

# Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing ['Pointure']

POINTURE (Latin *punctura*), sb. fem. Old synonym of prick. Term in printing, small iron blade with a point, used to fix the page to be printed on to the tympan. The hole which it makes in the paper. Term in shoemaking, glovemaking: number of stitches in a shoe or glove.

Litttré

I owe you the truth in painting, and I will tell it to you.

Cézanne

But truth is so dear to me, and so is the *seeking to make true*, that indeed I believe, I believe I would still rather be a cobbler than a musician with colors.

van Gogh

[...]—What interested me, was finally to see explained from a certain angle why I had always found this passage of Heidegger's on van Gogh ridiculous and lamentable. So it really was the naïveté of what Schapiro rightly calls a 'projection.' One is not only disappointed when his academic high seriousness, his severity and rigor of tone give way to this 'illustration' (*bildliche Darstellung*). One is not only disappointed by the consumerlike hurry toward the content of a representation, by the heaviness of the pathos, by the coded triviality of this description, which is both overloaded and impoverished, and one never knows if it's busying itself around a picture, 'real' shoes, or shoes that are imaginary but outside painting, not only disappointed by the crudeness of the framing the arbitrary and barbaric nature of the cutting-out, the massive self-assurance of the identification: 'a pair of peasants' shoes,' just like that! Where did he get that from? Where does he explain himself on this matter? So one is not only disappointed, one sniggers. The fall in tension is too great. One follows step by step the moves of a 'great thinker,' as he returns to the origin of the work of art and of truth, traversing the whole history of the West and then suddenly, at a bend in a corridor, here we are on a guided tour, as schoolchildren or tourists. Someone's gone to fetch the guide from the neighboring farm. Full of goodwill. He loves the earth and a certain type of painting when he can



find himself in it [*quand il s'y retrouve*]. Giving up his usual activity he goes off to get his key while the visitors wait, slowly getting out of the coach. (There is a Japanese tourist among them, who in a moment will ask a few questions of the guide, in a stage whisper.) Then the tour begins. With his local [Swabian] accent, he tries to get the visitors going [he sometimes manages it and each time this happens he also trembles regularly, in time], he piles up the associations and immediate projections. From time to time he points out of the window to the fields and nobody notices that he's no longer talking about painting. All right. And one says to oneself that the scene, the choice of the example, the procedure of the treatment, nothing in all this is fortuitous. This casual guide is the very person who, before and after this incredible tirade, carries on with his discourse on the origin of the work of art and on truth. It's the same discourse, it has never been interrupted by the slightest digression (what all these professorial procedures with regard to the shoes are lacking in, moreover, is the sense of digression: the shoes have to make a pair and walk on the road, forwards or backwards, in a circle if pushed, but with no digressions or sidesteps allowed, now there is a link between the detachability of the step and the possibility of the digressive). I see that you are shocked, in your deference, by the scene which I have, how shall I put it —projected.

—Then let's get back into the classroom. All that is classical, class-business, the business of pedagogy and classicity, Professor Heidegger, as Professor Schapiro says in homage to Professor Goldstein, projects a transparency. He wants to capture your interest, through this illustration, right from the beginning of his lecture. For *The Origin* was in the beginning, at a very significant date, a series of lectures delivered before a *kunstwissenschaftliche Gesellschaft* and then before a *freie deutsche Hochstift*, and shows it.

—The word 'illustration' has just been uttered. And it had been several times previously. I suggest that that's where we should start, if we must begin and if we must read Schapiro's *Note* against which I intend to defend systematically, at least for the committee exercise, the cause of Heidegger [who, don't forget, also proffers, in this place where it is a question of the thing, an important discourse on the *causa*]. A fair number of difficulties arise from what is translated by *illustration*. In his protocol, Schapiro uses this word which also translates [into French] '*bildliche Darstellung*' ['For this purpose an illustration suffices. We choose for this a famous picture by van Gogh ...']. Schapiro opens his text—and *The Origin*—at this point [by what right?] and he writes: 'In his essay on *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Martin Heidegger interprets a painting by van Gogh to illustrate the nature of art as a disclosure of truth.

'He comes to this picture in the course of distinguishing three

tour group

illustration  
now depends  
H

modes of being: of useful artifacts [products], of natural things, and of works of fine art. He proposes to describe first, 'without any philosophical theory ... a familiar sort of equipment [*Zeug*: product]—a pair of peasant shoes', and 'to facilitate the visual realization [translating *Veranschaulichung*, intuitive sensory presentation] of them' he chooses 'a well-known painting by van Gogh, who painted such shoes several times' [see 62]. But to grasp the 'equipmental being of equipment,' we must know 'how shoes actually serve.' For the peasant woman they serve without her thinking about them or even looking at them. Standing and walking in the shoes, the peasant woman knows the serviceability [*Dienlichkeit*] in which 'the equipmental being of equipment consists.' But we ...' [Schapiro, p. 203]. And Schapiro quotes these two paragraphs which you all find so ridiculous or so imprudent. Let's reread them first, in German, in French, in English.

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—It's done.

—Before going any further, I shall pick out from the cutting-out in Schapiro's protocol a certain number of simplifications, not to call them anything worse. They have effects on everything that follows. He simplifies matters by saying that Heidegger interprets a painting to illustrate the nature of art as the unveiling of truth. To prove this, one has no need to refer to what the following page says, i.e., [in translation first]: 'the work in no way served [*diente gar nicht*], as it may have seemed at first, to illustrate more clearly what a product is.' What has here been translated as 'illustrate' is *Veranschaulichung* this time, and not *Darstellung*, which was also translated above as illustration. *Veranschaulichung*, intuitive presentation, as it were, is what had to be facilitated by invoking the example of the picture. But it is also what *was not done*, although it seemed as though that's what was happening. Heidegger makes this quite clear: the work did not serve us to do that, did not do us this service which, all in all, we pretended to expect from it. It did better than illustrating or presenting something to sensory intuition—or worse, depending on the point of view—it showed, it made appear. Heidegger has just recalled that the work did not 'serve' as *Veranschaulichung* or *Darstellung*, and he goes on to specify: 'Much more is it the being-product of the product which arrives, properly [*eigens*] and only through the work, at its appearing.' This appearing of the being-product does not, according to Heidegger, take place in an elsewhere which the work of art could illustrate by referring to it. It takes place properly (and only) in the work. In its very truth. This might seem to aggravate the illusion denounced by Schapiro and to place under the heading of presentation what was marked down only in

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the name of representation, as if Heidegger thought he could see still more directly what Schapiro reproaches him for inferring too hastily. But things are not yet so simple and we shall have to return to this.

First of all; it is not as *peasant shoes*, but as *product* [Zeug] or as *shoes-as-product* that the being-product manifested itself. The manifestation is that of the being-product of the product and not of this or that species of product, such as shoes. Such was the function of the *Darstellung*. It must be carefully demarcated in this passage and its stages differentiated. Heidegger is not simply, as Schapiro claims, in the process of distinguishing between three modes of being of the thing.

—Then what *is* going on when the so-called illustration intervenes?

—Heidegger has just analyzed the system of the three couples of determinations superimposed on the thing. They are connected, associated in a sort of 'conceptual mechanism' [*Begriffsmechanik*] which nothing resists. Among the effects of this system, the matter/form couple and the concept of thing as informed matter have long dominated every theory of art and every aesthetics. And still do so today. From the moment he is interested here in the work of art, Heidegger insists and makes his question more precise: does this (dominant) form-matter complex have its origin in the being-thing of the thing or else in the being-work of the work and in the being-product [with the participation of man, it is understood, whence the temptation to take this matter-form complex to be the immediate structure of the thing] of the product? In other words, would it not be on the basis of the thing as work or as product that this *general* interpretation (or rather one that is claimed to be general) of the thing as informed matter was secretly constituted? Now reread the chapter: in the course of this questioning about the product as informed matter, the example of the pair of shoes appears at least three times *before and in the absence of the least reference to a work of art*, be it pictorial or otherwise. Twice associated with the example of the ax and the pitcher.

—There's a lot that needs to be said about these examples and about the discourse on the pitcher in Heidegger, with reference to the thing, precisely.

—Yes, in Heidegger and others before him, in his tradition, or after him: Ponge, for example. But let's not let ourselves get sidetracked. Another time. Having been twice associated with the pitcher and the ax, the pair of shoes (the third time it is mentioned but still before there is any question of the picture) detaches itself from the other examples. Suddenly it is alone. No doubt it is responding to a particular need, but Heidegger will never thematize this. Perhaps it is because, unlike the ax and the pitcher, this useful product is also an article of clothing [*Fussbekleidung*] whose mode of attachment to the body of the subject—let's say, more rigorously, to its *Dasein*—involves an element of orig-

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inality from which more can be got in this context. But let's leave that. In any case this example manages very well, for many pages, to do without any aesthetic or pictorial reference. And it is during its last occurrence before the allusion to the 'famous picture' that an essential schema is set in place. Without it we would understand nothing of the passage about such-and-such a work by van Gogh, nothing of its differential function, and nothing of its irreducible equivocality either. I called it a schema: basically, and in a barely displaced Kantian sense, it's a hybrid, a mediation or a double belonging or double articulation. The product [*Zeug*] seems to be situated between the thing and the work of art (the work is always a work *of art* in this context: *Werk*). It shares in both, even though the work resembles [*gleichet*] the 'simple thing' more than does the product. The example of the shoes guides the analysis of this schematism when it is first set in place. It is only three pages later, in order to take a further step [*un pas de plus*] in this question of the being-product, that Heidegger will take up the same example again: this time 'inside' a work of art, we shall see why and how this 'inside' turns itself inside out, and is crossed with a single step [*d'un seul pas franchi*]. For the moment, the pair of shoes is a paradigm.

—in its status as paradigm, it has a very noble philosophical genealogy, going back to Plato. So we can hear at this point a sort of quotation, as encrypted as it is conventional, in a long discursive chain.

—it is here a paradigm of the thing as 'product.' It is not yet 'painted' or 'painting' and it occupies, in an exemplary way, that 'intermediate place [*Zwischenstellung*, place of the between, the inter-stela or, as Lacoue-Labarthe might say, the inter-posture: see his 'Typographie,' in *Mimesis*]<sup>1</sup> between the mere thing [*blossen Ding*] and the work [*Werk*].' When the 'product' is the subject of a 'work,' when the thing-as-product [shoes] is the 'subject' presented or represented by a thing-as-work (a picture by van Gogh), the thing will be too complicated to be treated as lightly and simply as Schapiro does. For then one will have to deal with a work (which resembles a mere thing more than it does a product, and resembles a mere thing more than a product does), with a work presenting or representing a product the status of which is intermediary between the thing and the work, etc. The intermediate mode is *in the middle* of the other two, which it gathers and divides in itself according to a structure of envelopment which is difficult to spread out. Here, first of all, is the schematism of the product. For example: shoes *in general*. I pick out and emphasize a few words: 'The product [*Zeug*], for example the shoe-product [*Schuhzeug*] rests, as ready [*fertig*, finished] in itself as the thing pure and simple, but it does not have, as does the block of granite, this *Eigenwüchsige* (difficult to translate: not 'spontaneity,' as the French translation has it, but compact self-sufficiency, dense propriety referring only to itself, stubborn). On the other hand the product also shows an affinity [*Verwandtschaft*] with the

work of art, inasmuch as it is produced [*hervorgebracht*] by the hand of man. In spite of this, the work of art in its turn, by its self-sufficient presence [*in seinem selbstgenügsamen Anwesen*], resembles [*gleich*] the thing pure and simple, referring only to itself [*eigenwüchsige*] and constrained to nothing [*zu nichts gedrängten*] [...]. Thus the product is half a thing, because determined by thingliness, and yet more than that, at the same time it is half work of art, and yet less than that

—so a work like the shoe picture *represents* half of itself and yet less than that

—and yet less than that, because it lacks the self-sufficiency of the work of art.

—so a work like the shoe-picture exhibits what something lacks in order to be a work, it exhibits—in shoes—its lack of itself, one could almost say its own lack. And that is how it's supposed to be self-sufficient? Accomplished? Does it complete itself then? Unless it overflows (itself), into inadequation, excess, the supplement?

—Heidegger continues. 'The product thus has its proper intermediate place [*Zwischenstellung*] between the thing and the work, always supposing that it is permissible to give in to such an accountant-like classification.'

What, to Heidegger's own eyes, limits the legitimacy of this arithmetical triplicity (the one by which Schapiro boldly sums up the whole context: 'in the course of distinguishing three modes of things ...'), is that if thing 2 (the product) is between thing 1 (naked, pure and simple thing) and thing 3 [the work of art], thus participating in both of them, the fact nonetheless remains that thing 3 is more like thing 1: also, further on, the picture will be presented as a thing and it will be allowed a privilege in the presentation made in it (in presence and self-sufficient) of thing 2 (shoes as product). These 'three' 'modes' do not entertain among themselves a relationship of distinction, as Schapiro thinks. (Tight interlacing, but one which can always be analyzed, untied up to a certain point. Like a lace, each 'thing,' each mode of being of the thing, passes inside then outside the other. From right to left, from left to right. We shall articulate this *strophe* of the lace: in its rewinding passing and re-passing through the eyelet of the thing, from outside to inside, from inside to outside, on the external surface and under the internal surface (and vice versa when this surface is turned inside out like the top of the left-hand shoe), it remains the 'same' right through, between right and left, shows itself and disappears [*fort/da*] in its regular traversing of the eyelet, it makes the thing sure of its gathering, the underneath tied up on top, the inside bound on the outside, by a law of stricture. Hard and flexible at one and the same time). Thus the work, which is more like the thing pure and simple than a product is (shoes, for example), is also a product. The shoe picture is a product (of art) which is like a thing, presenting (and not representing, we shall come

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to this) a product (shoes), etc.

The recourse to the 'famous picture' is in the first place justified by a question on the being-product and not on the work of art. The work of art as such will be talked about, it seems, only as if in passing and after the event. At the moment when Heidegger proposes to turn toward the picture, he is thus *not* interested in the work, but only in the being-product of which some shoes—any shoes—provide an example. If what matters to him and what he describes at this point are not shoes in painting, one cannot legitimately expect from him a description of the picture *for itself*, nor, in consequence, criticize its appositeness. So what is he up to and why does he insist so much on the being-product? He, too, has a suspicion, and a hypothesis: has not the thing pure and simple, thing 1, been secretly determined on the basis of thing 2, of the product *as* informed matter? Must we not try to think the being-product 'before,' 'outside,' 'under' this supervening determination? 'Thus it is that the interpretation of the thing in terms of matter and form, whether it remains medieval or becomes transcendental in the Kantian sense, has become current and self-evident. But this does not make it any less a superimposition fallen upon [*Überfall*] the being-thing of the thing, than the other interpretations. This situation reveals itself already in the fact of naming things properly speaking [*eigentlichen Dinge*] things pure and simple [*blasse Dinge*, naked things]. This 'naked' [*Das 'bloss'*] does however mean the stripping [*Entblössung*, the denuding which strips of -] away of the character of usefulness [*Dienlichkeit*] and of being made

—If I understand rightly: not the denuding of the foot, for example, but the denuding of the shoes that have become naked things again, without usefulness, stripped of their use-value? Presenting the shoes as things (1 or 3, without 2) would involve exhibiting a certain nudity, or even an obscenity

—obscenity, that's already laying it on a bit thick [*en remettre*], let's say nudity, yes. Heidegger goes on: 'and of being made. The naked thing [*blasse Ding*] is a sort of product [*Zeug*] but a product divested [*entkleidete*] of its being-as-product. Being-thing then consists in what still remains [*was noch übrigbleibt*]. But this remainder [*Rest*] is not properly [*eigens*] determined in itself. . . .'

—The remainder: these naked shoes, these things of uncertain use, returned to their abandonment as things for doing nothing.

—Perhaps saying that still involves thinking of them too much in terms of their use-value. In order to think this 'remainder' and 'properly' [*eigens*] otherwise, Heidegger then takes another step. He wants to interpret the being-product *without* or before the matter-form couple, convinced that this remainder will not be reached by subtraction of the 'product' but by opening up *another* road toward what is properly product in the product, toward the 'Zeughaften des Zeuges.'



The reference to van Gogh is inscribed in this movement, in whatever makes it very strictly singular. That said, *inside* this movement, Heidegger's gesture, with all the craftsmanlike subtlety of a cobbler with a short awl, going quickly from inside to outside, speaks *now of the picture, in it, now of something quite different, outside it*. In a first movement and most importantly, the question which provokes the reference to the picture in no way concerns a work of art. In a manner of speaking the primary motivation of the passage does not concern painting. And yet, through this lacing movement we were talking about (from inside to outside, from outside to inside, his iron point passing through the surface of the leather or the canvas in both directions, pricking and pointing [*par piqûre et peinture*]), the trajectory of the reference is divided and multiplied. In a way which is doubtless both wily and naïve, but following a necessity which Schapiro's lawsuit seems to me to overlook.

—is it a matter of rendering justice to Heidegger, of restituting what is his due, his truth, the possibility of his own gait and progress?

—This question comes a little too early. I'm only starting. [...]

—I always get the impression that in commenting on Heidegger, in restituting him in an apparently very strict way, one makes him say something quite other, all the accents are changed, his language is no longer recognizable. The commentary becomes obscene and thinking otherwise becomes thinking otherwise than he, who wants to think the remainder 'properly.' Here, 'otherwise' would be otherwise than properly. But then what would be proper to this other?

—Let us rather return to the 'famous picture.' A product-thing, some shoes, is there as if represented (Heidegger will, moreover, say that it is not represented, re-produced, but let's leave these questions for the moment, we shall pick them up again). This 'product' has at least the following singular characteristics that we can point out immediately: It belongs to the genus 'clothing' (and is in this sense *parergonal*), and this is not the case with all products. It hints at a movement of return to the thing that is said, by metaphor or transference, to be 'naked': insofar as it is a useless product, not in current use, abandoned, unlaced, offered, as thing (1 and 3) and as product (thing 2) in a sort of idleness [*désœuvrement*]. And yet, insofar as it is a usable product, and especially insofar as it is a product of the genus clothing, it is invested, inhabited, informed

—haunted

—by the 'form' of another naked thing from which it is (partially and provisionally?) detached

—'the *parergon* is detached ...'

—and to which it seems to be waiting (seems to make us wait for it) to be reattached, reappropriated. It seems to be made to be retied. But the line of detachment (and thus of the out-of-use and the idleness alike) is



not only the one which goes around the shoes and thus gives them form, cuts them out. This first line is already a tracing of coming and going between the outside and the inside, notably when it follows the movement of the lace. It is therefore not simple, it has an internal border and an external border which is incessantly turned back in. But there is another line, another system of detaching *traits*: this is the work *qua* picture in its frame. The frame makes a work of supplementary *désœuvrement*. It cuts out but also sews back together. By an invisible lace which pierces the canvas (as the *pointure* 'pierces the paper'), passes into it then out of it in order to sew it back onto its milieu, onto its internal and external worlds. From then on, if these shoes are no longer useful, it is of course because they are detached from naked feet and from their subject of reattachment (their owner, usual holder, the one who wears them and whom they bear). It is also because they are painted: within the limits of a picture, but limits that have to be thought in laces. Hors-d'oeuvre in the *oeuvre*, hors-d'oeuvre as *oeuvre*: the laces go through the eyelets (which also go in pairs) and pass on to the invisible side. And when they come back from it, do they emerge from the other side of the leather or the other side of the canvas? The prick of their iron point, through the metal-edged eyelets, pierces the leather and the canvas simultaneously. How can we distinguish the two textures of invisibility from each other? Piercing them with a single *pointure*

—So there'd be a *pointure* of the laces, in this other sense—

—piercing them with a single *pointure*

—does the *pointure* belong to the picture? I'm thinking of the points that nail the canvas onto the stretcher. When nails are painted (as they are by Klee in his *Constructif-impressionnant* of 1927), as figure on a ground, what is their place? To what system do they belong?

—the nails do not form part of the 'principal' figure, as the laces do. The functioning of their *pointure* requires another analysis—

—piercing them with a single *pointure*, the figure of the laces will have sewn the leather onto the canvas. If the two textures are traversed by a single doubled blow, then they are henceforth indiscernible. Everything is painted on leather, the canvas is both *shod* [*chaussée*] and unshod, etc. That is how it appears, at least, in this play of appearance/disappearance. [...]

—I'll sharpen up the question: to a peasant or a peasant woman? It's the limen of this debate, let's remain there a little longer: why does Heidegger sometimes say 'a pair of peasants' shoes [*ein Paar Bauernschuhe*] and nothing else [*und nichts weiter*],' without determination of sex or allowing the masculine to gain a footing thanks to this neutrality, and sometimes—more often, in fact—'the peasant woman' [*die Bäuerin*], when designating the 'subject'? He never explains himself on this point, and Schapiro, for his part, never pays the

slightest attention to it. To which sex are these shoes due? This is not exactly the same question as that posed earlier, when we were wondering whether or not there was a symbolic equivalence between the supposed 'symbol' 'shoe' and such-and-such a genital organ, or whether only a differential and idiomatic syntax could arrest bisexuality, confer on it some particular leading or dominant value, etc. Here it is not the same question and yet the attribution of shoes (in painting) to a subject-wearer (bearer)

—of shoes and of a sex

—a masculine or feminine sex, this attribution is not without its resonance with the first question. Let us not forget that *The Origin* deals with the essence of truth, the truth of essence and the abyss [*Abgrund*] which plays itself out there like the 'veiled' destiny [*fatum*] which transfixes being.

Graft of sex onto the shoes. This graft is not arrested by *The Origin*: sometimes the indeterminacy slips by force of language toward the masculine, sometimes the feminine wins out. There is *some* peasant (*liness*) and the peasant woman, but never a peasant man. For Schapiro, it comes down without any possible argument on the side of the masculine ('a man of the town and city'), Vincent van Gogh's sex being in no doubt for the signatory of the 'Still Life ...'

—It is true that neither Heidegger nor Schapiro seems to give thematic attention to the sex of reattachment. The one reattaches, prior to any examination of the question, to peasantry, but passes without warning from peasantry to the peasant woman. The other, having examined the question, reattaches to some city-dwelling painter, but never asks himself why they should be men's shoes nor why the other, not content with saying 'peasantry,' sometimes adds 'the peasant woman.' Sometimes, and even most often.

—But what is thematic attention? And does what it seems to exclude (the implicit? the foreclosed? the denied? the unthought? the encrypted? the 'incorporated'?—so many different functions) allow itself to be excluded from the field?

—From what field? Fenced by whom? By what? By peasantry or peasant-womanry? [...]

—All this aggravates Heidegger's referentialist, monoreferential naïveté. This must be emphasized with respect to a discourse on *The Origin of the Work of Art*. It can't not have some relationship with the whole undertaking. And yet:

a. Heidegger 'is well aware,' and Schapiro knows that he is well aware: 'Van Gogh painted such shoes more than once' [*solches Schuhzeug mehrmals gemalt hat*]. Why did he not take this into account? Is his error more serious or less serious for this? Has he arrived by induction at a sort of 'general picture,' retaining, by abstraction or subtraction, the common or supposedly common traits of a whole series? This hypo-

thesis—the least favorable—is ruled out by everything of Heidegger's one can read. He was always very severe on this conceptualism, which would here be doubled by an empiricist barbarity. So?

Heidegger's defence, mitigating circumstances: his 'intention' was not that of concentrating on a given painting of describing and interrogating its singularity as an art critic would do. So let's read once more the opening of this passage. It is indeed a question of 'simply describing' [*einfach beschreiben*] not a picture but 'a product,' 'without philosophical theory.' 'We choose as an example a common sort of product: a pair of peasants' shoes.' *Not yet a picture, not a work of art, but a product.* Let's go on. 'In order to describe them, we do not need to have in front of us real samples of useful objects of this type. Everyone is familiar with them. But since it is a matter here of an immediate description, it may be as well to facilitate intuitive presentation [*Veranschaulichung*]. By way of an accessory aid [*Für diese Nachhilfe*, omitted in the French (and English) translation], a pictorial representation [*bildliche Darstellung*] suffices. For this purpose we choose a famous picture by van Gogh who painted such shoes more than once.'

—It's clear, the picture is, *for the moment*, as a hypothesis, an intuitive accessory. One can reproach Heidegger for this illustrative procedure, but that would be a different matter from behaving as though he were trying to describe the picture for itself, and then, in this hypothesis which for the moment is not his, reproaching him for mistakes in the reading. *For the moment*, the object to be described, to be interpreted, is not the picture or even the object insofar as it is painted ([re]presented), but a familiar product well known to everyone. None of what follows concerns, or pretends to delimit, the pictorial specificity of the shoes or even their specificity insofar as they may be different from other shoes. With a picture in front of you to keep up attention and facilitate intuition, a picture of a pair of shoes, whatever pair it may be, peasants' shoes or not, painted or not, you could bring out the same features: the being-product, the usefulness, the belonging to the world and to the earth, in the very definite sense that Heidegger accords to these two words which do not interest Schapiro and to which we shall have to return. But in that case, you'll say, why choose a painting? Why explicate so heavily what stems from the problematical identification of these shoes as peasants' shoes? At the stage where we are at the moment, and Heidegger says so, some real shoes (peasants' or not) or shoes drawn vaguely in chalk on the blackboard would have rendered the same service. The blackboard would have sufficed.

—That's what Schapiro reproaches Heidegger with.

—But Heidegger says it ('But what more is there to see there? Everybody knows what belongs to shoes'), and you can only reproach him for it by assuming that he was *primarily* interested in a picture, that he was trying to analyze it as such, which is not the case. For the use to

which he wanted to put it at first, the various canvases were indeed interchangeable, with no harm done. If his attribution of the thing to peasantry is indeed (and we shall still have to examine to what point it is) imprudent and precipitate, we do at least know that he could have produced, for what mattered to the analysis of the being-product, the same discourse on town shoes: the relationship of the wearer to this strange product (very close to, and yet detachable from, his body), the relationship with walking, with work, with the ground, the earth, and the world. Everything that comes down to the 'peasant' world is in this respect an accessory variable even if it does come massively under 'projection' and answers to Heidegger's pathetic-fantasmatic-ideological-political investments.

b. The 'same truth,' that 'presented' by the picture, is not for Heidegger 'peasant' truth, a truth the essential content of which would depend on the attribution (however imprudent) of the shoes to peasantry. The 'peasant' characteristic remains secondary here. The 'same truth' could be 'presented' by any shoe painting, or even by any experience of shoes and even of any 'product' in general: the truth being that of a being-product coming back from 'further away' than the matter-form couple, further away even than a 'distinction between the two.' This truth is due to a 'more distant origin.' It is not the truth of a *relationship* (of adequation or attribution) between such-and-such a product and such-and-such an owner, user, holder, bearer/wearer-borne. The belonging of the product 'shoes' does not relate to a given *subjectum*, or even to a given world. What is said of belonging to the world and the earth is valid for the town and for the fields. Not indifferently, but equally.

Thus Schapiro is mistaken about the primary function of the pictorial reference. He also gets wrong a Heideggerian argument which should ruin in advance his own restitution of the shoes to van Gogh: art as 'putting to work of truth' is neither an 'imitation,' nor a 'description' copying the 'real,' nor a 'reproduction,' whether it represents a singular thing or a general essence. For the whole of Schapiro's case, on the other hand, calls on real shoes: the picture is supposed to imitate them, represent them, reproduce them. Their belonging has then to be determined as a belonging to a real or supposedly real subject, to an individual whose extremities, outside the picture, should not remain bare [déchaussées; also, 'loose' (of teeth)] for long.

—loose like old teeth. But he won't be able to avoid the bridge. He doesn't know that the shoe already forms a prosthesis. And perhaps the foot does too. It can always be someone else's. So many sayings pass through here to speak of the dislocation of the inadequate, like when one is 'à côté de ses pompes' (literally, 'beside one's shoes (with fatigue)'), or the usurper's abuse: 'to be in someone's shoes.'<sup>2</sup> Thrown into the abyss, the sphynx, from the moment the turgidity

Sworn about  
Heid.

—Schapiro tightens the picture's laces around 'real' feet. I underline: 'They are clearly pictures of the artist's own shoes, not the shoes of a peasant. . . . Later in Arles he represented, as he wrote in a letter of August 1888 to his brother, 'une paire de vieux souliers,' which are evidently his own. . . .' They are: the lace passes here, in the copula, it couples the painted shoes and the painter's feet. It is drawn out of the picture, which presupposes a hole in the canvas.

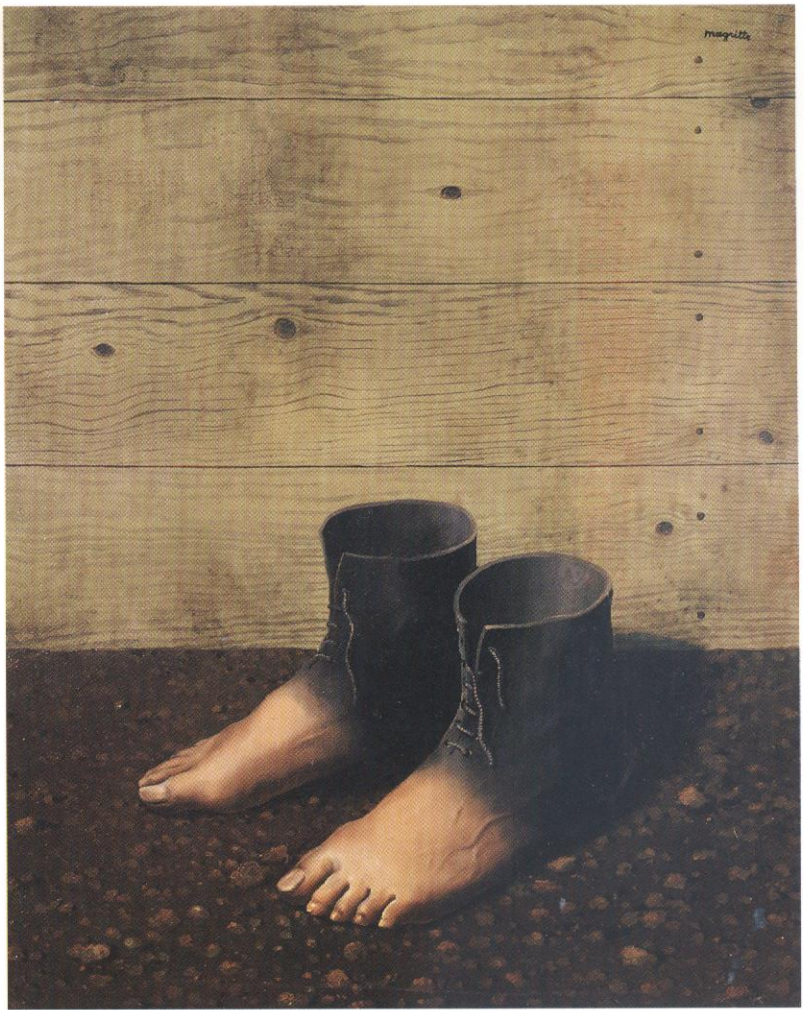
—And besides, did we have to wait for Heidegger before being on our guard? Before we could avoid considering a painted object as a copy? Worse, before we could avoid attributing it an adequate model (real shoes) and what's more attributing to this model an adequate subject (van Gogh), which makes two capitalized attributions? Then there is the word *evidently*, the word *clearly* which comes in again later, when a picture is identified in a catalog, the words *his own* which several times so calmly declare property, propositions of the type 'this is that' in which the copula ties a 'real' predicate to a 'painted' object. One is surprised that an expert should use all this dogmatic and precritical language. It all looks as though the hammering of the notions of self-evidence, clarity, and property was meant to resound very loudly to prevent us from hearing that nothing here is clear, or self-evident, or proper to anyone or anything whatsoever. And doubtless Schapiro knows this or says it to himself more or less clearly. But it is only at this price that he can have the shoes, acquire them with a view to a restitution, snatch them from the one to give them to the other. That other to whom he believes he is no stranger. To slip them on, then. On his own feet and on the other's feet. Like a garment or an object that one puts on [*qu'on se passe*]. The *se passer* of this thrust [*cette passe*] is also what the shoes in *restance* are doing. That's what's happening here.<sup>3</sup>

—I would distinguish three dogmas in Schapiro's credo, when he speculates in this way on the occasion of these old shoes. Three dogmas with structures that are distinct from one another but analogous in their functional finality. 1. Painted shoes can belong really and really be restituted to a real, identifiable, and nameable subject. This illusion is facilitated by the closest identification between the alleged holder of the shoes and the so-called signatory of the picture. 2. Shoes are shoes, be they painted or 'real,' solely and simply shoes which are what they are, adequate to themselves and in the first place fittable onto feet. Shoes belong properly. In their structure as replaceable product, in the standard nature of their size, in the detachability of this clothing-type instrument, they do not have what it would take to make all *strict* belonging and propriety drift. 3. Feet (painted, ghostly, or real) belong to a body proper. They are not detachable from it. These three assurances can't stand up to the slightest question. They are in any case immediately dismantled by what *happens* [*se passe*] by what *there is* in this painting.



63 René Magritte

*The Red Model*,  
(Le Modèle rouge), 1935



—Although they bear on three distinct articulations, these three assurances tend to efface them in the interests of one and the same continuum. To reattach the detachables according to an absolute stricture.

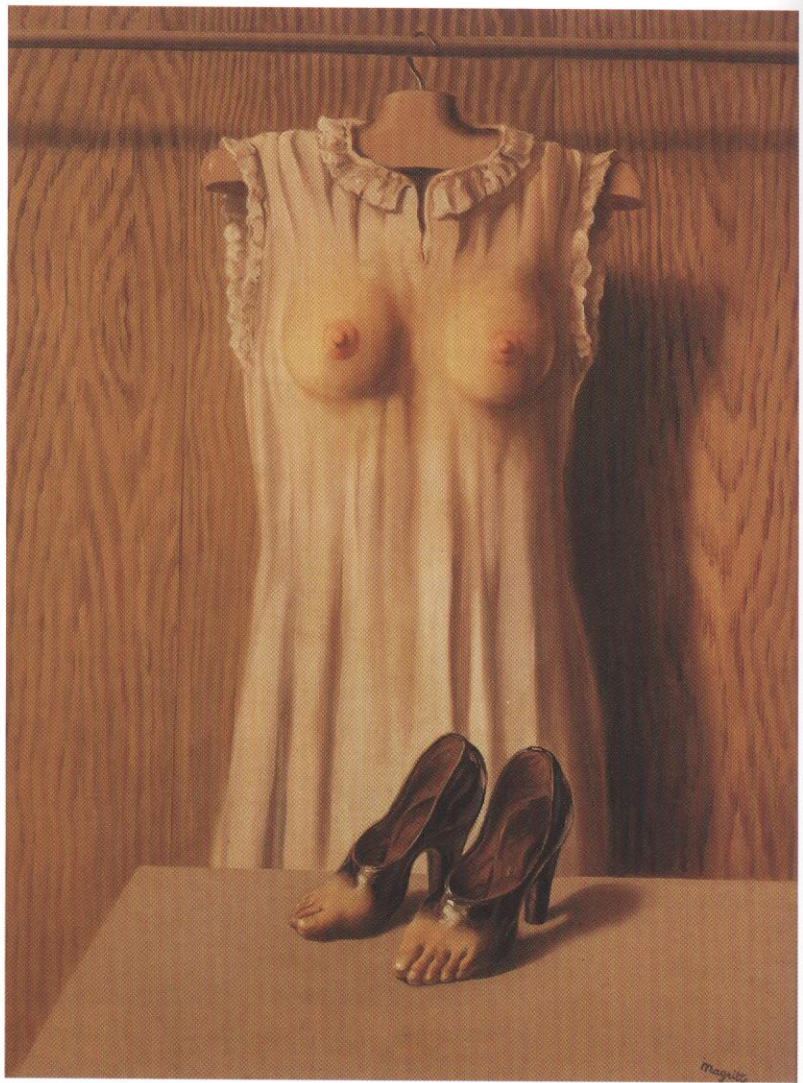
—No more laces, what, no longer even a knot to be seen, or holes or eyelets, but full shoes, absolutely adherent to the foot.

—Like in Magritte's *Le Modèle rouge* [63]. But there, too, one must take into account an effect of series and citationality. Magritte painted several of them. There, not counting *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (1947) [64], or *Le Puits de vérité* (1963) [65], there is incontestably a pair, you can see the disposition of the toes which form one and the same body with the boots. They form both the pair and the join.

—*Le Modèle rouge* also mimics this lure and mocks it. It also cuts off the shoe-foot at the ankle, at the neck, indicating by this trait or stroke, added to the horizontal and regular lines of the wooden background, then added to the lines of the frame, that this pair of rising-sided (rising toward what?) shoes, now out of use, with empty unlaced neck

64 René Magritte

*Philosophy in the Boudoir,*  
(La Philosophie dans le boudoir), 1947



(unlaced differently from one model to another), then summoning van Gogh's witnesses to appear, are still deferring their supplement of property, the revenue on their usury [*usure*: also 'wear']. Their silence makes the expert speak, and he will not take long to say, like Heidegger speaking of van Gogh's picture: 'it has spoken.' Two psychoanalysts—from London, of course, that sort of thing would never get across the English Channel—said to Magritte: '*The Red Model* is a case of castration.' The painter then sent them 'a real psycho-analytical drawing' which inspired the same discourse from them.

—But why so cutting in this verdict against Schapiro? If he were so credulous in the identification of this picture

—I haven't demonstrated that yet, I've stuck to the general premises. Later, with respect to this picture

—All right, let's say credulous in the attribution, in general, of painted

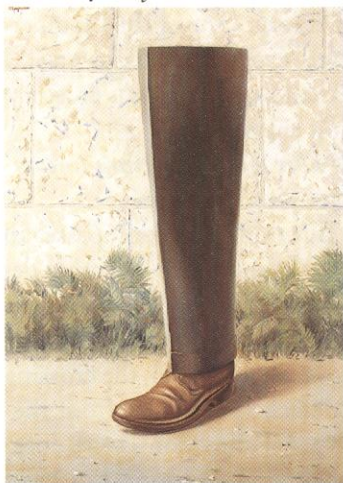


shoes to a determinable subject and, which is indeed more serious, to one that is determinable *in reality*: isn't Heidegger's naïveté still more massive! He also attributes the painted shoes, without the slightest examination, to peasantry, or even to the peasant woman. This attribution appears to be incompatible with what he says further on against imitation, copy, representative reproduction, etc., against the notion of adequation or *homoiōsis*. For example: 'Or else would the proposition according to which art is the putting-itself-to-work of truth give new life to a fortunately outdated opinion according to which art is an imitation or a descriptive copy of the real? The replica of the given doubtless demands conformity with being, a regulated measuring against it; *adaequatio*, say the Middle Ages,  $\alpha\mu\omicron\iota\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$  said Aristotle already. For a long time, conformity with being has been considered to be equivalent to the essence of truth. But do we really believe that this picture by van Gogh copies [*male ab, depicta*] a given [*present, vorhandenes*] pair of peasants' shoes, and that it is a work because it has succeeded in doing so? Do we wish to say that the picture has taken a copy of the real and that it has transformed the real into a product [*Produkt*] of artistic production? Nowise.' This reply ['Nowise'] also holds, in the next paragraph, for the reproduction of a general essence which some tried to substitute for the singular given, keeping the same schema. Now I understand well enough how that hits Schapiro's preoccupations and disqualifies his assurances (Schapiro who seems to believe in the reproduction of 'given' shoes, those of van Gogh and even of a 'given' van Gogh, in a given time and place, 'by that time a man of the town and city!'), and I also understand well enough how the proof itself is in this case *a priori* irrelevant. But what I do not understand is why Heidegger should escape from the same suspicion, from his own suspicion basically, from the moment he says, without proof this time, without even looking for a proof: they are peasants' shoes. He does not even say *they are* in order to reply to a possible question, he names

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65 René Magritte

*The Well of Truth*,  
(Le Puits de vérité), 1963



them, 'Ein Paar Bauernschuhe,' without even imagining the first murmur of a question.

—That's the whole dissymmetry, the innocent outbidding of this correspondence. One claim is more naïve, more excessive, if one can say that, than the other. One attribution exceeds the other. Imagine an auctioneer who is both an expert and a buyer, pushing up the bidding in the empty room. Bidding for second-hand, more or less unmatched shoes on a framed canvas. On the one hand, Schapiro's attribution remains in the aesthetics of representation, and even of the most empiricist kind: either short of (precritical), or going beyond (excessive), the movement carried out by *The Origin* in the passage just translated. But on his side, by saying 'Bauernschuhe' without asking himself any questions about this, Heidegger falls short of his discourse on the truth in painting, and is even more naïve than Schapiro. Excessive to the extent of talking about peasants' shoes even before any question of 'representation,' and already in the order of a 'presentative' truth. The fact is that the step backwards from a truth of adequation to a truth of unveiling, whatever its necessity and its 'critical' force, can also leave one practically disarmed in the face of the ingenuous, the precritical, the dogmatic, in the face of any 'preinvestment' (be it 'fantasmatic,' 'ideological,' etc., or whatever name you call it). There's a law here. This is perhaps one of the secrets of this correspondence, of its dissymmetry or its excessive symmetry: in the contract of truth ('I owe you the truth in painting'), between truth as adequation (of a representation, here an attributive one, on Schapiro's side) and the truth of unveiled presence (Heidegger's side). For the moment let us leave this truth contract, between the two truths. (What is *doing* the *contracting* there has to do with a *trait* [*Riss*] and an attraction [*attrait*] [*Zug*] of the work, with a *Gezüge*, which will draw us much further into Heidegger's text.) The truth of the shoes as things due (the object of the subject) constrains this correspondence and we ought (supposing one ever has to ought) to reexamine its terms later. One of the innumerable difficulties in reading *The Origin* and especially this passage, is that of grasping the furtive moment when a certain line is crossed, and of grasping too the step with which it is crossed.

—In the sense of *über die Linie* [*trans lineam* or *de linear*] and of the topology of being in *Zur Seinsfragel*

—No. Well, yes. But this connection passes through detours we don't have time for here. Or space. I was simply designating, close at hand here, the crossing of certain lines, of certain *traits* in the picture (the outline of the 'product,' for example the line of the collar or the line of the lace). And above all, first of all, the crossing of the lines of framing, the *traits* which detach the picture from the real milieu. Where, at what moment, in what direction [*sens*] does this transgression take place? And is this crossing a transgression? Transgression of what law?

Which comes down to wondering notably whether and within what limits Heidegger intended to speak of the 'famous picture.'

—Which one?

—We don't know yet. We have verified that at the precise moment when in this chapter he takes the example of a pair of peasants' shoes, no picture has yet been necessary. None has even been invoked. And it's been going on like that for several pages. Now even at the moment when the 'famous picture' provides what is basically an example of an example, its status leaves us in a definitive uncertainty. We can always say, challenging proof to be produced, that Heidegger does not intend to speak of the picture, does not describe it *as such*, and passes regularly from an example of a product (peasants' shoes) to the example of the example (some particular shoes in some particular picture), in both directions, then from exemplarity to the being-product, picking out the predicates of the being-product and letting the others drop

—like old shoes