

## **EDITORIAL**

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### **Philosophy and Art(history) Reconsidered**

The two issues of *Labyrinth* 2020 are dedicated to the theme "Philosophy, Art(theory), and Literature". This topic is not new, but it is still of current interest, especially in the face of new media, artificial intellect, virtual reality and the new means used by artists today. The changes in the conception of art over the last two decades, including philosophical views, deserve particular attention in a special issue. Our intention here, however, is a different, more "classical" one. The theme itself has been inspired by a double anniversary, namely the 130th birthday of the writer, painter and art historian Prof. Nikolay Raynov<sup>1</sup> and the 100th birthday of his son Prof. Bogomil Raynov<sup>2</sup>, writer and aesthetician. In honor of both, an international conference<sup>3</sup> was held at Sofia University in May 2019, where their work and its main themes were reassessed. In the two *Labyrinth* issues, the dual relationship between philosophy and the various arts is once again put up for discussion, but in a broader context.

By way of introduction, I would like to draw attention to two opposing positions with regard to art and philosophy/philosophical aesthetics. Artists and art critics have often expressed the opinion that philosophy, understood as rational, logical thinking that deals with general and abstract questions, is incapable of understanding art. Renoir once said: "Nowa-

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<sup>1</sup> Nikolay Raynov (1889-1954) published several dozen novels, novellas, collections of fairy tales and other works. He was a professor of art history and built up Bulgarian art studies academically with his contributions to art, in particular his twelve volumes on the history of the plastic arts. He is the founder of the Institute of Literature at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and was appointed a member of it. He was also a mystic, president of the theosophical lodge "Orpheus" and editor of its journal of the same name. As a writer and painter, he represented the ideas of Symbolism and the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of the Secession.

<sup>2</sup> Bogomil Raynov (1918-2007), professor of aesthetics at the Academy of Fine Arts, is the author of poems, short stories, novels and plays. He is one of the founders of the Bulgarian crime novel. His crime novels were filmed according to his own scripts and were very popular during the socialist era. He was elected a corresponding member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences for his books on art.

<sup>3</sup> See [https://www.uni-sofia.bg/index.php/bul/novini/kalendar/mezhdunarodna\\_interdisciplinarna\\_konferencija\\_na\\_tema\\_filosofiya\\_izkustvo\\_literatura](https://www.uni-sofia.bg/index.php/bul/novini/kalendar/mezhdunarodna_interdisciplinarna_konferencija_na_tema_filosofiya_izkustvo_literatura)

days, people want to explain everything. But if one could explain a picture, it would no longer be art". (Rewald 1973, 582) In my youth I argued with various art critics, including my father, Bogomil Raynov, who claimed that Kant, like most philosophers (!), had no idea about art and therefore gave ridiculous examples. Without success, of course, because everyone stuck to their positions, and I still believe in the necessity of philosophical education, including philosophical aesthetics.

Conversely, there is an opinion among some philosophers that those who deal with art, i.e., art historians and art critics, do not actually know what art is. In my opinion, Heidegger is an example of this. According to him, "there has never been so much talked about and so much confusion about art as there is today" (Heidegger GA 74, 191)<sup>4</sup>. This can be illustrated by a statement recently made by a "respected art connoisseur and writer":

'Art is what important artists do'. Fine. But we ask again: who is an artist? Obviously, anyone who meets the standards of art. And who is an important artist? Not the one who is most traded and bought, but the one who meets the highest standards of art. And what is art? Answer: What the great artists do. We are going around in circles. And the above statement about art turns out to be meaningless. It says nothing about art or artists." (Ibid. 192)

In this sense, Heidegger speaks of "artlessness," i.e., "that the affirmation and approval of those who enjoy and experience 'art' cannot decide anything about whether the object of enjoyment comes from the essence of art at all, or is only a sham of historical skill, supported by prevailing purposes." (Heidegger GA 65, 505-506)

I think that these two opposing views are not very productive and that a "middle way" is needed to understand the complex relationship between philosophy and art. In any case, it would be insufficient to reduce this relationship to a "philosophy of art" and then criticize the latter as either alien to art or as a kind of metaphysics.

Philosophy and art have been cross-fertilizing for a very long time. Of course, art, such as the cave paintings of Sulawesi, can be considered much older than philosophy, which emerged later. At the same time, the first literary monuments (Rig Veda, Gilgamesh Epic, etc.), which are usually equated with myths and mythical-religious world views, testify to a common ground. These texts can be considered "pre-philosophical", but they already contain certain cosmogonic and cosmological ideas, which were presented in a literary and partly also in a musical form. This intertwining should not be forgotten, even if in the following two

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<sup>4</sup> The translations from Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* (GA) are mine, Y.R.

issues of Labyrinth we are more interested in modern developments of the connection between art and philosophy, namely the influence of philosophical ideas on the various arts and, conversely, the way in which philosophers receive and interpret art and produce works of art themselves, such as novels, poems, theater and film scripts. In this context, we inevitably come to the difficult and ambiguous questions: "What is philosophy?" and "What is art?" These questions have been asked by many philosophers, especially Heidegger, whom I already mentioned.

For Heidegger, to put it bluntly, art and philosophy itself are interpreted from his thinking of being or from the event of being. Just as philosophy is equated with metaphysics, so the aesthetic conception of art is interpreted as a metaphysical one, in which the work of art is presented as an object for a subject, and as such must be overcome (Heidegger GA 65, 503). Art, whose highest form, according to Heidegger, is poetry, is by its very nature an opening, an enabling of the unveiling of the truth of being.

Another perspective, which I personally find broader and at the same time more differentiated, is that of Jean-Paul Sartre, who wrote not only works that are difficult to understand, such as *L'être et le néant*, but also novels, plays and, last but not least, essays on art criticism. Many people are familiar with his study *Qu'est que la littérature?* But I would like to refer here to another text, namely the interview "L'écrivain et sa langue" he gave to Pierre Vaerstreten in 1965.

In this interview, Sartre discusses his view of language, in which he articulates the groundbreaking distinction between everyday language, literary language, poetry, scientific language, and philosophical discourse. While in everyday language, which he also calls "prose," there is reciprocity, i.e., an effort to exchange and communicate with others, in literature and poetry the reader or listener serves only to reveal the writer's hidden meanings, which he incorporates into his own game. Literature and poetry, according to Sartre, are profoundly narcissistic because the writer seeks to represent himself through the reader's play of meanings. In prose, the narcissism is much more indirect, since it is interested in communication and seeks resonance, that is, a choice of words directed at the other. The success of poetry, on the other hand, lies in transcending and complementing the prose that exists alongside it. For Sartre, philosophical discourse, which he also calls "philosophical prose," has little to do with ordinary prose because it uses the most difficult of all languages – the language that wants to communicate the most, and most extensively.

If you take Hegel, if you read a sentence by Hegel without being somewhat versed in Hegel, without knowing him, then you will not understand him. Here is another problem. For the purpose of philosophy, as I understand it (...), is basically to reach as far

as possible, by conceptual approximation, the level of the concrete general that is given to us in prose. (...) Its aim, then, is to create concepts that become more and more difficult until we succeed in finding something like a model of what is directly presented to us in prose. (Sartre 1979, 116; the translation is mine, Y.R.).

In other words, the task of philosophy is to grasp and illustrate the hidden meanings and general structures of experience. According to Sartre, it comes "after" prose and goes beyond it in concepts that are groundbreaking, "prospective". Although philosophical discourse should avoid the mystifications of literary language, it cannot be reduced to scientific language, to "pure practice," that is, to positive, applied knowledge. In contrast to the unambiguous terminology of the sciences, philosophical discourse uses ambivalent terms, which is why, according to Sartre, Husserl's idea of philosophy as a "rigorous science" was nonsense. (Ibid., 114)

You may or may not share Sartre's view, but it is evidence of an effort to differentiate between art and philosophy, and to show that they are different languages. This does not mean that philosophical concepts cannot be incorporated into a literary work or a play, but this will only succeed if they are "translated" into the language of art. As Sartre says in "What Is Literature?": "We must learn to speak in images, to transpose the ideas of our books into these new languages" (Sartre 1988, 217). And vice versa, art can have a meaningful effect on philosophy by transforming it into a concrete generality through the "heavy concepts". A good example from Sartre's point of view would be the influence that Dostoevsky had on him.

Dostoevsky once wrote: 'If God did not exist, everything would be permitted'; and that, for existentialism, is the starting point. Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself. He discovers forthwith, that he is without excuse. For if indeed existence precedes essence, one will never be able to explain one's action by reference to a given and specific human nature; in other words, there is no determinism – man is free, man is freedom. Nor, on the other hand, if God does not exist, are we provided with any values or commands that could legitimise our behaviour. Thus we have neither behind us, nor before us in a luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse. – We are left alone, without excuse. (Sartre 2007, 28-29)

The following essays illustrate this dual relationship between philosophy and the arts. They show *in concerto* how, on the one hand philosophy has influenced art and architecture, for example how Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's reformulation of the affective sphere of the body lead to a disruption of the bodily metaphoric order inherent to artistic

representation (Irene Breuer) and how, on the other hand, the analysis of fictional characters can lead to revision of philosophical ideas like Husserl's concept of presentification (Jing Shang). Also the complex intertwining between philosophy and literature (Alain Millon, I-Ning Yang, Nicola Apicella, Rodolphe Olcèse) is specially discussed. Finally, ethical and axiological problems, in theory and praxis, that arise in both philosophy and the art(theory) are explored in more detail (Elisa Reato, Toufic El-Khoury, Marie-Claude Létourneau, Emanuele Lacca). All of this makes it possible to gain a broader and, at the same time, a deeper insight into the subject of this volume.

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