

AESTHETICS IS TRUTH ON BEING (Art According to Martin Heidegger)

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Abstract

In his philosophy, the later Heidegger attempted to gain a non-reifying access of to Being. To this end he turned to art, expecting it to make precisely such access possible. His principal writing on aesthetics in the essay “The Origin of the Work of Art” (1935-1936). Kant, when writing on aesthetics, had investigated aesthetic experience, that is to say the effect of works of art on the subject. In opposition to this, Heidegger emphasized in his essay the autonomous value of a work of art. According to Heidegger a work of art must not be misunderstood as a thing with distinctive characteristics of its own such as, for instance, the fact that it depicts reality particularly well or particularly beautifully. On the contrary it reveals the general nature of thing, thereby opening up a view of the world for us.

Keyword: art, aesthetics, being and time, heidegger

INTRODUCTION

Heidegger is the most enigmatic philosopher of the 20th century. His philosophy is notoriously complex and somewhat mysterious. It is difficult not because of any philosophical pretensions, but because the task Heidegger set himself was enormous. It entails nothing less than the ripping away of the foundations of Western thought; foundations Heidegger believes were established by Plato, solidified in the enlightenment and so ingrained in our understanding of the world that they are unquestioned by all but the most sceptical and inquisitive (Glendinning, 2001:110).

Born in Messkirch, Germany, in 1889, Heidegger's initial ambitions were in theology. However, his attempts to become a priest, a theology student and a professor of catholic theology all failed. This was in part due to illhealth, but also because of the judgement of academics who thought him unsuitable. This rejection fuelled Heidegger's ambition and generated a certain resentment in his character. In April 1933 Heidegger was elected Rector of Freiburg University. Soon after that, he joined the Nazi Party. He believed that his position and intellectual and spiritual leader of Nazism in Germany. However, Heidegger's self-importance was not recognised by the Nazi party, who needed a Nazi-supporting bureaucrat to implement changes in all universities rather than a spiritual leader. Frustrated by his lack of recognition Heidegger resigned as rector in April 1934 (Steininger, 1978:102).

Heidegger's writings are generally held to be extremely obscure. It is not just that his thought tries to penetrate ultimate and abstract matters but also that he uses language in a highly idiosyncratic way. John Macquarrie, a translator of *Being and time*, describes, in the Preface to the book, how Heidegger uses words in unusual ways, produces his own vocabulary and exploits the German language's capacity for constructing new compound words (Mehta, 1971:19).

Heidegger's later writings are even more difficult than his earlier works, oracular in tone, cryptic and terse in style. In consequence he has come to be regarded by many with a mixture of irritation and reverence. His output is considerable and covers a wide range of topics: logic, philosophy of science, philosophy of history, ontology, metaphysics; language, technology, poetry, Greek philosophy and mathematics. In spite of the abstruseness of his ideas his influence has spread very wide. He saw himself as a philosopher with a mission to redeem a civilisation that had sold out to technology, science and a calculating rationality; that had "fallen out of Being" and that must be recalled and made once again "at home" in Being. The intensity with which he consistently expounds and proclaims this theme is remarkable. In a paper called "Martin Heidegger at eighty" Hannah Arendt wrote: "Heidegger never thinks 'about' something. He thinks something" (Biemel, 1977:65).

Discussions of Heidegger's philosophy of art usually begin and end with his celebrated 1935-1936 essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art". For already, at the time of writing, "The Origin of the Work of Art", Heidegger possessed an abiding and thoughtful love for the work of the early Romantic poet, Friedrich Holderlin. The basic proposal of that paper is to fundamentally reject, not only the idea that actuality of work of art can be grasped on the basis of its "thingly" character, but quite generally the idea that might be grasped on

the basis of the presence of something in the world at all: even a special kind of thing which is the object of the distinctively aesthetic experience. To understanding Heidegger's conception in the essence of the art, it will prove helpful to see it against the background of his "early" work: *Being and Time*. In the final decades of his life Heidegger came to have a great love for, in fact, a considerable number of modern artists: inter alios, Rilke, Stefan Goerge, le Corbusier, Stravinsky, George Bragues, Klee, and Cezanne (Mehta, 1971:97).

DISCUSSIONS

Being and Time

Heidegger described his philosophy as the Quest for Being. He is classed with and is inseparable from the existentialists although he steadfastly disavowed this connection, maintaining that it is Being as such rather than personal existence that is his main concern. His work is dominated by a search for some sort of meaning lying at the heart of the astonishing fact that "there are things in being". It owes a good deal to Kierkegaard and to Heidegger's teacher, Edmund Husserl. Heidegger in turn exerted a strong influence on Sartre. He employs the term *Dasein* to describe the mode of existence of a human being and argues that human life is radically different from other forms of life because it is able to be aware of itself and to reflect on its Being. Human beings, he holds, may choose to live authentically, having a full sense of their situation in the world, or inauthentically as nearautomatons, unthinkingly conforming to established routines and patterns. His major philosophical work is *Sein und Zeit (Being and Time)*, first published in 1927 (Sheehan, 2001:289).

The subject of his major work *Being and Time*, which in 1927 made him, so to speak, famous overnight, is an analysis of human existence and its temporality. In it, following the phenomenological method of his teacher Husserl, he investigated the fundamental structures of human existence, the "existentials" (*Existenzialien*). These "existential" describe, in the first instance, a relationship of man to space and time which is fundamentally different from the mode of existence of things. Being is always "being in the world," that is to say, it entails a relationship to a pre-existent environment with its own quite specific quality as regards existence. Hence the world is always "disclosed" (*erschlossen*) in one way or another. However, existence cannot choose a pre-disclosed world for itself; it is "thrown" into the world. But existence that has been thrown into the world is not tied to

any particular manner of being. It must first, at every moment and in every decision, make itself into what it wants to be.

Heidegger gives the name of “concern” (*Sorge*) to this “existential,” the fact that existence is “that Being which is concerned in its being with its being.” In concern, the temporality of human existence, the knowledge of our own mortality, becomes visible (Heidegger, 1960:89). Existence is a “being unto death.” Were it not for the certainty of death, were existence not “held out into Nothingness,” there would not be the danger of wrongly choosing one’s own authentic life. But as things are, only by being “resolute” can we escape inauthenticity, the helpless dependence on “Them.” However, Heidegger leaves open the question of “resolute to what end?” (Mehta, 1971:87).

Analysis of existence is the subject of the first half of *Being and Time*. The second half was never published. However, the philosophy of the late Heidegger, following the so-called “change of direction” in the mid 1930s, can be understood as a further development of the approach in *Being and Time*. For the question to which *Being and Time* was intended to provide an answer and which Heidegger pursued throughout his life, was “What is Being?” According to Heidegger, traditional philosophy cannot answer this question because it has “forgotten” Being.

Western metaphysics in particular has failed to recognize Being by trying to describe Being (*das Sein*) or God as the highest and most perfect existing thing (*das Seiende*). But Being is separated from “existing things” by an “ontological difference.” It is not something that finds itself existing in the world, but it is that which causes the “things that exist” to have any existence. It is the active source of everything that is. Hence even the fact that Western philosophy has forgotten Being is something that has been brought about by Being itself. For Being itself, so to speak, punishes Western man, who has made himself master of the world, for his arrogance by withholding itself from him. The late Heidegger’s philosophy can be understood as one long appeal for modesty, for precise attention to the quiet messages of Being, which, as he admits, is the vocation of the poet rather than the philosopher (Heidegger, 1962:234). Only when man has learned to be “calm,” when he no longer tries, with the aid of technology, to bend nature to his will, only then will he be able to carry out his task as the “guardian of Being” (Sheehan, 2001:289-291).

From Dasein to Being

Dasein is essentially in the world. Ordinary human discoveries, communications, decisions, and activities presuppose a familiar background of values and categories, customs and routines. How does this world get established? How for that matter can it be radically changed? Not by ordinary Dasein, for Dasein is always already in a world. By extraordinary Dasein, then? The artist, the poet, or even the thinker? Heidegger, in the wake of Holderlin, sometimes describes the poet as a sort of demigod, standing in a no man's land between the gods and the people, and transmitting the hints of the gods to the people. It is in this no man's land that it is decided who man is and where he establishes his existence (Heidegger, 1962:63).

The artist or the poet cannot do his work in any normal human way, in any way that already presupposes the world that he is to set up. He must be something like the vehicle of an impersonal force—art or truth or being itself. The artist must be “resolute”, entschlossen. ecstatically “opened up” to this force. The resoluteness that originally seemed to be a way of conducting oneself authentically in this world has found a new role: resoluteness enables the creator, and the preservers, to found a new world (Heidegger, 1960:54).

Language too has found a new role. In *Being and Time* language grows out of the significant involvements of the already established world. In “The Origin of the Work of Art” it plays a more fundamental part. Projective language, the naming of things for the first time, helps to found a world. Language too cannot be devised by human beings in the normal human way, which already presupposes our possession of language. So language too, at least projective language, is an impersonal force that constitutes Dasein and its world, not simply an instrument for communication. This is why Heidegger says: “Language speaks, not man. Man only speaks when he fatefully answers to language” (Heidegger, 1971:96).

The Founding of Truth

All art is dichterisch, inventive or projective. So too is the preservation of a work, since the preserver has to enter the realm disclosed by the work. But the essence of Dichtung, Heidegger continues, is the founding of truth. Founding Stiftung, has three senses, and art involves founding in all three senses. First, “bestowing”. The setting into (the) work of truth involves a paradigm-shift: it thrusts up the extraordinary and thrusts down the ordinary. So truth cannot derive from what went before. It comes as a gift. Founding is an “overflow”, the bestowal of a gift (Heidegger, 1971:75).

Second, founding is “grounding”. Truth is cast not into a void, but to preservers, historical. men. It comes from nothing, but is addressed to a people. Three factors are involved in a people. The first is the people’s “endowment”, their “earth”: the land on which they live and which they cultivate, but also relatively permanent features of their world such as the German language that they speak. The second is the ordinary and traditional, the old ‘world’, their pagan customs and beliefs, for example. The third is the new “world”, their “withheld vocation”, the beginnings, say, of Christianity among them (Heidegger, 1971:75). The creation of, say, a Christian work of art cannot be explained by these factors, especially not by the old world. But it is guided by them. It is composed in German, adapted to their endowment, and it presents a Christian message. It makes the people’s destiny explicit, and grounds it on their native soil.

Thirdly, founding is “beginning”. A beginning is in a way direct or immediate, but it may also require long preparation—like a jump or leap (*Sprung*) for which we need to prepare ourselves. A genuine beginning is not simple or primitive; it contains the end latent within itself; it is a leap forward (*Vursprung*), that leaps over everything to come (Heidegger, 1971:76). Homer’s epics, for example, are not primitive or simple; they also implicitly contain the tragedies which later opened up the world of the Greek city-states. The history of art is not a steady cumulative process, but is punctuated by massive explosions of creative energy that leave future generations to do what they can with the pieces (Heidegger, 1960:76).

“When beings as a whole require grounding in openness, art always attains to its historical essence as founding” (Heidegger, 1971:75). Such art alters our whole view of being. This has happened three times in the West First, and most radically, in Greece, with its conception of being as “presence” (*Anwesenheit*). Then in medieval times, when the beings disclosed by the Greeks were transformed into things created, by God. And finally in modern times, when beings become “objects”, to be calculated and manipulated (This is what lies at the root of “technology”). Each time a new world arises; unconcealment of beings happens; and it sets itself into work, a setting accomplished by art. When art happens, a thrust enters history and history begins again. Art grounds history, not history in the sense of important events, but history as the entry of a people into its native endowments and its movement towards its appointed destiny. Now we understand the word ‘origin’ in the title of the essay. “Origin”, *Ursprung*, means a “leap forth” (Heidegger, 1971:77). Art lets truth leap forth. Art is the origin or leaping forth of the work of art. Thus it is the origin of the

creators and preserves of the work, and that means of the existence of a historical people.

Art and Truth

Why must truth happen in a work? The conflict between concealment and unconcealment is a conflict between an old paradigm and a new paradigm, between, say, an old religion and a new religion. An artwork is like a fortress or standard marking the ground newly won for truth: “Clearing (*Lichtung*) of openness and establishment in the open belong together” (Heidegger, 1971:61). There are, Heidegger concedes (Heidegger, 1971:62), other ways of staking our claim to truth: an “act that founds a political state” (e.g. the US Constitution); the “nearness of that which is not simply a being, but the being that is most of all” (e.g. the conversion of St Paul); the essential sacrifice (e.g. the Crucifixion); or the thinker’s questioning (Science is not an ‘original happening of truth’. It fills in the details of a “domain of truth already opened ... as a science passes beyond correctness and goes on to a truth.... it is philosophy”). But art is the main way in which truth happens. Not only the temple but also Greek tragedy lay down the paradigm, the values and categories, in terms of which a people view the world and make their choices.

Why must the artwork be created? A work involves a “rift” between earth and world, and (unlike equipment) composes conspicuous earthy materials into a reposeful form. The notion of rift, *Riss*, links up with that of a ground-plan or paradigm, a *Grundriss* (Heidegger, 1971:64). But it also means that a work is conspicuous, owing to the tension it embodies. A broom fades into the background of other equipment, its constituent materials “used up”, smoothed down into its usefulness. A work is solitary, tensed, and striking. It is especially suitable as a marker of truth. But the very existence of the work cries out for explanation. A work, unlike a tool, bears the scars of its production. The rift needs a creator to contain it.

A work needs an audience or “preservers” as well as a creator. The work draws its preservers “out of the realm of the ordinary” into the new world it opens up, and suspends their “usual doing and valuing, knowing and looking” (Heidegger, 1971:66). The appropriate response to a work is neither knowing nor willing, but a “knowing that remains a willing, and willing that remains a knowing” (Heidegger, 1971:67). It is not carrying out some plan one has already formed, but “resoluteness”. The ecstatic entry into a new realm of openness in which all one’s old beliefs and desires are suspended. It is somewhat like St Paul’s conversion, opening up a new field

for knowing and willing that is disconnected from one's previous notions and plans. Great art, like the voice of God, is not consumer-led: it changes one's whole way of viewing the world and of finding one's way about in it. But the work is not like a drug, and the experience is not private: the work is communal and grounds our relations to one another.

A work, Heidegger has said, is not a thing or a tool with something added; things, stuffs, are inconspicuous in equipment and revealed only in works. But what about the artist? Must not he know about nature, about the things and tools he portrays, before he creates art? No. It is the work that draws out the rift (Riss) and draws the sketch (Riss) (Heidegger, 1971:70). The artist does not first have a clear view of things and then embody it in a work: nature is opened up for him, as well as for us, only in the work. The work needs creators, who "put truth into the work", and also preservers, who "put it to work", actualize it, that is, in their communal knowing-willing (Heidegger, 1971:71). But the work also makes creators, as well as preservers, possible. Creators are agents of a force larger than themselves: art.

Truth comes, in a way, from nothing. We cannot account for Van Gogh's painting by supposing that he came across some old shoes, and painted what he saw. For, first, the shoes alone could not account for the way in which Van Gogh saw them. And secondly, he did not see there in a new way before his painting emerged: "the opening up of the open, and the clearing of beings, happens only as the openness is projected." Art, like St Paul's conversion, comes as a bolt from the blue (Heidegger, 1971:71).

Artworks and Things

Heidegger's most general work on art, "The Origin of the Work of Art", was published in 1950, but stems from lectures given in 1935. He rejects two widely held doctrines. First, that 'art is concerned only with beauty and pleasure: "art is rather the disclosure of the being of beings" (Heidegger, 1971:111). Second, that a work of art is primarily a thing, and that aesthetic value is superimposed on it by our subjective view of it: for Heidegger it is art that shows us what a thing is. There are nevertheless two ways in which an artwork is a thing. First, a work, such as a painting, can be moved and stored like other things (He later rejects this way of viewing artworks. It treats them as objects present at hand, in the way that an art-dealer or a removal-man does.) Second, it has a thingly aspect: "There is something stony in a work of architecture, wooden in a carving, coloured in a painting, spoken in a linguistic work, sonorous in a musical composition" (Heidegger, 1971:19).

The Greek Temple

Heidegger now presents his second exhibit: a Greek temple. He does so partly to distinguish his own view from the view that art is imitation: the temple is not representational. But partly also because he wants to argue that a work of art not only opens up a world; it also sets up a world, a world to which belongs. The Van Gogh opens up the world of the peasant. But it does not set it up, nor does it belong there. The temple, by contrast, unifies and articulates the world of a people: it 'first fits together and at the same time gathers around it self the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being' (Heidegger, 1971:42). The world of a people is the familiar structured realm in which they know about and make their decisions.

The temple not only sets up world. It sets forth world's counterpart, earth. It is surrounded by 'earthy' nature, buffeted by storms and resting on rock, and it also consists of earthy natural materials. It thus reveals earth as earth, and grounds the world on earth. All artworks set forth earth in their way. In equipment, earthy raw materials are 'used up', that is, fused into the artefact so that they are no longer noticeable: it does not matter, and we do not notice, whether shoes are made of leather or of some functionally equivalent material. In artworks materials are only "used", not "used up": they remain conspicuous within the work (Heidegger, 1971:47). The earthy materials of poetry, the poet's words, are, unlike the words of common discourse, conspicuous and resistant to paraphrase. It matters whether the Parthenon is made of marble or plastic. In one way or another, all artworks set forth earth.

World is the human environment in which we lead our lives: the tools we use, the houses we dwell in, the values we invoke. Earth is the natural setting of this world, the ground on which it rests and the source of raw materials for our artefacts. World and earth are opposites in conflict. World strives for clarity and openness, while earth shelters and conceals, tending to draw world into itself. Each needs and sustains the other. The artwork straddles both contestants: The temple's static repose is the product of the conflict between earth and world. It is a happening, an event—the event of truth as unconcealment. Only if beings are unconcealed can we make particular conjectures and decisions. But since we finite creatures never wholly master beings cognitively or practically, there is also concealment. Without concealment there would be no objectivity, no decisions, and no history: everything, the past, the present, and the future, would be wholly

transparent to us, leaving no hidden depths to things, and no scope for choices with uncertain outcomes. (The two pairs of opposites, earth-world and concealment-unconcealment, do not exactly coincide. Earth is partly unconcealed, and the world is partly concealed). Truth happens in the work: "Setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work is the fighting of the battle in which the unconcealedness of beings as a whole, or truth, is won" (Heidegger, 1971:55).

Heidegger plays down the role of the artist and tends to regard the work as the product of an impersonal force, such as truth or art itself, that uses the artist to actualize itself. In "great art" the artist effaces myself: he is like a "passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge" (Heidegger, 1971:40). But an artwork is essentially "created" (Heidegger, 1971: 56). Creation is quite distinct from the manufacture of a tool: art is not craftsmanship plus something extra, any more than a work is a tool plus something extra.

On the Music

This claim about (genuinely) abstract painting leads directly to the question of the absence, in Heidegger, of any sustained discussion of music. The third of my critical questions asks: does not Heidegger unjustly or, perhaps better, unphilosophically-neglect music? Does he not, to his detriment as a philosopher, evince a certain blindness in this direction?

The foundations of Heidegger's stance to music go back to his critique of Wagner in the mid-thirties, in volume I of the Nietzsche study. Like Nietzsche (after breaking off his friendship with Wagner in 1876), Heidegger criticizes the unarticulated, structure-less, 'sea'-like quality of Wagner's music. Unlike Nietzsche, however, he identifies this quality with the character of music as such. What Wagner sought in the idea of opera as *Gesamtkunstwerk* (collective artwork) was indeed, he says, a collecting together of all the individual arts. But it was by no means a collecting that granted equal rights to each. Rather, he claims (glossing over the difference between Wagner's earlier (pre-*Tristan*) and later musical theory and practice), what Wagner wants is the domination of art as music, and *thereby* the dominance of the pure state of feeling the tumult, and delirium of the senses, tremendous contraction, the felicitous distress that swoons in enjoyment, absorption in "the bottomless sea of harmonies", the plunge into frenzy and the disintegration of sheer feeling as redemptive.

In 1936, then, Heidegger's fundamental objection to Wagner is that since what he writes is, in effect, purely instrumental in Wagner's own language "absolute" music, he cannot 'set forth' a world—in the rich, into—ethical sense of 'world' deployed by the Greek paradigm.

By the postwar period Heidegger has ceased to require such a grandiose function of art. Yet the selection of musical works for which he expresses particular esteem—Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* as well as his music for *Amigone* (Petzet, *Encounters and Dialogues*, pp. 80, 161), and Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* and *Persephone*—includes no examples of absolute music. What this strongly suggests is that, insofar as he thought about music at all, he continued to insist that in "valid" musical artworks, music must always be subordinate to a linguistic text, subordinate, as "The Origin" maintained, to "poetry".

Given his concern for dwelling it is easy to discern the line of thinking that must underlie this insistence. Art cannot facilitate dwelling in the world, cannot present one's world as a holy place, unless it represents, or in some other way brings that world to presence. But this is something (absolute) music cannot do. Hence music, pleasant though it undoubtedly is, cannot be an essential art form. What are we to make of this line of thought? This is no place to become deeply involved in precisely that which is almost entirely missing in Heidegger; the philosophy of music. I shall content myself, therefore, with a few brief and, I fear, dogmatic remarks.

Theorists of music, by and large, seem to agree with Schopenhauer's assertion that, with the deviant exception of 'programme' music, music does not represent the "outer", visible world. Apart from formalists who hold that music is connected to nothing but music, they tend to conclude from this that the domain of music is the "inner" world of feeling. The significance of music, it is frequently suggested, is that it 'expresses' emotion or at least something closely related to emotion. Thinking about music is dominated by the "inner-outer" contrast together with the notion that the domain of music is confined to the "inner".

Insofar as he thinks about music at all, Heidegger's thinking about music, too, is dominated by this contrast—in spite of the fact that his general philosophy is devoted to demolishing it. Left to it self, his remarks on Wagner affirm, music brings to presence a "pure state of feeling"; the inner, subjective response to worldly things and events severed, however, from their usual objective complement. The effect is no doubt relaxing and "aesthetically" pleasing, but it does not help make our world a place of dwelling.

Nietzsche did not make the mistake of supposing music to be confined to a supposed “inner” world of feeling (Though his own music, as Hans von Bulow told him, is entirely without merit, he did, at least, write music and understood it in a way that Heidegger could not). The full title of his first book is: *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*. What Nietzsche understood in this title is that it is not the case that music’s only route to the bringing of a world to presence is by accommodating itself to a preexistent text (Heidegger, 1981:54). Music does not have to take second place to drama because it can itself give “birth” to drama, to action, to a world as painters, like Mondrian, who have derived inspiration from musical sound and mood, have always known. Another fact which points in the same direction is the disposition of listeners to give titles, *Pastoral Symphony*, *Moonlight Sonata* (titles which may be more or less appropriate) to works of absolute music. Translated into Heidegger’s language, what Nietzsche understood was that music possesses, in fact to a consummate degree, the power to be an Ereignis-experience. Heidegger’s discounting of absolute music is thus, I believe, in his own terms, a serious error as perhaps, for similar reasons, is his blanket discounting of the (genuinely) abstract in painting.

Of Webern, Heidegger said, in a letter to the musicologist Martin Zenk, that he could find “no point of entry”. Though the remark, in this particular case, might well be forgiven, it actually applies, to a rather large degree, to Heidegger’s relationship to music in general. Only someone afflicted by a certain musical deafness, or lack of musical education, could, even for a moment, be tempted to suppose Wagnerian “structurelessness” to be a quality of Western music in general.

To a degree, Heidegger’s musical deafness diminishes his thinking about art. He was, however, gifted, to a consummate degree, with a sensitivity to the poetic word. It seems to be a rough kind of truth that those who are hypersensitive to one art form are typically afflicted by a compensatory blindness to another. The price we pay for Heidegger’s—among philosophers, it seems to me unparalleled—insight into poetry is the comparatively low quality of his thinking about music.

Poetry

All art, then, is essentially *Dichtung* (Heidegger, 1974). *Dichtung* here has a wide sense and means something like “invention” or “projection”. What the artist puts into the work is not derived from the things around

him but invented or projected. All great art involves a “change ... of the unconcealment of beings” (Heidegger, 1974): it illuminates the ordinary, it rips us for a time out of the ordinary into another world, or it changes our whole view of the world. In a narrow sense, however, *Dichtung* means “poetry” (Poesio), and poetry is Heidegger’s third exhibit. He does not believe that all other arts are, or stem from, poetry. What he believes is this. Language is not just a medium for communicating what we know. Language used for this purpose is “actual language at any given moment”. Language also brings beings out of “dim confusion” into the open by naming them for the first time, and thus gives us something to communicate about. This is innovative language or “projective saying” (Heidegger, 1974). It lays down what can and what cannot be said in the language of communication. Since poetry is in language, and since it is a form of art, that is, of the lighting projection of truth, poetry must be projective saying, an original, innovative use of language to name things and thus open up a realm in which we can communicate.

Poetry is not, however, only one among several arts. The other arts—architecture, sculpture, painting, music—operate within a realm already opened up by language. The disclosure effected by language, that is, by poetry, preceded disclosure by the other arts. So poetry is prior to the other arts, just as linguistic disclosure is prior to other forms of disclosure.

Van Gogh’s Peasant Shoes

He does this by introduction his first exhibit: Van Gogh’s painting of a solitary pair of worn peasant shoes. It is cannot just look at the shoes the are wearing, because attention distors our view of them: shoes are essentially inconspicuous to their wearer. From the painting, Heidegger argues, we see that the shoes are involved both with the world—the world of human products and activities—and with the earth, the natural foundation on which the world rests.

This is overlooked both by the ordinary user and by the from-matter theory. Owing to their excessive familiarty, the user regards his shoes, as simply thing for walking. Or (to take a different example) someone familiar with a cricket bat regards it as a priedce of the wood for hitting balls. The formmatter theory refines this account. Focusing on the manufacture of shoes and bats, it say that shoes and bats are pieces of metter (leather, nail, wood) with a form (their usefulness) imposed on them. The user and the theory neglect much else that would need to be explained to an uninformed alien: the involvement of the shoes with the world of the peasant, and the

wear and tear they undergo from earth; the involvement of the bat with the world of cricket (stump, bowler) and the earth on which it is planted. But what they neglect becomes apparent in the painting: “the equipmentality of equipment first genuinely arrives at its appearance through the work ... The nature of art world then be this: the truth of being setting itself to work” (Heidegger). The work is not a thing with artistic qualities added: the work reveals the nature of thing.

The End of Art?

Heidegger used the word “turn” to refer to two things: the shift of perspective involved in the transition from Divisions I and II of *Being and Time*, the analytic of Dasein, to Division III, on being and time; and the change from forgetfulness of being to the remembrance of it that he hoped would come. Often the turn is used to refer to a change in Heidegger’s own thought which supposedly occurred in about 1930. Can we detect signs of a turn in this third sense? Has Heidegger changed his mind between *Being and Time* and “The Origin of the Work of Art”?

There is plainly much continuity between the two works. Heidegger is still concerned with Dasein and its world. But the focus of interest has *changed*. *Being and Time* was concerned with the nature of Dasein in an already established world. “The Origin of the Work of Art” asks a different question: How is a world set up in the first place? Heidegger approaches this question through a series of increasingly fundamental works of art. First, a Van Gogh, which reveals to us a world that is already in place. Second, a temple, which is often the dominant, structuring centre of a city-state. Here he also refers to tragedies, which originated in a particular city-state, though they were often performed in other cities. And finally, though implicitly, the Panhellenic poetry of Homer and Hesiod, poetry regarded as the common possession of the Greek world.

Heidegger no doubt exaggerates. Is art always so crucial for world-building as it perhaps was for the Greeks? Was the Christian world set up by art or only celebrated (or set forth) by art? Might not equipment the first motor—car or the Concorde plane—set up a world as effectively as an artwork? Is every dominant, world-structuring monument (such as Trafalgar Square) a great work of art? But these queries are by the way. The main point is that Dasein cannot play the pivotal part in the founding of a world. It cannot, as it does in the first two divisions of *Being and Time*, occupy the centre of the stage.

CLOSING

Like *Being and Time*, this work ends with a discussion of Hegel's art, Heidegger asks, still an essential and necessary way in which that truth happens which is decisive for our historical existence? Hegel answered that it is not. But Hegel's answer was given in the framework of a truth of beings that has already happened, the truth that has informed Western thought since the Greeks. If ever Hegel's claim comes up for decision, the decision will involve a quite different conception of truth (Heidegger, 1974:79-81).

At present we are too entangled in the old conception to assess Hegel's claim. All we can do is continue to reflect on art. This cannot force art into existence, but it prepares for it: "Only such knowledge prepares a space for art, a way for creators, a location for preservers" (Heidegger, 1974:78). Heidegger conceives himself as a sort of John the Baptist for the new art and the new world that is to come.

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