on language they cannot conceive of nothingness and stillness as a breaking away from temporality, and hence from history. Sartre in fact perceives nothingness as the ground of all nihilations that bring forth temporality. Even understood as the very core of consciousness,
nothingness for Sartre is not simply that which makes possible the perception of temporality as the understanding of the constant motion of being, but is construed as the ontological ground of such change. Heidegger, in a similar vein, places the origin of the work of art at the origin of history, a history that instead of being universal and all-inclusive is compartmentalized and divided into separate, language-bound systems. The conclusion we reach at this point is that as a realm of mediation and separation language must be understood also as the realm of history (understood as an event separated from the universal contingency of Being). As the phenomenological method is essentially descriptive (i.e., language-dependent), Heidegger and Sartre, by adhering to it, were unable to take their investigations toward an original dimension beyond history where art and nothingness could coexist in total unity with Being.31

It is at this point that we must introduce some examples of Eastern philosophy in comparison with existential phenomenology and work toward an ontology that develops from an East/West perspective. We will start by pointing out Eastern philosophy’s capability of shedding light on the inability of existential phenomenology to transcend the category of history. In this regard, Heidegger’s encounter with the Thai Buddhist monk Bikkhu Maha Mani is especially illustrative.32 Contrary to Heidegger’s emphasis on Dasein’s attunement as its original relation to history, Bikkhu Maha Mani states: “We know no history. There are only passings of worlds.” In this statement we encounter a perception of the world that does not detain itself in particular developments concerning specific historical settings, but starts from a comprehensive view of the totality of Being to assert that worlds come and go from the surface of an all-encompassing entity that is always in motion. Here we are beyond the separation between world and earth.

Concerning the overcoming of this separation, Bikkhu Maha Mani’s assertion should not be regarded as a minor curiosity, but, on the contrary, should be observed in all its scope and for all its implications. For here we seem to be approaching an answer to the question of how it is possible to overcome metaphysics. As Joan Stambaugh notes, “The whole of metaphysics with its separation of essence and existence belongs on one side of another, more fundamental division: the ontological difference, the difference between Being and beings.”33 If our contention is correct that this difference ensues from language, we can qualify Stambaugh’s later assertion that “all ‘doing’ is itself metaphysical”34 and assert that, more than all doing, all saying is metaphysical.

The aforesaid must then be regarded in the light of the West’s emphasis on language. Here we might even risk the assertion that the West is in fact obsessed with language. As such it will also be obsessed with identity, with the separation between human beings and the world, and between human beings and themselves. History, as we have seen, issues from this kind of separation, which in turn issues from language. As separation is precisely that which lies at the heart of metaphysics, my contention is that history together with language is the realm of metaphysics.

In approaching the relation of the for-itself to the in-itself we have tried to understand the former as resulting from a movement of the latter toward its own contradic-
tion. If consciousness is then conceived as the ultimate degree to which there is a total movement of Being toward its opposition, we will have achieved the overcoming of the separation between consciousness and the world, and consequently of metaphysics as a whole. But we will still have to face the problem that such an overcoming will be valid only as long as we can describe consciousness as inseparable from the totality of being. More than a mere truism, we are faced here with a major difficulty. For at this point we encounter the necessity of using language to describe something that we intend to account for as undifferentiated but which language itself is primarily responsible for setting in difference. So once again our only option is to attempt an account that starts from a perspective that is placed outside human reality. As we have seen, to achieve this standpoint has been one of the major difficulties of Western thought.

This standpoint, however, is not new to Eastern philosophy. Zen Buddhism and Taoism, for instance, consistently perceive a uniform ground existing prior to the separation of subject and object. If Tao, on the one hand, can be understood as “the source of what we call reason and mind,”35 that is, something that as a source must also be prior, then Zen, on the other hand, suggests precisely the existence of a peculiar locus where subject and object are not yet differentiated and where all understanding is grounded. The standpoint of such perceptions is clearly on the side of the totality of being, as opposed to the emphasis on human reality as a separate entity from which all knowledge ensues. Instead of opposing consciousness to world, then, Tao and Zen perceive the mind as an entity that issues from and is indissolubly linked with the world. In this regard, the development of Nishida Kitarō’s philosophy is particularly illustrative of the possibility of a move from a consciousness-centered inquiry toward one that takes the world as the starting point of reflection. As Masao Abe notes: “With The Fundamental Problems of Philosophy, Nishida shifted from seeing the world from the standpoint of the self in terms of individual consciousness to seeing the self from the standpoint of the world in terms of the self-determination of the world.”36

This “self-determination of the world” is certainly akin to what we perceive as the total movement of Being toward its contradiction, an all-encompassing movement that, as we have seen, implies a peculiar teleology where Being appears entangled in a paradoxical advancement that goes from itself toward itself as its own negation. This teleology, it must be noted, is in fact present in Nishida’s thought. In presenting his concept of the will, Nishida writes: “What we call the demands of reason are actually demands for a greater unity; they are demands of the universal system of consciousness that transcends the individual person, and they can even be seen as the manifestation of a great, trans-individual will.”37

In spite of its being called the “demands of reason,” Nishida’s concept denotes a perspective that goes beyond consciousness as the starting point of intellectual inquiry. The very term “reason” in this fragment should be understood as part of a much larger context than the one articulated by the Western notion of logos. We hear of a “trans-individual will,” and of its demands. Despite its recognizable Schopenhauerian tone, Nishida’s “will” goes beyond that of a pure, irrational desire to
live. Furthermore, the originality of Nishida’s ideas lies in the fact that he was capable of determining the accessibility of this trans-individual will through a process of fusion between consciousness and the world that is achieved at the level of what he calls “pure experience.”

As the result of an inward movement that arrives at the ultimate ground of all reality, pure experience appears as the locus of the total identification of nothingness with being. Here the separation of consciousness and the world no longer holds sway, for the movement required to achieve pure experience implies a leap beyond the ego toward a realm of unity and self-identity. We encounter at this point something very similar to what Graham Parkes perceives as implicit in Heidegger’s assertion that in order to achieve a truly authentic form of dealing with the world Dasein must forget itself. Parkes refers to section 69(a) of *Being and Time*, where Heidegger writes: “A specific kind of forgetting is essential for the temporality that constitutes being in relevance. In order to be able to ‘really’ get to work ‘lost’ in the world of tools and to handle them, the self must forget itself.” As Parkes suggests, “forgetting the self means opening it up to allow one’s actions to be guided by the authentic self, which, itself nothing, is one with the nothing of the world.”

Although Parkes clearly goes beyond what Heidegger himself is willing to state, his interpretation is promptly validated when regarded in connection with the larger project of the existential analytic of Dasein and the ontological implications of care, attunement, and temporality that conform its being-in-the-world. The idea of Dasein’s authentic loss of itself in the world, then, must be seen as issuing from a strong belief in the possibility of a communion between humanity and the world. It must be understood also as part of the same attempt at emphasizing the unity of consciousness and the world displayed in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” where, as we have seen, Heidegger states that “Much closer to us than all sensations are the things themselves” (see p. 3). Dasein’s loss of itself in the world, then, is nothing more than humanity’s retrieval of the things themselves, that is, the final accomplishment of its return “back to the things themselves.”

Nishida and Heidegger could thus be perceived as aiming at the same mark. Nevertheless, their difference lies in what has been mentioned above regarding the perspective from which one carries out one’s investigation. While Heidegger takes the point of view of the self, that is, of Dasein as already in the world, and then tries to work back to the world through avowing a “forgetting of the self” that will disclose truth as pure presence of being, Nishida considers a unified field of identity as the ground in which the self is built. In his own words:

Over time I came to realize that it is not that experience exists because there is an individual, but that an individual exists because there is experience. I thus arrived at the idea that experience is more fundamental than individual differences, and in this way I was able to avoid solipsism.40

My impression is that once philosophical inquiry starts from a separation it can hardly move back to a unity. Although in Nishida in order to achieve pure experience a certain rearward move is still required, the identity of self and world is clearly
conceived as the real origin, as opposed to a beginning that starts at the separation of earth and world founded, but also allegedly bridged, by the hybrid work of art / (poetic) language.

Further reflection on the relation between Nishida’s thought and existential phenomenology would lead us to point out the similarity between Nishida’s grounding of all reality in a field of pure experience and Sartre’s claim of consciousness’ priority to the ego. Here again, however, unlike Sartre, Nishida does not fall back onto the world of the ego to identify in it a paradoxical realm of freedom. For, to Nishida, the realm of pure experience is in fact the only possible realm of freedom: “Pure experience is an animated state with maximum freedom in which there is no gap between the demands of the will and their fulfillment.” In this sense, instead of crying for a forgetting of the self that will disclose the truth of being to Dasein, or justifying a call for political engagement on the basis of the for-itself’s inability not to choose, Nishida will propose an inward movement of the self toward itself. Pure experience will then be the result of this kind of movement. Again, in Nishida’s words, “When one directly experiences one’s own state of consciousness, there is not yet a subject or an object, and knowing and its object are completely unified. This is the most refined type of experience.”

Here one might argue that Nishida’s view is not that of existentialism, that he does not conceive of existence as prior to essence, and that as such his inquiry is geared toward a realm that is not attentive to everyday human life. To this we might counterargue by saying that it is not that Nishida does not perceive existence as prior to essence; what he does not perceive is existence as separated from essence. Pure experience is possible only in life, that is, in existence. As the realm of identity between self and the world, pure experience is also the locus of authentic life.

One clear indication of the existential nature of the concept of pure experience is that it is also conceived as the realm of poiesis. Art cannot be separated from life, and in Nishida art takes the role of accounting for reality as a whole. The material component of the work of art is thus transcended, for “True reality, like the true meaning of art, is not something that can be transmitted from one person to another. All we can transmit is an abstract shell.” We find ourselves now also beyond the realm of the aesthetic conceived as the locus of the sensory. Abstraction is correctly perceived as grounded in negation: nothingness comes into being at the same time that contradiction is conceived as inherent in reality. In Nishida’s words, “Reality is established by contradiction. Red things come into being in opposition to things that are not red, and things that function are established in opposition to things that function reciprocally. When these contradictions disappear, reality disappears as well.”

Using Nishida’s concept of pure experience we can devise a new function of art. If pure experience is the realm of poiesis, and if that realm is also the realm of true reality conceived as the “free development that emerges from the internal necessity of a single unifying factor,” then the poetic, and hence art, would be that unifying element that causes being to come to terms with its own contradiction. For the unification required is one that would bring being out of its contingency, and since such
a contingency can be overcome only with the contradiction of being, nonbeing becomes the final goal of pure experience and poiesis. Nevertheless, as pure non-being is not a real possibility—for a negation depends always on the existence of that which is negated—we end up with a circular movement where being tries to depart from itself in order, at the end, to find nothing but itself. In sum, conceived as poetic experience, art assumes a new function within the order of being: to bring to view, and finally to consummate, being’s continual search for a realm of stability in a nonexisting dimension outside itself. Nothingness is such a dimension. As pure negation, this dimension can only refer back to that which it negatees.

Here we encounter one last element that must be considered so that our inquiry can be brought to a close. We are faced now with the question of truth. If we are willing to follow Heidegger and define truth as aletheia, and we remember that the concept means the disclosure of that which is, as it is, then we will have to ask ourselves about the meaning of such a disclosure; that is, we will need to face the question of on what basis is this kind of dashing forth of being carried out. Since, as we have seen, in its search for nothingness being can only refer back to itself, the disclosure of being, or aletheia, can only be the result of the aforementioned circular movement, where being is left out with nothing but itself in its search for nothingness. From this we could derive a new theory of intentionality, where every act of consciousness is carried out as a flight from being. Consciousness would then be intentional only negatively. As the very result of being’s flight from itself, every intentional act of consciousness would consist of a denial of the objects (being) that come into a particular field of perception. The intentional object of consciousness, according to this view, would consist not in what consciousness aims at, but in what it tries to fly from. For example, in a furnished room our attention is directed to a chair only through the negation of all the other elements present in our field of vision. By negating the bed, the clock, and the table, we arrive at the chair. Only by maintaining a denial of these elements can we continue to hold the chair intentionally within our field of perception. Within a larger theory of being as encased in the search for its contradiction, intentionality then becomes an illusion: it is nothing but the reflection of being’s flight from itself toward an unachievable nothingness that refers it back to itself.

Here we are not far from Sartre’s reversal of Spinoza’s proposition, that is, from *omnis determinatio est negatio* to *omnis negatio est determinatio*. At any rate, what concerns us more directly is that art’s function within such an ontological system becomes that of the disclosure of the truth of being conceived as being’s search for stability in its very contradiction, that is, its search for nothingness. Here we have overcome metaphysics, for, as pure experience, there is nothing beyond being to which art or anything else can refer. And here art cannot be considered as dependent on a specific object: we find ourselves now in a realm beyond language, for pure experience is beyond language.

We have thus departed from Heidegger’s notion of art as poetic language to a conception of art as poetic experience. Such experience is primarily independent of the presence of a specific object, although it is not contradictory to it. Thus the
art object, in itself, can be conceived as nothing other than an invitation to pure experience. As a question, it still depends on a separation, that is, on a distance between the questioner and the questioned. Poetic experience, then, will come as the only possible answer to the work of art’s question. As such it is the very expression of identity, where questioned and questioner are brought together.

We can now go back to Kierkegaard and assert that in order for art to be capable of functioning toward the achievement of truth and authenticity, the realm of the aesthetic need not transcend outward, but inward. In order to endow art with function, and consequently wrest it from the quality of a pure object that is always referring back to its own materiality, we need not look for an ethical or religious realm in which to place it. Art’s function as the discloser of truth will be recovered through an inward movement that results in the understanding and realization of art as pure experience, an experience that, being possible only within being, is never metaphysical. Here truth reappears as the business of art; nevertheless, truth is no longer defined as that of which Western thought has been willing to conceive. In Nishida’s words:

Truth is that which has unified our experiential facts, and objective truth is the system of representations that is most effective and most integrating. To know the truth or to accord with it is to unify our experience; it is to proceed from a lesser to a greater unity. If we regard our authentic self as being this unifying activity, then to know the truth is to accord with this greater self, to actualize it.49

Our contention, again and one last time, is that the unity referred to by Nishida has to be understood as the product of being’s search for stability and self-identity in a realm that undermines its state of contingency and irrationality. Such state, in its turn, must be perceived as the one expressed by the concept of mujō, a notion that asserts impermanence as the ultimate reality of being. The unity achieved in truth, then, will only be tentative, or at most fragile and abstract. It will ultimately be illusory, for outside any momentary state of identity, being will continue to exist in its state of mujō. Nevertheless, this kind of illusion appears as the only solace that humanity, that fringe of being that glimpses its own contradiction, is left with.

Our inquiry has reached the point where we can consider the necessity and possibility of further developments. We have understood that the limitations of existential phenomenology in overcoming metaphysics are rooted in its failure to take the concept of nothingness to its ultimate consequences. We have also recurred to phenomenological ontology to propose its development toward an inquiry into Being that functions in tandem with a theory of art where the work of art is defined as a nonbeing beyond language. Existential phenomenology then, becomes the basis of a description of the communion of a total happening of truth understood as the merging of consciousness with itself within the horizon of the totality of being’s self-denial as the ultimate truth of human life. Here we give phenomenology the task of describing the particular instances of the realization of the ontological function of art, that is, of its promotion of the union of total being as undifferentiated from nonbeing.
Our further task will be to develop the aforesaid assumptions about intentionality, nothingness, and poetic experience toward a descriptive method that is applicable to the individual arts. Artistic events will then appear inscribed in a theory of being where nothingness plays a major conceptual function, and where poetic experience ensues as the expression of the ontological function of art. In order that we can apply this descriptive method directly to works of art, however, we must first follow in Nishida's footsteps and investigate those of his concepts that have been developed from pure experience, such as “action-intuition” and “place.” Only after such concepts are observed in relation to artistic events rooted in immediate experience, such as the tea ceremony and calligraphy, for instance, will we be able to bring our results to a consideration of Western art forms and works of art, regarding them from a broader perspective that encompasses everything from architecture and literature to jazz and conceptual art. Here existential phenomenology will come into play as inherent in such a descriptive method, and only then will it operate as the appropriate mode of inquiry in an attempt to defend the function of art as that which provides access to truth within the human experience.

Notes


4 – Ibid., p. 73.

5 – It is important to keep in mind that after the publication of *Being and Time* Heidegger appears to have abandoned the phenomenological method. Although this fact makes it improper to expect from him the further reduction mentioned (since the theory of language here alluded to is presented in the later essay “The Origin of the Work of Art”), it does not necessarily invalidate the assertion of the necessity of such a reduction. For an analysis of Heidegger's break from phenomenology see Otto Pöggeler, “West-East Dialogue: Heidegger and Lao-tzu,” in Graham Parkes, ed., *Heidegger and Asian Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1987), p. 65.

7 – Such insistence on denying negativity a proper place in his theoretical framework may be regarded as a corollary of Heidegger’s indefatigable effort to overcome Hegelian dialects. For Heidegger’s own words on his intent to overcome Hegel see The Basic Problems of Phenomenology (Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 178.


9 – Ibid., p. 200.

10 – Ibid., p. 208.

11 – Ibid., p. 215.


14 – Ibid., p. 217.


17 – Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 23; italics appear in the original text.

18 – Hegel, Aesthetics, p. 71.

19 – Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 189.

20 – Ibid., p. 186.

21 – Here the similarity with Heidegger’s assumption that “In order to hear a bare sound we have to listen away from things, divert our ear from them, i.e., listen abstractly” is conspicuous (see Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” in Poetry, Language, and Thought [Harper and Row, 1971], p. 3).


24 – Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 138.

25 – Ibid., p. 25.
27 – Ibid.
28 – Ibid., p. 63.
31 – Joan Stambaugh recalls that Heidegger was in fact attentive to “the possibility of a shift from the history of metaphysics as the history of the Being of beings to the entry into Being as Being, which has no history” (“Heidegger, Taoism, and Metaphysics,” in Parkes, Heidegger and Asian Thought, p. 90).
34 – Ibid.
35 – Ibid., p. 85; italics appear in the original text. Stambaugh presents this definition of Tao as the implicit understanding of the term present in Heidegger’s thought.
37 – Nishida, An Inquiry into the Good, p. 28.
41 – Ibid., p. 8.
42 – Ibid., p. 3.
43 – Nishida writes: “The world of action-intuition—the world of poiesis—is none other than the world of pure experience” (An Inquiry into the Good, p. xxxiii).
45 – Ibid., p. 56.
46 – Ibid., p. 58.
47 – Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 16.
48 – As Masao Abe asserts, “It is upon the standpoint of this pure experience that we can establish a new metaphysics that is beyond the realm of experience in the ordinary sense and yet does not drift away from experience in the traditional search for a universal principle” (Masao Abe, “Introduction,” in Nishida, An Inquiry into the Good, p. xvii).

49 – Nishida, An Inquiry into the Good, pp. 23–24.