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**HOW DO YOU READ PHILOSOPHY
FROM THE HERMENEUTICAL POINT OF VIEW
AN ESSAY IN EXPLICATING THE TERM “DESTRUCTION”
WITHIN THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMES OF HANS-GEORG
GADAMER’S PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS**

The main attempt of this paper is to explicate the term “destruction”, one of the most important notions for Heidegger’s hermeneutics within the language and thought of Hans-Georg Gadamer. The question we will pose here to fulfill this task is: how one reads philosophy from the point of view presented in “Wahrheit und Methode” and other Gadamer’s works. The answer, the main idea of this text, does not propose any method of reading the philosophy basing on “Wahrheit und Methode”. It tries only to present Gadamer’s understanding of what is happening with us, when we read philosophy, when we philosophize: “ihre [der Hermeneutk] Aufgabe überhaupt nicht ist, ein Verfahren des Verstehens zu entwickeln, sonder die Bedingungen aufzuklären, unter denen Verstehen geschieht” (WM, p. 300).

The problem of philosophy reading philosophy and philosophers reflecting upon our attitude toward the past, history and tradition is a kind of mirror (*speculum*) focusing and reflecting almost all of the important philosophical issues nowadays, making it the proper space of *speculative* thinking. Heidegger, Rorty, Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault,

Liotard (but also Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche) – all of those great philosophers, many of them being Gadamer's partners in dialogue, constructed their discourse first by taking a stance on relation between (their) reflection and the history of philosophizing.

The conclusions included and questions raised in this text touch also the problem of the philosophical self-consciousness and the coherence of Gadamer's conception. If a philosophical conception makes statements about the nature of philosophy it exposes itself to the error of *circulus vitiosus*, or a performative contradiction. Although in author's opinion it is obvious, that in cases of such philosophies of interpretation like hermeneutics or deconstruction this problem cannot be solved as easy, as Habermas or Apel would like to see it, it will be left in the paper explicitly unsolved.

The basic axiom of our argumentation is, naturally, the universal claim of hermeneutics. To define this claim briefly, we might say, that the universal aspect of Gadamer's hermeneutics allows us to explicate any phenomenon of understanding using his notions and relations between them¹. There are certain moments and aspects of the hermeneutical experience – the basic experience of understanding anything – that we will recognize in the experience of art, of history, of language, and then, finally – of philosophy. Our line of argumentation therefore shall be as follows:

1. First, we will describe the reconciliation with the past occurring in the festival of art – we will focus on the ontological dimension of symbol, occasionality and decorativeness and the necessity of the work of art to be presented – in other words, the universality of transitory character of arts. We can already pose here the question we'll be aiming at the whole time: is a philosophical text also transitory and what would this mean?
2. Secondly, we shall analyze the problem of history and the historical relativism. Although we will have already found the truth of art, it'll be nevertheless necessary to pose the question about the relation of the abstract argumentation of the philosophy to the temporal distance between the particular historic period, when the philosophical text was written, and the present, when it's being read.
3. Finally, in the last part of the paper we shall name all characteristics of the experience of philosophy in Gadamer's conception and link them to previous deliberations. Those characteristics are: the lingual and textual form of philosophical thought and its conceptuality. Therefore we will have to give more attention to Gadamer's conception of language and the relation between words and notions – the later issue can already be stressed as the main problem of this paper – the problem of destructing the tradition of philosophy.

1. The festival of reconciliation: the mediation in art

A piece of art is not given to us merely as an object and, on the other hand, we do not approach it merely as subjects. This is the main thought of Gadamer's aesthetics. The

¹ Comp. UP, p. 220 – for the shortcuts used in this text to mark the cited works of Gadamer see: bibliography.

experience of art is an event, that includes us in a process far surpassing our limited consciousness. This process Gadamer tries to describe as a play, in which we are only the players, not fully aware of the rules.

The term Gadamer chose has also a polemical tone. It recalls one of the most important modern philosophical aesthetics – Kant conception of a free play between intellect and senses. What Gadamer aims precisely at is the subjectification of the aesthetical dimension done by Kant, what results in conceiving of art as a work of genius.

We will not get involved in the details of Gadamer's elaborated critique on Kant. What we need to stress here is that, in Gadamer's opinion, Kant's conception favors the beauty of nature, for only there we can observe the beautiful objects in a completely disinterested attitude. The phenomenon of finding something as beautiful, in Kant's opinion, is based on the free play between what we see, the structure of the object, and the intellect, that strives the whole time to subsume the phenomenon under notions, but fails to do so. This play reveals only the purposeful framework of the object that remains for us a "purposefulness without a purpose".

The ability to see this purposefulness of nature enables us to think of ourselves as the very peak of the creation, because the ability of grasping this purposefulness of the world means the same for Kant as being this purpose of nature. Thus the aesthetical links with the ethical. With art it's different. A piece of art is always a beautiful presentation of an object (WM, p. 58) and at the same time the presentation of aesthetical ideas – "etwas, das über allen Begriff hinausliegt" (WM, p. 58).

Gadamer's conception of play assumes, that the play of art encompasses both the work of art and the subject marveling it. It (the play) is something more than I can realize, for it is not the activity of my subjectivity, but an element I enter. Therefore the rules governing it are not transparent to me, I cannot make myself to be fully aware of them. The status of rules in such play resembles (and indeed is structurally identical) with the concept of prejudices in Gadamer's radical historical thinking – I can play/act/think only according to some rules/conventions/prejudices, never being fully aware of them, because making one element of the prestructure of understanding apparent changes, in the very same moment, the wholeness of relations between them (the rules/prejudices etc.). The set of regulations is always changing – this the radical aspect of hermeneutical thinking² – but we will come back to this problem later.

One of the most important characteristics of the play is its solemnity, its own gravity. Although I know I am playing, I cannot act as if the rules were "only" rules, that is if they belonged to another world – the world of pure appearance³. If I want to play I have to treat the game with highest possible seriousness. The play creates its own world, but it is not an illusion – it is impossible to mark a distinction between the play and the "real world". That is why Gadamer can say, that when art happens, it occurs in its and "the" world at the same time – or rather, that there's no more the "real" world and the world of

² It is interesting to compare this thought with some projects of „radical hermeneutics“, see e.g. J. D. Caputo, *Radical hermeneutics. Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

³ We can find such conception by Schiller, see idem „Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen“, letter twenty-five, Reclam Universal-Bibliothek 2000, p. 102-106, for Gadamer's critique on Schiller see WM, p. 132-142.

art – the solemnity of the game precludes such distinctions. This is an important moment, that will also occur in Gadamer’s thinking about the language – there is no possibility to distinguish the non-lingual world and the language, in which we interpret the world. The play is the world, the world is always already interpreted in the language.

As we’ve said – we know the rules, but not like consciousness knows its object (or the transcendental structures if the latter’s possibility) but rather like players (that do not act as players, what means – as we were “only” playing) who follow them and let themselves be “carried” by the happening of the play. Yet, those rules can sometimes get blurred. It is then when we need to recall them, to present them once again. But it is of course impossible to present the whole set of regulations governing the play – as Gadamer sees it. Rules are not given – they can be only recalled. The structure of summoning the rules of the game is what Gadamer calls “symbol”.

Before we inquire further we have to stress the fact, that in „Die Aktualität...“ “symbol” means the same as “allegory” in “Wahrheit und Methode”. In the second (earlier book) Gadamer assigned the notion “symbol” to the aesthetic of genius. To present an idea – something more than beautiful – the genius needs to create the symbol, that would refer us to the infinite and ungraspable (that is apparently the logic of Kantian aesthetic). Such symbol is only the creation of an individual full of genius (and therefore can be grasped only by another genius) and does not refer to the tradition (for the tradition only circumscribes the symbolic activity of the mind). Allegory on the other hand comes from the tradition, it is rooted in the way a certain problem has been depicted in the art for many centuries. Therefore a new painting joins in the conversation of different artists and their works, conversation that is fully historical.

Gadamer criticizes the notion of “symbol” in the meaning given above. This critique accompanies his rejection of the abstraction of aesthetic consciousness (WM, p. 94-106). This consciousness, that arises from Kant’s philosophy, sees a piece of art as an object of aesthetical pleasure. For such consciousness the art is symbolic, for it refers, in the way the artist (and only he) made it, to the ideas, not by presenting them directly (in Kant’s philosophy this – direct presentation – is the activity of transcendental schematics, the realm of cognition – and for Kant art is not cognition), but by giving them *per analogiam*, figuratively. Art is unhistorical and bears no cognition within itself. With the rejection of this transcendental way of thinking Gadamer consents to the allegorical understanding of the artistic symbols. The activity of artist’s mind can never free itself from the tradition, it can never step outside the hermeneutical circle. It is even not appropriate to speak of “freeing” oneself from this circle, for it is the very possibility of our faculty to comprehend.

Because allegory, or as we call it from now on, symbol, is immersed in tradition and history, understanding means putting it in play with our prejudices, or to be accurate with Gadamer’s terminology – letting ourselves be more involved in the play we are playing all the time. But this reading of allegory makes the rules of this play become visible – therefore we can say, that in a symbol we recognize ourselves. It is not of course like this, that the artist was thinking the same way we do – it means only, that we understand the art – always allegorical – in its truth. In its truth, insofar as it changes us: “An experience – a fortiori, an experience of art – changes the one who experiences”⁴.

⁴ Weisheimer, p. 102.

This understanding means always making something – the object of understanding, the phenomenological “thing” we want to comprehend, tradition itself – contemporary. This making past events contemporary means, for Gadamer, common communication of everyone with everybody. The art presents symbols that we find ourselves within – it presents us to ourselves. The specific character of art is that it is (when approached hermeneutically, not with the attitude of psychological historicism) *selbstverständlich*. If art was ever aristocratic, exclusive, it was so only for different social or political reasons. Art as hermeneutical phenomenon is for everyone, it is always comprehensible⁵. Because of this ability of art’s truth to be intelligible for everybody, Gadamer calls the experience of art *festival*. “Wenn etwas mit aller Erfahrung des Festes verknüpft ist, dann ist es dies, dass es jede Isolierung des einen gegenüber dem anderen verweigert”⁶.

But this *Selbstverständlichkeit* of art doesn’t mean now, that the art’s *atopon* impact is reduced. The fact that art is understood even by the ignorant (at least somehow) or illiterates (*biblia pauperum*) changes nothing in the very activity of art. Work of art is something, that we usually find as close to us – because even if we don’t know the artist’s intention, the epoch of its origin, or even the common interpretation, we can never say, that we don’t understand at all (we see here the figure of hermeneutical circle). But on the other hand, if art brought nothing new, if it didn’t attract our attention, it wouldn’t be art. Gadamer states the whole truth of hermeneutical reflection upon the very phenomenon of art in two beautiful sentences: “Die Vertrautheit, mit der das Kunstwerk uns anrührt, ist zugleich auf rätselhafte Weise Erschütterung und Einsturz des Gewohnten. Es ist nicht nur das «Das bist du!», das es in einem freundigen und furchtbaren Schreck aufdeckt – es sagt uns auch: «Du musst dein Leben ändern»”⁷.

The concepts of play, symbol and festival are to show, that the element of art is not something, that we should perceive outside our general understanding of the world. Experiencing the piece of art is not understanding the genius of its creator (as in Kant’s aesthetics) – this is the way followed by the romantic tradition of aesthetics. Gadamer traces the evolution of this tradition in the work of Schiller and, first of all, Schleiermacher – the problem we will not analyze further.

The belonging of the work of art to the world rather than to our consciousness (to the world the also belong to (?)) Gadamer tries to explicate with two more notions: the occasionality and decorativeness of a piece of art. Both these characteristics are described by Gadamer as having an “ontologischer Grund” (WM, p. 149) – this is a clue for us, marking the necessity of these two notions for the analysis of the experience of philosophy (“ontological” means – present in every event of understanding (?)).

The experience of direct reconciliation with the tradition, that we encounter in the experience of the art, is a mediation, mediation between the past and the present. This mediation is not simply a repetition of the original meaning of a piece of art. Once again – there is no one, fixed, stable intentional object of an aesthetic consciousness. The work of art is ideal, but only in the sense, that „Es hat den Charakter des Werks, des «Ergon» und nicht nur der «Energiea»” (WM, p. 116). Something has to come to its own, independent existence in the play: “«Werk» meint nichts anders als «Ergon» und ist

⁵ ÄH, p. 7.

⁶ AS, p. 130.

⁷ ÄH, p. 8.

genau wie jedes andere «Ergon» dadurch charakterisiert, dass es von dem Produzenten und seiner Produktion losgelöst ist⁸. But we must never forget, that “Was derart von dem darstellenden Tun des Spielers ablösbar ist, bleibt aber dennoch auf Darstellung angewiesen” (WM, p. 116).

The consequences of this ontological remarks are fundamental. The notion of occasionality, of universal occasionality is a brief formulation of a new, hermeneutical, attitude toward interpretation: “Universal occasionality implies that occasions, not just intentional acts, determine meanings⁹. We shall later link this occasionality with the lingual expansion of philosophical notions.

Together with occasionality Gadamer develops the second concept, decorativeness. To explain the concept better Gadamer analyzes architecture, as the kind of art where the phenomenon of decorating something is most noticeable (WM, p. 164). A building will fulfill its functions only, when it can fit into the landscape or other urban buildings. The brilliance of an architect is not enough – it must fit within that, what already is. Architecture is of course mentioned here only in an exemplary fashion. What is proper to architecture is to be found also within other kinds of art. The “transitory” arts (the interpretative arts, like theatre, music etc.), these arts, that need to be presented in order to exist¹⁰ (because the medium of their transfer differs from the proper form of their perception) are also great examples. With the notions of universal occasionality and decorativeness we can formulate now the question: is, for Gadamer, every kind of art “transitory”?

The only kind of art left is the literature, the realm of words of a highest importance for our interest. Do we need to speak of a dependence of every reading of a text on an occasion of this reading? Don’t we read in silence, in our houses? Gadamer agrees with these statements, but changes the understanding of lecture¹¹. For him the reading of a text (even silent reading) is, from the ontological point of view, as proper for a text as being played for drama or symphony. The lecture is the realization, presentation of the text, therefore “Nur von der Ontologie des Kunstwerks her – und nicht von den im Phasenverlauf der Lektüre sich einstellenden ästhetischen Erlebnissen – läßt sich also die Kunstart der Literatur begreifen.” (WM, p. 166). The text exists as a text only in being read. We shall give more argumentation on this issue later, pondering Gadamer’s view on the language.

To summarize: for Gadamer a work of art is an ideal *ergon* of a cultural *energeia*. The second concept Gadamer explicates using the notion “play”. Play is an element, which we are encompassed by and that we cannot make completely transparent and comprehensible for us. We can present us the whole set of rules governing the play. But in the work of art the presentation of the game comes into being. The experience of reconciliation with the element we live in Gadamer calls the festival of art.

⁸ FHD, p. 134.

⁹ Weinsheimer, p. 125.

¹⁰ See: Grondin, p. 61-62.

¹¹ The notion *lecture* shall become very important for Gadamer in his dispute with Derrida. In his commentary on the latter’s insisting on the difference between written and spoken language, Gadamer writes: “Diese wesenhafte «Differenz», auf der Derrida mit Recht besteht, erkenne ich durchaus. Aber dazu bedarf es in meinen Augen keines Rückgangs auf die *écriture*. Mir ist die *lecture* zweideutig genug, in der Schriftliches unterwegs zur Sprache ist” (FHD, p. 128).

This reconciliation is possible only because the work of art exists only in being presented. In reference to Kantian tradition of aesthetics Gadamer writes: “Was wir mit «Darstellung» meinen, ist jedenfalls ein universales ontologisches Strukturmoment des Ästhetischen, ein Seinsvorgang und nicht etwa ein Erlebnisvorgang, der im Augenblick der künstlerischen Schöpfung geschähe und von dem aufnehmenden Gemüt jeweils nur wiederholte würde” (WM, p. 164). The presentation of a piece of art, whatever kind it is (architecture, drama, music, story, poem.... philosophical text?), inscribes it into the substantial being, into what already is. This inscription of the ideal sense into the presence is the mediation between the past and the present, that we’ve described as the reconciliation occurring in the experience of art.

This has also one great consequence more: if the sense of a work of art is dependent on the moment of its presentation, then the amount of interpretations is infinite and the concept of proper interpretation – inappropriate. “Vielmehr zeichnet es das Kunstwerk geradezu aus, dass man es niemals ganz versteht”¹² wrote Gadamer in one his own exhaustive presentations of his philosophy. This will maybe become more clear and wellgrounded when we’ll present this problem one more time explicating the game of the language. In further deliberations upon the experience of philosophy we will focus precisely on this moment of reconciliation: the inscription of the ideal sense into the substantial being, the event, where the understanding occurs – and the infinite character of such inscription.

2. The critique of historicism¹³

The ontological necessity of presentation is present in every moment of Gadamer’s thinking. In this chapter we shall trace this figure of mediation between the past and the presence in Gadamer’s critique of historicism.

The idea of necessary mediation is itself the critique of an alienated consciousness – in Gadamer’s terms this concept refers to the aesthetic and historic consciousness. The first one treats the work of art only as an object of aesthetic pleasure, remaining blind for any connections between the work and the world. (WM, p. 94-106). The second one strives to reconstruct the historic periods and events, but sees no connection between them and the present.

In Gadamer’s view hermeneutics must abandon the reconstruction of the past as its main task. Leaving the stand of romantic hermeneutics, especially that of Schleiermacher, Gadamer turns to Hegel: “Hegel spricht damit eine entschiedene Wahrheit aus, sofern das Wesen des geschichtlichen Geistes nicht in der Restitution des Vergangenen, sondern in der *denkenden Vermittlung mit dem gegenwärtigen Leben* besteht” (WM, p. 174).

The historic consciousness, as well as the aesthetic one, follows the program of achieving the transcendental point of analysis, free from anything alien to the consciousness. But Gadamer shows, that the method of acquiring this level of thinking –

¹² ZPD, p. 7.

¹³ This is how Weinsheimer titled one of the chapters in his book on Gadamer.

reflection, common to the methodology of natural sciences and to the Kantian vision of epistemology – is impossible, in the way the transcendental philosophy would like to see it¹⁴.

To conduct this critique Gadamer turns toward Heidegger. He accepts Heidegger's formulation of an ontologically positive character of the hermeneutical circle (WM, p. 296). To formulate this idea briefly we might say, that we understand only insofar, as we've understood before – we have to relate new things to all what already builds our understanding. This prestructure of understanding Gadamer calls prejudices (*Vorurteilen*) and vividly criticizes any attempt to abstract from them in order to achieve abstract, objective historical knowledge.

The hermeneutical circle is an another formulation of the hermeneutical principle of mediation. In the realm of the experience of the historical it led Gadamer to formulate his famous notion *Wirkungsgeschichte* – the effective history. The idea of *Wirkungsgeschichte* is very easy – it states, that history is not something merely past. It is an active force affecting every moment of our thinking.

It is impossible to distinguish that, what ought to be merely historical from that, what should be our present. This impossibility resembles the indivisibility of the world from the game (and the world from the language). We understand the past only from our point of view. Gadamer asks very distinctly: “Gibt es denn hier zwei voneinander verschiedene Horizonte, den Horizont, in dem der Verstehende lebt und den jeweiligen historischen Horizont, in den er sich versetzt?” (WM, p. 309). And his answer is, of course, negative: understanding occurs only there, where those two horizon fuse together.

The historicism sees the past as the accumulation of the worlds, each having its own horizon, what makes any mediation between them impossible. His main aim is to understand the historic period in his own specificity, mentality, spirit, language. But he must renounce from the truth of the past. He sees the texts from the past only as an expressions of the their own time (or singularities living in those times) while striving to reconstruct the spirit of that past world.

But we shouldn't think, that Gadamer renders all historic research and historic criticism as false or unnecessary. “Eine Überlieferung verstehen, verlangt also gewiss historischen Horizont” (WM, p. 310). The difference is, that the historic reconstruction tries to present the past with assertoric, apofantic sentences, drawing only the relations and influences that occurred in the past, while the hermeneutical, *wirkungsgeschichtliches* consciousness is “ein Moment des Vollzugs des Verstehens selbst” (WM, p. 306), that is – it leads to posing the tradition certain questions.

In abandoning the point of view of the present, striving to achieve abstract, objective reconstruction of the historic world and present it with assertoric sentences historicism makes the false presupposition when he can't see his own horizon of questioning. Accepting the prestructure of our understanding, our prejudices, we agree, that “Jede Aussage hat ihren Sinnhorizont darin, dass sie einer Fragesituation entstammt”¹⁵. But once again, we should not try to reconstruct those questions that the author asked himself during writing the text. The hermeneutical experience is always the experience of truth.

¹⁴ GJ, p. 18 – Gadamer speaks there of the naivety of reflection.

¹⁵ WW, p. 53.

Therefore, from the hermeneutical point of view, we should, and in fact we always do that, ask the text the questions about the issues we find important or interesting. The question is being posed in the fusion of horizons. Therefore the most important thing is to achieve this fusion – this is the proper hermeneutical task.

3. Lingual concretization of the *wirkungsgeschichtliches* consciousness

The concept of *wirkungsgeschichtliches* consciousness is, in my opinion, the peak moment of Gadamer's *opus vitae* and his philosophy. It is a specific combination of a potential of critical reflection and the recognition of its limits. Gadamer's analysis of the negative character of hermeneutical experience (WM, p. 352-368) shows the impossibility of basing the, phenomenological in its nature, hermeneutical truth (the negativity given in experience) on the pure and empty transcendental consciousness¹⁶.

Thus hermeneutics means, first of all, hermeneutical practice. But Gadamer's philosophy aims at the explication of the happening of understanding. The *wirkungsgeschichtliches* consciousness is the concept uniting these two moments of Gadamer's conception. The notions play (of art and of language), symbol, festival, *Wirkungsgeschichte*, presentation, hermeneutical circle etc. are reflexive – they intertwine with each other and simultaneously allow us to distance ourselves from the experience, to formulate the phenomenologically necessary structures of its (experience's, truth's) happening.

Our task now is to show the nature of the experience the concept of *wirkungsgeschichtliches* consciousness describes only formally (reflexive). We know already, that the understanding occurs in the fusion of horizons (WM, p. 311). Hermeneutical practice strives to remain open to the truth of the text. This truth is explicated with the use of the concept *Wirkungsgeschichte* and the prestructure of understanding. We understand only because we already understand (hermeneutical circle), because we refer to all what is already comprehensible for us – our prejudices¹⁷.

“Die Sprachlichkeit des Verstehens ist *die Konkretion des wirkungsgeschichtlichen Bewusstseins*” (WM, p. 393) – this is one of the most important sentences in whole Gadamer's philosophy. It means, that the nature of the hermeneutical experience, described with the notions of play or *Wirkungsgeschichte* is lingual and that understanding comes to its realization in language.

We shall therefore analyze Gadamer's conception of language, focusing only on the most important issues for our problem, in order to describe the lingual happening of fusion of horizons (translation).

In the text “Zwischen Phänomenologie und Dialektik” Gadamer criticizes his own failure in showing the close relation between the term of play occurring in his thinking

¹⁶ For similarities between Gadamer's and Popper's conception of experience see: Weinsheimer, p. 15-36.

¹⁷ „Das heißt, man muss auf die Vorurteile rekurren, um sagen zu können, inwiefern ein Verstehen des Ganzen in den Verstehensprozess eingeht“, Bertram, p. 49.

about the art and the conception of the play of the language. Although we are not able to fulfill this task for him, his self-critique can be very helpful in understanding the relations occurring between hermeneutical conception of the texts and the work of art. Although the experience of the latter served Gadamer as the *exemplum* of the hermeneutical experience in general, the fact of the lingual character of the texts is not of lesser importance. We've already stressed the contemporaneity of every work of art (Gadamer calls that the experience of the festival) and the reconciliation through the symbol coming to its fulfillment in this event. The writing makes it even more possible.

At the very beginning one could say, that "Sprachliche Überlieferung mag noch so sehr an anschaulicher Unmittelbarkeit etwa hinter Monumenten der bildenden Kunst zurücktreten" (WM, p. 393). This however cannot and must not be understood as a vice – this is the very possibility of the abstract thinking! Only in the language the words can create the distinctive feature of philosophical thinking – the notion. For Gadamer the notion alone is the characteristic of the philosophy – it has no object apart from the notion¹⁸. From one point of view this thought gives philosophy the space and freedom of thinking – one could say, its proper realm. But this conception raises also many questions. Some of them we will try to pose in the last chapter.

In his conception of the experience of art Gadamer incessantly emphasized the impossibility of the play to be grasped by one subjective consciousness. He applies the same thinking to his view on the language. "Ein (...) Wesenzug des Seins der Sprache scheint mir ihre Ichlosigkeit"¹⁹ – it's not us, who speak the language, it's rather the language who speaks with our help. The sentences we built are neither just our expressions nor merely sentences about facts. In both these conceptions Gadamer sees the instrumentalisation of language, as he stresses this extremely distinctively: "Die Sprache ist überhaupt kein Instrument, kein Werkzeug"²⁰.

Like in the art, the work of art was the presentation of the world (it was impossible to make the distinction between the world-in-itself and the world presented in the work of art) and just like in the interpretation of the history our prejudices become transparent (where we've recognized the figure of the hermeneutical circle), so the singular sentences, when understood, are referred to the wholeness of the world. In the art, the singular painting/piece of music/poem are referred to the wholeness of the play. This wholeness is the prestructure of our understanding – our prejudices. The concretization of this wholeness is the lingual interpretation of the world: "Es ist eine Fundamentalstruktur unseres Sprechens überhaupt, dass wir von Vorbegriffen und einem Vorverständnis in unserem Reden (...) dirigiert werden"²¹. These a priori notions (*Vorbegriffen*) and a priori understanding (*Vorverständnis*) is not something we acquire self-consciously – it is something we are born into (the Heideggerian *Geworfenheit*). "Wir sind in allem unserem Denken und Erkennen immer schon voreingenommen durch die sprachliche Weltauslegung"²²

Therefore I cannot fully present myself this wholeness, for it is the world I live in. I can only re-present it in speaking and in the conversation, the same as the play of the

¹⁸ BP, p. 78.

¹⁹MS, p. 151.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 148.

²¹SH, p. 181.

²²MS, p. 150.

tradition comes to its presentation in the work of art. I suppose we can already say, that the notions of play, symbol and festival, the whole ontology of the piece of art apply also to the happening of the language.

The ontology of the language in the philosophy of Gadamer confirms the universal aspect of the language – what coincides with the universal aspect of the hermeneutics (WM, p. 478-479). “Es ist die Universalität der Vernunft, mit der das Sagenkönnen unermüdlich Schritt hält”²³ – this sentence is of the highest importance for the hermeneutical understanding of the philosophy. In the very center of Gadamer’s thinking on the language stays the notion of its speculative structure. The world comes to its presentation in the language. It is the world we live in – the world we understand. The prejudices that allow the understanding are coming to its existence in the language.

The language is not a conceptual scheme, neither is it a system of symbols. Both of these conceptions assume, that there is the world that we describe with the use of the words. But the world is given to us in the language and we cannot simply choose the ways we want to make it present. We do not control the language. We cannot predict and control the changes that the new words or new context will do to our understanding. In his text “Semantik und hermeneutic” Gadamer criticizes the conception of the meaning that would define the sense of the words by their exchangeability²⁴. This conception states, that the word means the same as the word that is its synonym – that can be put in its place. But this conception, Gadamer writes, remains blind (or rather – deaf) to the polyvalence of the word. We will come back to this issue in a moment.

The language is not an instrument because the words have their history, their etymology – they are burdened with meaning²⁵. The language always refers to something, that remains unexpressed. Therefore we cannot speak of an expression of the subjectivity in the language. But the concept of elementary, atom sentences, the ideal of modern symbolic logic is also impossible. In his text “Sprache und Verstehen” Gadamer analyzes the ontological grounding of this lingual ideal – the affirmative, presenting sentence. The possibility of modern sciences, mathematics and, first of all, the symbolic logic occurred when the priority was given to sentence instead to the word²⁶. The false prejudice that Gadamer sees is the presupposition of the isolation of the sentence – its truth should be determined only in the reference to the facts (to the world –in – itself). The hermeneutical element lies in the word – because the ways we choose the words depends on the whole situation we speak in.

In this thought we can see the translation of the logic of occasionality and decorativeness into the notions of Gadamer’s philosophy of the language: “Was sich hier auftut, ist der grosse Bereich der Okkasionalität alles Redens, die den Sinn der Rede mit ausmacht”²⁷. Gadamer writes further, that this occasionality should be seen as the question. Therefore any statement is always an answer for some question:” Wer verstehen will, muss also fragend hinter das Gesagte zurückgehen” (WM, p. 375). This

²³ Ibidem, p. 152.

²⁴ SH, p. 176.

²⁵ It would be interesting to compare this phenomenon with the tradition of meaning included in the allegory.

²⁶ SV, s. 192.

²⁷ SH, p. 178.

question constitutes the horizon of understanding: "Eine Meinung verstehen heißt, sie als Antwort auf eine Frage verstehen" (WM, p. 381).

Historicism, as we've already seen, would like to see this horizons as the matter of historic reconstruction. Therefore he describes the unexpressable of the text in affirmative sentences, that present the "objective" relations in history. The *wirkungsgeschichtliches* consciousness aims however at the fusion of the horizons. This fusion is only possible within the question and answer logic, analyzed in the last subchapter of the second part of "Wahrheit und Methode". By posing the question, we allow our horizon of understanding to fuse with the tradition. The tradition after all is present in our understanding – this is, let us recall it, the activity of *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Therefore in reading/understanding/interpreting the text our prejudices come to the lingual existence – the world presents itself. We recognize here the same structure, that we previously called the symbol²⁸ – the reconciliation.

This presentation is necessary, for the language functions sub-consciously, in its specific way. When we speak, we concentrate on the thing expressed in the words. But because our understanding is constituted by the horizon of the unexpressed, the reflexive potential of *wirkungsgeschichtliches* consciousness recognizes the problem specific to the texts. We shall now focus on this problem, for it is crucial to our question we ask Gadamer.

"In der Form der Schrift ist alles Überlieferte für jede Gegenwart gleichzeitig" (WM, p. 393) The ideality of sense in writing, in written text, is taken out from its original context²⁹. Therefore the only context in understanding these texts is our prestructure of understanding. Sometimes it is impossible to reconstruct, even in approximation, the characteristics of its original context³⁰. But nevertheless we find in it (as far, of course, as we understand this particular language) the same words and notions we know and we speak with. We refer them to our world, our way of understanding the world. Remaining open to the truth of the text, we allow it, in all its difference, to pose us the question, so we can start the conversation with what is said in it.

Therefore, whenever we understand, we understand differently – the basic characteristic of the piece of art is also retained in case of lingual piece of art. But what about philosophy?

The problem is that philosophy doesn't use simple words. It strives to define its terms as strictly as possible. In opposition to poetry or literature philosophy always tried to create its own specific discourse. We can already point in this place that our understanding of philosophy differs from that of Gadamer's. But we shall wait with our doubts till the end of the paper.

For Gadamer, the most important issue in his thinking about the philosophy is that it remains within the element of the language³¹. Therefore the notions explicating the happening of the play of art and language are also applicable to the realm of abstractive thinking, that philosophy always attempted to be. The notions that philosophy used were

²⁸ „Allegory" in: *Wahrheit und Methode*.

²⁹ This insight is very similar to Derrida's and Deleuze's conception of (written) sign as something that is merely repeated.

³⁰ In this place one should pose the question about the relevance of philosopher's biography for the understanding and critique of his philosophy. The question must remain here unanswered.

³¹ BP, p. 79-80.

to be strictly defined, in opposition to poetry or literature. Therefore it could conduct argumentation. In Gadamer's opinion this abstraction of the notion is another (third) naivety of modern philosophy, de(con?)structed by the phenomenological movement³².

The problem is, that the philosophical notion is also being coined within the element of natural language³³. Therefore it bears within itself the prejudices of the language of the author, its time etc. The author himself used the language with the tradition – tradition that roots in the very beginnings of the European philosophy, in the Greek language.

For Gadamer, the task of philosophy is to acquire the unity of the notion³⁴. This unity should be conceived similar to the unity of the language. I understand it in this way, that every problem occurring within the particular philosophy bears in itself the conceptuality, the way of thinking, specific to this particular philosophy, that the whole set of notions tries to express. Therefore we cannot speak of the history of problems, as the neokantism saw that³⁵. Every philosophical problem shows its sense in the context of the whole conceptuality of the particular philosophy. It does not remain identical in the history of philosophy. Gadamer describes his critique of this false prejudice on the example of the problem of freedom³⁶. After acquiring the conceptuality of modern physics we do not understand this issue the same as Plato did.

But we cannot conceive of these systems as closed horizons. Such thought is of course impossible, for we've already pointed out the role that the natural language plays in creating the philosophical conceptuality. Therefore tracing the history of the particular word/concept we trace the prejudices that led to its coining. This is easy for us, for we use the same conceptuality. We just need to hear, what does the word say.

This hermeneutics of hearing is, in my opinion, the heart and the logic of destruction – in opposition to deconstruction³⁷. Destruction is the openness to the tradition contained within the words used in philosophical discourse. "Der Träger der Überlieferung ist ja nicht diese Handschrift als ein Stück von damals, sondern die Kontinuität des Gedächtnisses" (WM, p. 394). Destruction is the listening of this tradition (both *Überlieferung* and *Gedächtniss* in the quotation above), for the language, that once coined this or that notion is still to be found within it. As we've seen, from the hermeneutical point of view the idea of exchangeability of synonyms does not apply to specific uses of the language – like literature or poetry. And although we've made the statement, that philosophy differs from poetry, the *sound*, the *music* of the words are both important in all of these kinds of experience. Notions coined in language are the proper object of philosophy, we may now broaden Gadamer's formulation. All what we can find within the word, within the being of the word³⁸ influences still our thinking. The task of destruction is to trace the history of these words, to translate them into the language we can understand – we can understand once again (symbol, reconciliation). The occurrence of many notions and terms we use in sciences and philosophy took place

³² GJ, p. 19-20

³³ Just as any artificial language is always being created within this element.

³⁴ BP, p. 80. In my personal opinion this statement is very similar to Heidegger's – that every great thinker thinks only one thought. Therefore both of them are exposed to Derrida's critique.

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 81.

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ Comp. „Destruktion und Dekonstruktion“.

³⁸ Comp. "Wort und Bild – «so wahr, so seiend»".

in many different discourses. Therefore they have a fixed meaning, they are used in fixed contexts etc. Destruction puts them once again in the context of *life*, it translates them into the contexts of everyday speaking in their original language (in the case of philosophical notions this is mostly the Greek language), therefore making it possible to translate them into the language, which we use. The condition of proper understanding of the philosophy is to put it again into the continuity of a living tradition: "Eine Sprache versteht man, indem man in ihr lebt" (WM, p. 388).

Our deliberations agree with Gadamer's general remarks on the universality of the process of translation. The general task of the translator's task Gadamer describes in the following way: "Der Sinn soll vielmehr erhalten bleiben, aber da er in einer neuen Sprachwelt verstanden werden soll, muss er in ihr auf neue Weise zur Geltung kommen" (WM, p. 388). Decorativeness in the discourse on art meant the necessity to fit the work of art into the context. The same figure we recognize within the problematic of the lingual translation. When we try to express the same sense in new context (new lingual world) we need to search for the words very carefully. We must also never forget that "Die Bedeutung eines Wortes ist eben nicht nur im System und im Kontext allein da, sondern dieses In-einem-Kontext-Stehen bedeutet zugleich, dass sie sich von der Vieldeutigkeit, die das Wort an sich hat, auch dann nicht völlig abscheidet, wenn der Zusammenhang den jeweiligen Sinn eindeutig macht"³⁹. But this doesn't mean, that there is no possibility of accurate translation. For a linguist such translation (in philosophy) probably would remain impossible – but „ nicht, was da mitgeteilt wird, macht er zum Thema, sondern wie es überhaupt möglich ist, etwas mitzuteilen, mit welchen Mitteln der Zeichensetzung und Zeichengebung das vor sich geht"⁴⁰. From the hermeneutical point of view this way of presenting something is of course also important. But it focuses on the thing expressed in the words. Thus the translator focuses then on his understanding of the thing meant in the text and also his understanding of the language. Therefore the hermeneutical task is indeed never-ending. The clarification of the words takes place in constant conversation with the text.

This necessity, but also, this constant possibility of translation in conversation made it possible for Gadamer, in opposition to Heidegger, to criticize the concept of the language of metaphysics⁴¹. There are no word that belong to this or that tradition of philosophy, therefore we should not renounce using them, but always try to specify, how we understand them. And we also cannot comprehend the terms occurring within the history of philosophy the same. The word *hypokeimenon* doesn't mean the same as *substantia* or *subiectum*. We only have to hear the difference.

In the notion of *wirkungsgeschichtliches* consciousness meet and intertwine two moments: openness for the truth of the text (letting my prejudices enter the game with the text) and the reflexive (critical) control of the fuse of the horizons. We can also translate those terms as, respectively, "the good will to understand"⁴² and "destruction". It is, in my opinion, impossible to think one of them without the other. "The good will to understand" shows the primordial hermeneutical act – reading the text in the way it wants to speak. It is Letting-The-Text-Speak. But it is mostly not the text, that speaks. It

³⁹ SV, p. 197.

⁴⁰ TI, p. 341.

⁴¹ ZPD, p. 11.

⁴² TI, p. 343.

is more the living tradition⁴³ embodied in the lingual form that allows the text to speak to us. “Destruction” is therefore the putting the text back in the continuity of life. We try to understand, how the words occurring in the text once could have lived, hear the connection between them and the everyday language of the time – we destruct any petrification of the meaning in the history of philosophy. We destruct in the name of the truth. “The good will to understand” is the openness to the truth of a text. This truth always takes place in the language, for it is the element of language that allows our prejudices to get involved in the play with tradition. The tradition and our being – our prejudices – come to presentation (to their reality) in the “middle world of the language”: “Die Zwischenwelt der Sprache erweist sich gegenüber den Illusionen des Selbstbewusstseins ebenso wie gegenüber der Naivität eines positivischen Tatsachenbegriffs als die eigentliche Dimension dessen, was gegeben ist”⁴⁴. The hermeneutical truth is the reconciliation within the element of language⁴⁵.

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⁴³ Therefore Derrida's attack on Gadamer, where he points at the priority of continuity over the rupture, aims directly at this moment.

⁴⁴ TI, p. 339.

⁴⁵ Heidegger was destructing the tradition of philosophy in order to let the voice of Being speak again. When Gadamer says, that the Being is the language („Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache“), he points at the fact, that the destruction from his point of view should lead to the free hearing of the voice of tradition embodied in the being of the language – in other words, letting the play of the language take place.

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