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Volume 10, 2018

Edited by Connell Vaughan and Iris Vidmar

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## **Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics**

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# *Aesthetics, Scientism, and Ordinary Language: A Comparison between Wittgenstein and Heidegger*

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ABSTRACT. Wittgenstein and Heidegger's objections against the possibility of an aesthetic science were influential on different sides of the analytic/continental divide. Heidegger's anti-scientism is tied up with a critique of the reduction of the work of art to an object of aesthetic experience. This leads him to an aletheic view of artworks which precedes and exceeds any possible aesthetic reduction. Wittgenstein too rejects the relevance of causal explanations, psychological or physiological, to aesthetic questions. His appeal to ordinary language provides the backdrop for his critique of the philosophical tradition's focus on a narrow range of evaluative aesthetic terms, thus excluding most of the language we ordinarily employ in the relevant cases. The main aim of this paper is to compare Heidegger with Wittgenstein, showing that: (a) there are significant parallels to be drawn between Wittgenstein and Heidegger's anti-scientism about aesthetics, and (b) their anti-scientism leads them towards partly divergent criticisms of what I will call 'aestheticism'. The divergence is mainly due to a disagreement concerning appeals to ordinary language. Thus situating the two philosophers' positions facilitates a possible critical dialogue between analytic and continental approaches in aesthetics.

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## 1. Introduction

There is one particular common aspect of Wittgenstein and Heidegger's discussions of aesthetics which has, to the best of my knowledge, so far been overlooked by scholarly debate. Though the similarities of their positions against scientism may come as no surprise to anyone who has an interest in their views on aesthetics, scholars have not hitherto undertaken a detailed comparison of their positions against the possibility of establishing an aesthetic science.<sup>2</sup> Intriguingly, both thinkers' relevant critical commentaries on aesthetics were first publicly delivered during the 1930s. For Heidegger, the central texts I will look to are 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (Heidegger, 2002) delivered as lectures in 1935 and 1936, and the closely related lectures on Nietzsche (Heidegger, 1991) delivered between 1936 and 1940. As far as Wittgenstein is concerned, I will discuss one of his few sustained investigations into aesthetics, the 1938 'Lectures on Aesthetics' (Wittgenstein, 1967).<sup>3</sup> Chronologically, the relevant texts on aesthetics and psychology by Wittgenstein and Heidegger both fall into

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Mulhall's (2014, 156-195) comparative account of the two philosopher's aesthetics does not explicitly address their positions concerning an aesthetic science. Efforts to compare Wittgenstein and Heidegger's general outlooks have, nonetheless, included relevant comparisons of their views on the relationship between philosophy and science; see e.g. Carman, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the 1938 lectures are preceded not only by the well-known, yet brief, mentions of the identity of ethics and aesthetics in Wittgenstein's early notebooks and the *Tractatus*, but also by various discussions of Aesthetics in the notes taken by G. E. Moore of Wittgenstein's (2016) lectures at Cambridge between 1930-1933.

periods when some change of outlook was underway (though scholars have disputed as to whether, and to what extent, these changes of outlook were drastic).

This paper will demonstrate that in Heidegger and Wittgenstein's discussions of the origin of the work of art there is not only a parallel rejection of the possibility of establishing a science of aesthetics, but also a concern about the relation that such a science would have to psychology and physiology. Thus what follows is first of all an attempt to compare Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's points of view. Having shown that they are partly in proximity, however, I will take a comparative approach in order to argue that Wittgenstein's view of the mismatch between the relevant ordinary ways of speaking and the limited vocabulary of aesthetics is at odds with Heidegger's move away from ordinary language in his attempt to look at conditions of possibility for aesthetic concepts.

Both Heidegger and Wittgenstein's philosophical predecessors (including Frege, Russell, and Husserl) were, arguably, responding to the rise of experimental psychology as a discipline distinct from philosophy (see Kusch 1995; Nasim 2008). The problem of demarcating between the two had been central in philosophical debates during the first two decades of the twentieth century. This question was not simply part of the background in both thinkers' philosophical development; it was also of concern throughout their careers. Heidegger's work was, from its outset, concerned with extruding 'psychologism' from a version of philosophy that is purified from it. Similarly, Wittgenstein crucially distinguishes between philosophy and psychology throughout his work (even in those later instances where the



work involves a kind of philosophical psychology (e.g. Wittgenstein, 1982, 1992; see Brusadin, 2017, pp. 283-284)).<sup>4</sup>

In what follows, I will discuss Heidegger's criticism of the reduction of the work of art to an object of aesthetic appreciation, which furthermore includes an account of the artwork's resistance against psychologistic or physiologistic reductions. Wittgenstein, as I shall show, has a similar account of the irrelevance of psychology to aesthetics. This paper will demonstrate that there is a certain tension between Wittgenstein and Heidegger's contrasting approaches to what I shall call 'aestheticism'.

Wittgenstein and Heidegger's lines of influence, within aesthetics as in philosophy more generally, have tended to lead towards different sides of the analytic-continental divide.<sup>5</sup> By drawing parallels between their brands of anti-scientism, while also making explicit their particular points of divergence, this paper can hopefully facilitate future critical dialogue between the divergent traditions influenced by each thinker. For example, the current state of debate in analytic aesthetics is roughly divided between those who accept various attempts at offering causal justification for aesthetic statements, and those who accept Wittgenstein's criticism of such projects (see e.g. Currie, 2003). Though historically examining the latter Wittgensteinian position, this paper will not engage in a systematic attempt to defend it (or, for that matter, Heidegger's parallel position) in light of

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<sup>4</sup> Different subsequent versions of anti-psychologism were developed partly in an attempt to interpret Wittgenstein (see Bäckström, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> I further discuss issues concerning the viability of this notion in Vrahimis (2018) and (2013).

recent controversies. In other words, the primary goal of this paper is to compare Heidegger with Wittgenstein, rather than highlight their worth for contemporary aesthetics. In particular, what I aim to show is that, (a) despite, to the best of my knowledge, being ignored in the relevant scholarship, Wittgenstein and Heidegger's positions with regard to what I will call 'aestheticism' parallel each other, and that (b) Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's brands of anti-scientism in aesthetics nonetheless lead them towards partly divergent criticisms of 'aestheticism'.

## **2. The Historical Background: Aesthetics and Psychologism**

At its birth in the 1870s, experimental psychology promised to offer a new scientific way to study the human mind. Among the consequences of the creation of experimental psychology, and the severing of psychology away from philosophy, was a crisis with regard to philosophy's self-conception. Given that the new experimental psychology had not been strictly delimited, it was unclear what could, and what could not, become its object of study. For a while during the end of the nineteenth century, it seemed possible that psychology could end up providing the data on the basis of which the majority of traditional philosophical questions would be answered.

Franz Brentano, the founder of the phenomenological tradition in which Heidegger's work belongs, had seen what he called 'descriptive psychology' as the ground on which aesthetics could be rendered into a science. Both Brentano (e.g. 2002) and his disciple Edmund Husserl (e.g. 2001) agreed that aesthetics, as well as ethics and logic, were what they

called ‘practical disciplines’. ‘Practical disciplines’ cannot themselves provide justification for the norms they produce, which in the case of aesthetic norms concerns an account of the correctness of taste and the production of the beautiful (see Huemer, 2009). Brentano thought that such norms can only be justified by being correctly connected with a prior discipline, one that is purely descriptive. Whereas Brentano thought ‘descriptive psychology’ could play such a role, Husserl’s anti-psychologism led him to see what he called ‘phenomenology’ as grounding the practical philosophical disciplines (thus paving the path towards philosophy as a ‘rigorous science’).

The Husserlian project of developing an anti-psychologistic phenomenological grounding for the philosophical disciplines is also one of the starting points of Heidegger’s (1914) work (see also Kusch, 1995, p. 121). The distinction of his own approach from biologism, anthropologism, and psychologism forms a crucial part of the introduction to *Sein und Zeit* (Heidegger, 1996, pp. 42-47). It is indeed the danger looming in the fusion between psychologism and a form of biologism that constitutes the backdrop of Heidegger’s understanding of the pitfalls of aesthetics, both in his interpretation of Nietzsche’s ‘physiological’ aesthetics, and in his discussion of aesthetics in ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’.

### **3. Heidegger’s Overcoming of Aesthetics**

In ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, Heidegger’s discussion of artworks is at its root an attempt to oppose a particular reductionist account of artworks.

The particular kind of reductionism that Heidegger addresses allows us to slip to a further chain of positivistic reductions. According to Heidegger, the first step that makes the subsequent chain possible is one that involves the relation between art and aesthetics:

Almost as soon as specialized thinking about art and the artist began, such reflections were referred to as 'aesthetic'. Aesthetics treated the artwork as an object, as indeed an object of αἴσθησις, of sensory apprehension in a broad sense. These days, such apprehension is called an 'experience'. The way in which man experiences art is supposed to inform us about its essential nature. Experience is the standard-giving source not only for the appreciation and enjoyment of art but also for its creation. Everything is experience. But perhaps experience is the element in which art dies. This dying proceeds so slowly that it takes several centuries. (Heidegger, 2002, p. 50)

According to Heidegger (2002, 50-52), then, aesthetics becomes the particularly modern and specialised philosophical subject which takes a certain type of experience (and, following Hegel, the particular type of experience that can be induced by art works) as its object. This, as Heidegger points out, is a historically contingent form of understanding of what art is, and only exists within a particular form of Western culture in the modern age. For Heidegger, this understanding of art is derivative of a particular early modern philosophical conception of subjectivity and objecthood. In Heidegger's understanding of the history of Western philosophy, modern aesthetics is born from Descartes' reconfiguration of

the philosophical significance of the subject (but see Shockey, 2012).

Modern philosophy, after Descartes, opens up the possibility of seeing the work of art in terms of aesthetics, and thus in terms of subjective aesthetic experience. This reduction is presupposed by the further chain of reductions which Heidegger discusses. The aesthetic reduction of the artwork may be followed by the reduction of aesthetics to psychology (in the vein of Brentano). From there onwards, the path is paved for the further reduction of psychologistic aesthetics to physiology.

According to Heidegger, once we have defined the ‘aesthetike episteme’ as ‘the [subject’s] relation of feeling toward art [*qua* object] and its bringing-forth’ (Heidegger, 1991, p. 78), then the road is paved towards its reduction to psychology. Furthermore, once this path is treaded on, then why should the psychologist be limited to giving first-person descriptive accounts of the relevant ‘aesthetic’ feelings? Is there something to prevent the further reduction of a descriptive psychological aesthetics to a genetic account of brain states or other bodily states involved in aesthetic feelings (now reduced to psychological states)?

Heidegger attempts to imagine a possible defence of such a reduction in the interpretation of Nietzsche he develops during the 1930s. His main task, here, however, is primarily interpretative: he aims to argue against interpreting Nietzsche as a proponent of a crude biologistic understanding of the ‘physiology of art’.<sup>6</sup> In other words, Heidegger’s work on Nietzsche

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<sup>6</sup> Heidegger here unconventionally interprets Kant’s aesthetics in a manner which exempts it from the overall Heideggerian critique of modern aesthetics (see Torsen 2016),

does not argue against reductionism per se, but rather against a reductionist interpretation of Nietzsche.

If what is sought after is something like a Heideggerian argument against reductionism, then the place to look is Heidegger's discussion of aesthetics in 'The Origin of the Work of Art'. The transcendental argument we find Heidegger offering there does not, however, attack psychological or physiological reductionism in aesthetics, but rather something even more fundamental. I shall hereafter refer to Heidegger's target, namely the aesthetic reduction of the work of art, by using the (perhaps awkward) term 'aestheticism'.<sup>7</sup>

What Heidegger has to say about aesthetics relies on his previous work, e.g. in *Being and Time*, where he had developed a sustained critique of specialisation in philosophy and science that is a consequence of Western metaphysics. Heidegger's thesis (derived, to a large extent, in critical dialogue with the Brentanian conception of science discussed above) claims

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while blaming Schopenhauer for interpreting Kant in a way which paves the path towards psychologistic and biologicistic reductionism.

Interestingly, Appelqvist (2018) has shown that Wittgenstein's commentary on aesthetics also involves a Kantian conception of aesthetic normativity. Thus, interestingly, both figures could be seen as working out different renditions of a broadly speaking Kantian aesthetics. Schopenhauer is a point of divergence: as opposed to Heidegger's rejection of Schopenhauer's interpretation of Kant's aesthetics, Schopenhauer's views influenced Wittgenstein's overall outlook, including his views concerning aesthetics (see e.g. Glock 1999).

<sup>7</sup> By using this term I mean to suggest a parallel with 'psychologism', rather than any association with the movement in favour of 'art for art's sake'.

that any specialised field of study into one particular type of being must somehow rely on a prior understanding of Being in general. Such an understanding is necessarily presupposed by each type of specialist inquiry into some being, though it may not be provided by the enquiry itself. This leads Heidegger to content that in order to enter into modes of questioning about beings, these specialised forms of inquiry are required to become oblivious to fundamental questions about Being in general. A forgetfulness of the ground from which they stem is necessary for their existence.<sup>8</sup>

In 'The Origin of the Work of Art', Heidegger applies this overall approach to aesthetics, which is a specialised way of studying one particular type of being (and, as such, an outgrowth of Western metaphysics). Heidegger's conviction seems to be that aesthetics, *qua* specialisation, reduces the work of art, which exceeds its field of study, to the type of entity which can become an object for aesthetics. In this reduction, aesthetics has to forget about everything in the artwork that cannot become its object of study. Heidegger thinks that aesthetics thus becomes oblivious of the most fundamental workings of the artwork. The work of art is not primarily an object for aesthetics, but something altogether different.

For Heidegger, what specialised enquiry (whether in the guise of aesthetics, psychology, or physiology) into the artwork fails to capture has to do with a particular relation between artwork and truth. Heidegger, as is well known, sets aside the traditional philosophical conception of truth as

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<sup>8</sup> Note here that this concern for grounding is connected to Brentano's and Husserl's concerns for the descriptive phenomenological grounding of the 'practical disciplines'.

*adequatio rei et intellectus*, replacing it with a view of truth as a process of disclosedness (see Heidegger, 1996, pp. 204-220). In ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, he traces this back to the Greek notion of *aletheia*, which he (questionably) interprets etymologically as ‘the unconcealment of beings’ (Heidegger, 2002, p. 16). According to Heidegger, works of art involve this process of unconcealment, which precedes and exceeds any aesthetic reduction.

As Heidegger would later point out, his project in ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ should be understood as an attempt to *overcome* the Western tradition of philosophical aesthetics, which is in turn seen by Heidegger as an aspect of his overall project of overcoming metaphysics.

The question of the origin of the work of art [...] stands in the most intrinsic connection to the task of overcoming aesthetics, i.e., overcoming a particular conception of beings—as objects of representation. The overcoming of aesthetics again results necessarily from the historical confrontation with metaphysics as such. Metaphysics contains the basic Western position towards beings and thus also the ground of the previous essence of Western art and of its works. Overcoming metaphysics means giving free rein to the priority of the question of the truth of being over every ‘ideal’, ‘causal’, ‘transcendental’, or ‘dialectical’ explanation of beings. The overcoming of metaphysics is not a repudiation of philosophy hitherto, but is a leap into its first beginning, although without wanting to reinstate that beginning. (Heidegger, 2012, p. 396)



In other words, what Heidegger is concerned with in his discussion of aesthetics is a way of reaching towards some original primordial essence of the work of art (see Dill, 2017). Reaching out to this origin is only possible once aesthetics is overcome. Furthermore, the retrieval of this origin of the artwork is somehow related to his overall project of overcoming metaphysics. The reduction of the artwork to an object of aesthetic experience is also its subsumption under a particular metaphysical conception of things and of beings. The origin of the artwork is something non-metaphysical, which he would elsewhere call a 'saving power' (see Dill, 2017, pp. 3-4). What he calls *aletheia*, the process of unconcealment that the artwork allows for, is not graspable in terms of aesthetic experience. Rather, the entire field of aesthetics forgetfully covers over some original aspect of artworks that Heidegger seeks to indicate in his attempt to overcome aesthetics.<sup>9</sup>

The above is the gist of Heidegger's transcendental argument against aesthetics. The argument is transcendental in the following sense: what aesthetics leaves out in the reduction of the artwork to aesthetic experience is, according to Heidegger, also what makes aesthetics as a discipline possible. The condition of possibility for aesthetics is the work of art which precedes aesthetics. The artwork exceeds its reduction to an object of study

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the positive account of the artwork that follows Heidegger's negative attitude towards 'aestheticism' remains incomplete. For example, Heidegger nowhere clearly states exactly what type of artwork has in mind as relevant to his project, and scholars disagree as to how we should envisage such artworks (see e.g. Dill, 2017).

for aesthetics.

Heidegger here reverses the process of grounding aesthetics in a prior discipline such as psychology or physiology. He undertakes this reversal by pointing to a specific process at work in the artwork itself as that which makes aesthetics possible. Heidegger does not ask us to give up on aesthetics, but simply to see that aesthetics is: a) a historically situated, modern way of thinking about art, and one among many possible others, b) a discipline that is dependent on a prior understanding of the work of art, c) a reduction of the work of art that does not exhaustively account for its workings, and d) a discipline that is somehow more viable once a), b) and c) are acknowledged as part of its self-understanding. Given a)-d) above, though, there is nothing that prevents Heidegger from accepting the reduction of aesthetics to psychology or physiology. Though his criticism consists in showing that aesthetics relies on a reduction of the artwork to an object of aesthetic experience, there is nothing in it that says why, once the reduction is acknowledged as partial, it is impossible to reduce aesthetics, *qua* reduction (rather than the work of art itself), to (physiology *via*) psychology.

#### **4. Wittgenstein's Objections against a Science of Aesthetics**

In his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Wittgenstein is also concerned with the question of the relation between aesthetics and psychology or physiology. He diagnoses a general misapprehension of aesthetics as a kind of science, which has a particular worrying application, that of the attempt to answer

aesthetic questions through psychology:

People often say that aesthetics is a branch of psychology. The idea is that once we are more advanced, everything – all the mysteries of Art – will be understood by psychological experiments. Exceedingly stupid as the idea is, this is roughly it.<sup>10</sup>

Aesthetic questions have nothing to do with psychological experiments, but are answered in an entirely different way. (Wittgenstein, 1967, p. 17)

Notice that, by contrast to Heidegger, the question of the relation between aesthetics and psychology that Wittgenstein addresses is not directly that of the *reducibility* of aesthetics to psychology.<sup>11</sup> Rather, more specifically, Wittgenstein is concerned with the language in which questions are posed and answered. Wittgenstein attempts to cure us of the type of misunderstanding about the nature of aesthetic questions that occurs once psychological experiments are thought capable of providing answers to them. Given Wittgenstein's construal of psychology as a search for causal

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<sup>10</sup> Wittgenstein repeats his ridiculing remarks on the idea of the reduction of aesthetics to psychology in the following lecture, where he says it is 'very funny – very funny indeed' (1967, p. 19). Perhaps Wittgenstein is involved in self-ridicule here directed at his own failed experimental attempt to respond an aesthetic question (see Wittgenstein, 2016, pp. 358-359).

<sup>11</sup> Wittgenstein may, nonetheless, be interpreted as arguing against psychologistic reductionism (see e.g. Brusadin, 2017, p. 284).

mechanisms,<sup>12</sup> his divorcing of aesthetic descriptions from psychological explanations revolves around a discussion of the different roles played by causal explanation in either case.

Wittgenstein notes that the kinds of questions involved in aesthetics (of the type, e.g., that answer the question ‘why?’ as previously noted) are of a completely different type than those involved in psychology. Someone could respond to the question ‘why did Jones like artwork x?’ with some particular causal account that attempts to ultimately explain Jones’ aesthetic response by appeal to neurological facts about the activity of Jones’ brain (Wittgenstein, 1967, p. 20). One could even give the answer in such a way as ‘might enable us to predict what a particular person would like and dislike’ (Wittgenstein, 1967, p. 20) (perhaps one of the more fashionable topics in recent applications of psychology). One could repeat an experiment, such as playing a piece of music to different subjects, under some particular drug, at a laboratory, in order to get a statistical result regarding the effect of the music (Wittgenstein, 1967, p. 21).<sup>13</sup> This could result in a list of ‘concomitant causal phenomena’ (Wittgenstein, 1967, p. 17) or mechanisms that explain why human brains respond in such and such a manner to this particular piece of music. Yet that would not be an answer to the real question that had been posed. When one asks ‘why’ in this case, what is sought after is not information about an underlying psychological or physiological mechanism that determines one’s aesthetic preferences and

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<sup>12</sup> See also Wittgenstein (2016, p. 342).

<sup>13</sup> See also Wittgenstein (2016, pp. 358-359), where he describes a similar experiment he once himself conducted.

judgements. A causal explanation simply does not provide an answer to the aesthetic question that had been posed.

Thus neither Wittgenstein's nor Heidegger's accounts preclude the possibility of conducting psychological experiments which could give an informative account of the causal mechanisms involved in the perception, response to, creation of, and other interactions with works of art. Wittgenstein, like Heidegger, however, shows that a psychological analysis of the experience of a work of art would be completely unrelated to a significant aspect of that experience. What is needed, in both Wittgenstein and Heidegger's view, is a clear separation between the task at hand when doing psychology and physiology (i.e. that of providing causal explanations), from some task involving significant interactions with works of art (whether those be the aesthetic responses described by Wittgenstein, or the alethic participations in artworks described by Heidegger). Unlike Heidegger, Wittgenstein gives a compelling explanation of how particular manners of speech lead to the mistaken view that psychology could possibly attempt to solve problems in aesthetics by offering causal explanations. Causal explanations, Wittgenstein shows, simply will not do the required work for responding to aesthetic puzzles.

## **5. Wittgenstein and Heidegger against 'Aestheticism'**

At first glance, Wittgenstein and Heidegger seem to disagree on one fundamental issue: whereas Wittgenstein appears content to invoke a separation between 'aesthetic' and 'psychological' questions, Heidegger

wants to show how the work of art exceeds its reduction to an ‘aesthetic experience’. Thus Heidegger’s and Wittgenstein’s accounts, though parallel up to this point, might falsely appear divergent in the following manner: while Wittgenstein’s account seems primarily directed against aesthetic psychologism (or any other forms of aesthetic scientism), Heidegger’s main emphasis lies on overcoming what I have previously called ‘aestheticism’ (i.e. the reduction of the work of art to an object of aesthetic experience). Nonetheless, upon closer inspection, Wittgenstein might turn out to also have an interesting response to ‘aestheticism’.

Wittgenstein notices that the kinds of terms usually employed in philosophical discussions of ‘aesthetics’ are, in fact, not those terms that we are accustomed to using in our ordinary discussions about works of art.

It is remarkable that in real life, when aesthetic judgements are made, aesthetic adjectives such as ‘beautiful’, ‘fine’, etc., play hardly any role at all. [...] The words you use are more akin to ‘right’ and ‘correct’. (Wittgenstein, 1967, p. 3)

This view, one which frames the discussion of aesthetics and art in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, at least partly accounts for the phenomenon of aesthetic discourse’s irrelevance to the appreciation or creation of artworks that Heidegger observed. In this we find the Wittgensteinian construal of what with Heidegger we had called ‘aestheticism’: it is the restriction of the vocabulary we employ when talking of art works only to those terms traditionally discussed by philosophical aesthetics (such as ‘beautiful’,

‘ugly’, ‘fine’, ‘sublime’, etc).<sup>14</sup> Misleadingly, the terms which philosophical aesthetics primarily discusses are evaluative terms rather than, for example, regulative terms such as ‘correct’ or ‘right’ (as in the abovementioned quote). Thus, forgetting the multitude of terms employed, and games played, in ordinary language, philosophical aesthetics focuses on a very narrow array of terms. Whereas aesthetics is in fact complex, philosophers mistakenly think it to be simple. Thus, forgetting the multitude of terms we ordinarily employ, philosophical aesthetics focuses on terms largely irrelevant to ordinary usage (e.g. in our responses to art). Whereas aesthetics is a complex field, philosophers in the grasp of ‘aestheticism’ artificially oversimplify it.

Wittgenstein has a related point of criticism arrived at through his analysis of the employment of language in philosophical aesthetics. When debate in aesthetics narrowly focuses on terms such as ‘beautiful’, it presupposes a kind of essentialism concerning their definition. In other words, what is commonly sought in traditional philosophical discussions of beauty is a necessary and sufficient definition of the term that is applicable to its use in all contexts. Yet, as Wittgenstein painstakingly points out in his analysis, we use such terms ‘in a hundred different games’ (2016, p. 335), in various manners which defy any essentialist attempt to reach a univocal definition. Essentialism oversimplifies the complexity involved in the multiplicity of contexts in which we employ aesthetic terms (broadly

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<sup>14</sup> Note that in this Wittgensteinian construal the question is not that of the reducibility of one discipline to another (as found in Brentano, Husserl, and Heidegger), but rather about the limitations and confusions of the relevant vocabularies.

conceived).

As Wittgenstein points out from the beginning of his lecture (1967, p. 1), aesthetics is traditionally misunderstood as being more narrow than it should be understood to be once correctly conceived.<sup>15</sup> To allow an expanded vocabulary (including e.g. regulative, as well as evaluative, terms) to enter into the domain of aesthetics would entail extending it much further the philosophical tradition's oversimplified conception. The overall framework in which Wittgenstein proposes this is an attempted therapy for the philosophical obsession with simplification. One example of the temptation to simplify is that which takes place when the complexity of aesthetic language is narrowed down to the limited vocabulary employed by debates in philosophical aesthetics.

In partial agreement with Heidegger, Wittgenstein's appeal to the complexity of an expanded aesthetic vocabulary shows that the problem with 'aestheticism', construed as a favouring of a limited aesthetic vocabulary, would be its irrelevance to our ordinary ways of speaking about artworks. If one were to imagine a person that is, for some reason, restricted to speaking only in aesthetic terms, it would become apparent that their discussion of artworks would not go very far. It might, perhaps, go deep into questions of defining the terms, or deciding when to apply a term correctly or not. It is easy to see that this kind of discourse will soon become very remote from any discussion about actual artworks.

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<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed account of the significance of aesthetics to the later Wittgenstein's overall conception of philosophy, see Day (2017).



In Wittgenstein's case, the remedy for this kind of 'aestheticism' does not involve, like in Heidegger's case, a further shift away from our ordinary ways of speaking. According to a Wittgensteinian diagnosis, Heidegger's fault would lie in his attempt to express what had been inexpressible in the terms employed by aesthetics by using an obscure philosophical terminology that attempts to dig beneath aesthetic terms. For example, for Heidegger, 'form' and 'matter', as employed in aesthetics, are only manifestations of a prior working of the artwork which he sees as a clash between 'world' and 'earth' (Heidegger, 2002, pp. 22-38).

There are three interrelated criticisms against Heidegger's position that can be made from Wittgenstein's perspective. In the first place, Heidegger's position presupposes an essentialist conception of the aesthetic terms it attempts to dig beneath. This, as Wittgenstein shows, fails to address one of the basic problems faced by 'aestheticism', namely its failure to acknowledge that the terms it discusses have manifold uses in different games. Heidegger's essentialist attempt to uncover the conditions of possibility for aesthetic terms presupposes that the terms are univocal in all contexts of use (and thus preceded by the prior terms Heidegger uncovers). Wittgenstein's examination of the ordinary uses of aesthetic terms is meant to show such essentialism to be untenable. Here Heidegger is making a similar mistake to that made by his targets: as Wittgenstein shows, essentialism about the definition of aesthetic terms is presupposed both by the modern philosophical tradition in aesthetics, and by the scientific attempt to reduce the aesthetic term to a bundle of feelings.

Secondly, by making the choice to ground aesthetic terms in prior

terms, Heidegger is incapable of remedying the problem of the limitations of aesthetic language (as opposed to ordinary language used in connection to artworks). In other words, Heidegger's (2002) transcendental project (which sees 'world' and 'earth' as conditions of possibility for 'form' and 'matter' (pp. 22-38), or a process of *aletheuein* as a condition of possibility for aesthetic experience (pp. 32-50)) merely 'deepens' the restrictive manner of speaking involved in aesthetic language. Thus Heidegger does not overcome the limitations of the vocabulary that the philosophical tradition discussed under the banner of 'aesthetics'.

Thirdly, it seems that the attempt to go beyond aesthetic language by 'deepening' our ways of talking of artworks is in fact prompted by the very strictures that aesthetic language imposes. In other words, Heidegger's opposition to aesthetics is based on a diagnosis of its reductive nature, and furthermore on the incompleteness of this reduction. A Wittgensteinian critic might say that the seeming incompleteness involved in reductive 'aestheticism' is nothing other than a linguistic restriction, i.e. that aesthetics appears reductive only insofar as it has restricted our ways of talking about artworks. The effort to dig beneath aesthetic language in order to find what underlies it provides no remedy for this restriction; it is, rather, simply founded upon it.

The threefold Wittgensteinian critique developed above presupposes the validity of appeals to ordinary language, and the later Wittgenstein argues that there is no higher court to which philosophers may meaningfully appeal. Contrary to Heidegger, Wittgenstein specifically argues against probing deeper to look at whatever is thought to underlie our ordinary

employment of language. A common problem faced by criticisms that rely on appealing to ordinary language is a difficulty in finding traction with opponents who are dissatisfied with such appeals.<sup>16</sup> This is precisely the later (though perhaps, interestingly, not clearly the middle) Heidegger's standpoint. Contrary to Wittgenstein, Heidegger's later thought turns towards a highly critical position concerning the concealing function of mere *Gerede* within ordinary language. Indeed, the positive direction which the later Heidegger's negative critique of aestheticism points to is that of the power of *alētheuein* involved in poetic (in Heidegger's special sense), as opposed to ordinary, language. The former, as opposed to the latter, can unconceal, as all artworks do, something fundamental about the world.

Thus the Wittgensteinian *elenchus* based on ordinary language quickly leads to an *aporia* concerning different metaphilosophical and methodological preferences. Both philosophers have elaborate justifications, for appealing to ordinary language in the later Wittgenstein's case, and for the (poetic) leap away from it in Heidegger's later work. The task of critically examining these contrary justifications remains beyond the bounds of this paper, which limits itself to pointing out the *aporia* reached by the parallel critiques of scientism in aesthetics. Further appreciation of the various parallels between Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's overall outlooks, which any critical examination of their disagreements needs to keep in mind, also remains beyond the bounds of this paper. Suffice it to say that to note their disagreement regarding ordinary language is not to say that their

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<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Cavell (1979, Part II).

overall philosophical projects are not otherwise aligned.

Though the Wittgensteinian critique developed above may not be convincing to a Heideggerian, it is useful in allowing us to clarify, compare, and historically situate Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's positions. Wittgenstein's approach shows Heidegger to be closer to the modern aesthetic tradition than his own rhetoric suggests. Heidegger decries modern aesthetics for its reductionism, while at the same time failing to convincingly argue directly against scientific reductionism in aesthetics. Instead, he shifts his focus towards the conditions of possibility for aesthetics, ultimately presenting no reason for abandoning a kind of revised aestheticism (or any further type of reductionism) which acknowledges such conditions of possibility. Wittgenstein's examination of ordinary linguistic usage avoids, though perhaps not unproblematically, focusing on conditions of possibility. Given an acceptance of appeals to ordinary language, which opponents (and of course, Heidegger is only one among many) might resist, Wittgenstein shows us how to expand our oversimplified conception of aesthetics, while also arguing against the possibility of an aesthetic scientism. Comparatively situating the two philosophers' positions allows us to see that the basic divergence of the conclusions reached by their critique of aesthetic scientism relies on a different view of appeals to ordinary language. This acknowledgement helps to clarify some of the conflicting conceptions of aesthetics in either thinker's line of influence, and thus may facilitate critical dialogue between them.

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