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The Origin of the Work of Art as an Alternative to Traditional Aesthetics

Introduction

The 1936 essay “The Origin of the Work of Art” is an attempt to break with traditional aesthetic theories and this is one important philosophical aspect of the essay. The essay derived from a lecture delivered several times from 1935-1936, including an art historical society. It was addressed to an art historical audience and that perhaps accounts for the less rigorous philosophical aspects of the essay. I believe that this essay can be also criticized from within¹. Moreover, as it is often noticed, this is not an easy task. The discouraging process of reading Heidegger’s obscure language is one reason, the seemingly obligatory engagement with his whole philosophical system is another. One needs a point of entry, a fissure, in order to read Heidegger and criticize him on his own ground. What I suggest is that two things are important to do this: first to take into account Heidegger’s intention to break with the tradition of aesthetics and second that it is precisely the examination of its artistic examples that brings this essay to its interpretative limits.

In order to overcome the problematic of traditional aesthetics Heidegger needs to be able to account for several things: first to overcome the problem of ‘disinterested pleasure’ as the foundational principle of traditional aesthetics, second to be able to prove that the artwork opens up the Being of beings as a whole and to overcome the subject-object problematic. Finally he needs to be able to keep up with his own conception of truth and to resist the temptation to reconstitute *a* truth to the artwork²,

¹ I believe that in this essay the ambitious ontological project of Heidegger’s philosophy fails even on the level of what Bourdieu calls an “internal reading”. See Bourdieu P., *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, (Oxford: Polity, 1991)

² I am referring to Derrida’s phrasing “Restitutions” and his critique of Heidegger’s and Schapiro’s debate over the painting by Van Gogh in Derrida J., *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago

meaning that the evaluation for art is understood dialectically. There is a certain 'higher' 'truth' attached to the 'real' artwork understood in opposition to the non-truth of 'bad' artworks. As understood, this negates the possible change in the perception of the artwork, once again taking it to be an object against a subject. It also means the restriction-if not total negation of the historical horizon of understanding of the artwork; the artwork how it was perceived then, and now. Moreover, and most importantly for art history, it negates its relation to other artworks and the consideration of any change in the nature of identity of art.

As I will show his efforts fail on all of these three accounts. I believe Heidegger is unable to sustain his claims about an overcoming of traditional aesthetics. At the same time something important is revealed about the way he approaches the artwork and about the creative process of the artist. In the place of his overcoming of aesthetics I want to suggest a more productive way of reading Heidegger which focuses on his later ideas about poetic/artistic thinking (*Dichtung*). In this chapter I first briefly refer to Heidegger's efforts to overcome traditional aesthetics. I then introduce and discuss the fundamental concepts of his philosophy of art. Finally I raise certain critical points in order to criticize the essay on the grounds of Heidegger's own task to overcome traditional aesthetics. While it is not possible to exhaust Heidegger's ontological project and his ideas with regards traditional aesthetics. I deem this chapter as necessary because it lays down the important principles of Heidegger's approach to art. It also prepares the ground for my further discussion on Heidegger's ideas on poetic or creative thinking (*Dichtung*) as the artist's creative process. This also prefigures my central discussion about Paolini's artistic creation as a practical opening to Heidegger's later philosophy.

(The Origin of the Work of) Art against metaphysical aesthetics

For Heidegger Being has been understood through the great metaphysical names of the history of Being in its successive epochs, such as Idea, Substance, Will. But this was for him the greatest misunderstanding of philosophy; this was because it confused beings with Being. For Heidegger Being is not an entity. Heidegger saw as metaphysical thinking what he later called ontotheology. Traditional aesthetics is for him part of this metaphysical tradition. The peculiarity of Heideggerian thought,

Press, 1987). See further in Chapter 2 for an analysis of the debate.

around the time of the ‘Origin of the Work of Art’, stands in the fact that he first looks at the work of art in order to get from there to the meaning of Being. Unlike previous philosophers Heidegger does not first build an epistemological structure within which to locate the meaning of art. In other words Heidegger will not start from a first principle. Heidegger sees Nietzsche as the ‘last metaphysician’ for precisely this reason. According to Heidegger, Nietzsche saw art as a configuration of his fundamental principle of the *will-to-power*. Indeed one can find Heidegger’s intentions in the form of a critique on Nietzsche:

The behaviour of observation is not set in relief against creation, and so it remains undefined. The view that the observation of works somehow follows in the wake of creation is so little true that not even the relation of the *artist* to the work as something created is one that would be appropriate to the creator. But that could be demonstrated only by way of an inquiry into art that would begin altogether differently, proceeding from the work itself; through the presentation of Nietzsche’s aesthetics offered here it ought to have become clear by now how little he treats the work of art³.

Heidegger undertakes this task in the “Origin of the Work of Art”. It is then from the meaning of art that Heidegger will begin his investigation into the meaning of Being. As I read Heidegger art is a point of entry, a location from which an enquiry about the meaning of Being may begin. As Otto Pöggeler has noticed, on a general account of Heidegger’s work, one should think Being as ‘topology’⁴. The nature of this topological meaning of Being will become clearer as Heidegger’s thought developed in the years after the *Origin*. Art plays an important role within this topological thinking of Being. Art as the happening of truth helps Heidegger find the route to his later thinking. For traditional philosophy Being was regarded as presence, as substance. For Heidegger Being—in this period of his thinking—becomes understood as the kind of temporality enabled by the artwork. This means that the artwork shows

³ Heidegger M., Nietzsche Vol. 1, The Will to Power as Art, Krell Farrell D., trans. (henceforth cited as NI) (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1976) p 118

⁴ See Poggeler O., Martin Heidegger’s Path of Thinking Magurshak D., & Barber S. trans. (Atlantic Highlands NJ: Humanities Press International Inc., 1987)

something about the Being of beings as a whole. This is why at the heart of the Heideggerian interrogation is the work's being and its relation to truth.

The question about the nature of art is thought then out of the one main question of Heidegger's entire philosophical project about, the question of Being (*Seinsfrage*). As he wrote in the *Afterword* to the essay, " 'The Origin of the Work of Art' deliberately yet tacitly moves on the path of the question and the nature of *Being*. Art is considered neither an area of cultural achievement nor an appearance of Spirit; it belongs to the *disclosure of appropriation* by the way of which the meaning of Being can alone be defined"⁵. Heidegger does not relate art to the appearance of Spirit in a Hegelian manner according to which it is seen simply as belonging to the *Zeitgeist* of an epoch. Hegel's aesthetics he regards as "the most comprehensive reflection on the nature of art the West possesses—comprehensive because it stems from metaphysics"⁶. Nor does he regard art as the end product of cultural achievement. Heidegger's dealing with art will not begin from the observation of objects in a museum and the study of their formal characteristics. He does not deny the positive outcomes of the artwork's distribution by the art market or the efforts made by critics for example, toward a better understanding of the works. However he says that it is only to the object-being of the works that artistic activity corresponds. And that this does not constitute their work-being. He writes: "Yet in all this busy activity do we encounter the work itself?"⁷.

Moreover for Heidegger aesthetics is a phenomenon characteristic of modernity.

A third equally essential phenomenon of the modern period lies in the event of art's moving into the purview of aesthetics. This means that the art work becomes the object of mere subjective experience, and that consequently art is considered to be an expression of human life⁸.

⁵ OWA p 86

⁶ Ibid. p 79

⁷Ibid. p 4

⁸ AWP p 116

Put simply Heidegger's belief is that since the 'aesthetic attitude' flourished in modernity, great art has been in decline. However, this will prove problematic with regards his own choice of an artistic example: the painting of a pair of shoes by Van Gogh. Will Heidegger be able to justify his own views with regards great art and the artistic example he is interested in? This will be discussed towards the end of the chapter. His thoughts on art are presented as an 'insult' to common understanding or what he calls the 'usual view'. He says he is always looking for the least obvious, that which is usually thought last or usually remains unthought-of. 'The Origin of the Work of Art' questions after the simple question "what is art?". However, for Heidegger 'the simple is always the most difficult'. First he points to the circularity of the questioning. The circle seems unavoidable. How can we decide whether something is an artwork without knowing what art is first and it is only by looking at a work that we can infer what art is. "Ordinary understanding demands that this circle be avoided because it violates logic"⁹. Heidegger is thus proposing a paralogical way of thinking art. "But this is neither a makeshift nor a defect. To enter upon this path is the strength of thought, to continue on it is the feast of thought, assuming that thinking is a craft"¹⁰.

'World' and 'Earth': the introduction of two ontological concepts

The essay has an extraordinary structure which leads from the ordinary way we encounter things, in our everyday way of understanding, to things as seen when a 'world' is opened up by the artwork. But in opening up a 'world' Heidegger says that the artwork also sets forth the 'earth'. He uses these two ontological concepts in order to describe the structure of artistic production as an instant where truth as *unconcealment*, truth as disclosure comes-to-pass, that is comes to presence. Truth as *un-concealment* for Heidegger is the condition for propositional truth. It is not truth as correctness or propriety rather it is the fundamental condition of these. It is more an ontological model than a system. It is also a non-static process which exudes fluidity, the fluidity of a happening. This happening of truth involves what Heidegger calls the 'opening up of a world' and the 'setting forth of the earth'. The world opened up by the artwork is the showing of relations that usually remain unnoticed and in the

⁹ Heidegger M., Poetry, Language, Thought Hofstadter Albert trans. (London: Harper & Row, 1975) p 18 (Henceforth cited as PLT)

¹⁰Ibid.

background. The earth is the ever unilluminated ground on which different worlds take place.

Differences with traditional aesthetics

Heidegger's pre-theoretical exploration is an open attack to traditional aesthetics. Here he attempts to destroy the theoretical outlook on things and thus to avoid the traditional separation between theory and practice.

The nature of art can no more be arrived at from higher concepts than by a collection of characteristics of actual art works [...] But selecting works from among given objects, and deriving concepts from principles are equally impossible here, and where these procedures are practiced they are a self-deception¹¹.

To understand these differences better, here are some key points of "attacking" traditional aesthetic theories: a) Schopenhauer's ideas on the artist-genius and b) the idea that traditional aesthetics deals primarily with the question of beauty.

(a) Schopenhauer for example had such a theoretical stance on art as for him the artist-genius was the receptacle of the *Ideas*. These *Ideas* had the ontological status of the Platonic *Ideas*, namely a status of transcendental truths.

Heidegger's target here, by introducing the two ontological concepts, is on the one hand the idealism of the romantic philosophers who had been thriving on a 'cult of genius' and on the other, the view that sees art as being reduced to the product of cultural activity. In the first case Heidegger sees art as being reduced to a kind of 'psychologism' as in the reducing of art to the psychological state of the artist's 'lived experience'. In the second there is simply no room for the differentiation of art from any other human activity. Both of these accounts of art presuppose a kind of representational thinking and take truth to be correctness i.e. a correspondence between a statement and a thing or a judgment with its object.

¹¹ OWA p 18

In both of the cases mentioned above traditional aesthetics falls under what Heidegger calls ‘productionist metaphysics’ which blocks our way of getting to the nature of things. Relying on ‘traditional aesthetics’ to get to the nature of art prevents us from thinking in an essential way. Thinking in an essential way means allowing our way of thought to hear the question about the meaning of Being. This ‘thinking’ is *not representational* thinking. *Representational thinking* for Heidegger is thinking which starts with Plato and Aristotle and it is intensified in the enlightenment with Descartes’ cogito. The non-representational thinking—which entails questioning about the relation of art to philosophy—enabled by the work of art is, as I could provisionally put it, an extraordinary way to look at things. This according to Heidegger has a bearing on the way we apprehend Being, in other words, it is essentially related to the way we-are-in-the-world and the way we undertake decisions that have a bearing on our lives.

In the ‘Origin of the Work of Art’ Heidegger is on the way towards the non-representational thinking which would relate art to an openness of thought and link it directly to truth as un-concealment. However, Heidegger’s fundamental mistake towards getting there is that in his efforts to do that, he neglects one very important point: the relation of the artist to the creation of the work and the artistic process. It is only later on in his work that he will devote his efforts almost entirely to the work of particular “thinkers”(artists, poets, philosophers). Just to name two very important ones: the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin and the work of Friedrich Nietzsche.

(b) Another point of differentiation between Heidegger’s philosophy of art and traditional aesthetics is that the latter deals with the question of beauty. In the *Nietzsche Volume* he writes: “Now, since in the aesthetic consideration of art the artwork is defined as the beautiful which has been brought forth in art, the work is represented as the bearer and provoker of the beautiful in relation to our “*state of feeling*” ”¹². This is problematic for Heidegger as what becomes definitive for aesthetic consideration is the subject-object relation. Thus “the work becomes an object in terms of that surface which is accessible to “lived experience”¹³. Heidegger abandons this particular discussion about the beautiful and follows a different route.

¹² N I, p 78

¹³Ibid.

The question of art is for him directly linked to the question of truth. If the great art work is to be found beautiful it will be beautiful because of its relation to truth because it is intrinsically related to the showing of *truth as disclosure*. Great art for Heidegger discloses truth as a critical encounter with the world. He writes:

From the outset we define the nature of creating by its relation to the nature of *truth as the unconcealedness of beings*. The pertinence of createdness to the work can be elucidated only by way of a more fundamental clarification of the nature of truth¹⁴.

Heidegger places the historical conception of beauty, as conceived in the aesthetics of the 18th century onwards, within the binary logic of traditional aesthetics. This binary logic of aesthetic theory he sees as primarily problematic. ‘Traditional aesthetics’, one way or another, turns art into an object. Aesthetics deals primarily with the notion of experience.

Almost from the time when specialized thinking about art and the artist began, this thought was called aesthetics. Aesthetics takes the work of art as an object, the object of aesthesis, of sensuous apprehension in the wide sense. Today we call this apprehension experience. The way in which man experiences art is supposed to give information about its nature. Experience is the source that is standard not only for art appreciation and enjoyment, but also for artistic experience. Everything is an experience. Yet perhaps experience is the element in which art dies¹⁵.

To understand this we should refer back to what Heidegger says in his consideration on the basic developments in the history of aesthetics. These are not to be understood as principles but rather as important turning points in the historical development of aesthetics. Having experience as its object turns aesthetics into *episteme*, search for knowledge, as he explains in the ‘Six Basic Developments in the History of Aesthetics’:

¹⁴ OWA p 57 (the italics are mine)

¹⁵Ibid. p 79

The term “aesthetics” is formed in the same manner as “logic” and “ethics”. The word *episteme*, is formed in the corresponding way: *aesthetike episteme*: knowledge of human behaviour with regard to sense, sensation, and feeling, and knowledge of how these are determined¹⁶.

With his enquiry into the nature of the artwork Heidegger wants to break with the *traditional* epistemological foundations of previous philosophies of art. This is because Heidegger’s is a break with ‘the aesthetics of presence’. Put simply the ‘aesthetics of presence’ would belong to the philosophical thinking beginning with Plato. This thinking takes as presence the subject (*subiectum*), as what lies underneath. Heidegger’s is precisely a de-substantiation of philosophy and the destruction of this tradition. Presence for Heidegger is always to be conceived as the *presencing*, the opening of the *Da* of being-there. This linking of art directly to the meaning of being is Heidegger’s break with art as mimesis first traced in the writings of Plato and Aristotle. So in relation to traditional phenomenological theories, like Husserl’s for example, Heidegger’s approach not only does not break the link between art and perception, but on the contrary it enhances and strengthens their relation. Let us see what this approach entails.

Heidegger refuses to consider the work primarily or solely in relation to human beings, “since such a perspective would involve a historiographical or psychological approach and would fail to grasp the Being and the work that ground the work”¹⁷. What the Heideggerian interpretation subtracted from Nietzschean aesthetics was its character based on a ‘lived experience’. Heidegger saw a separation between the Nietzschean conception of becoming and being. If Heidegger sees Nietzsche’s *will-to-power* as the last metaphysical position it becomes imperative then that he has to tackle this problem and find a different way to approach the problem of the will. From the Heideggerian perspective, even for Nietzsche Being had been forgotten and concealed. Nietzsche’s principle of the *will- to- power* is the principle out of which art and truth can be conceived. For Heidegger this brings art and truth into a higher synthesis and it is precisely for this reason that Heidegger sees Nietzsche as the last

¹⁶ “Six Basic Developments in the History of Aesthetics” from the N I pp 77-8

¹⁷ Fynsk Christopher, Heidegger, Thought and Historicity, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) p 164

metaphysical thinker. It is in this sense that Nietzsche for Heidegger belongs to the tradition of the forgetting of Being. This last transformation of the notion of truth Heidegger sees as the last metaphysical position on the truth of Being. It remains to be seen whether Heidegger is able to keep up with this claim and what this entails for an account of his views on art.

Heidegger's failed attempt to an alternative philosophy of art

Art as the place of truth

In the 'Origin of the Work of Art' it is the artwork which undertakes this role in revealing how the Being of beings presences as a whole. It becomes more than just paint and canvas or stone and shape. Great art for Heidegger takes on the added dimension of "revealing truth". The artwork for Heidegger is an original happening which while it belongs to the past, its being has a distinctive openness—what I could describe as a thrust—towards the future. While the artwork opens the present it shapes the future in that it brings a historical people into their destiny and historical endowment—the artwork is a gift. As such the work is seen to entail a certain force, a certain power. Later on Heidegger will move away from this classification as we shall see as the thesis progresses. The artwork in the 'Origin' provides the community with a vision of its common destiny and vocation. This is what Heidegger regards as part of what he calls the 'fixing of truth in the figure'. He writes:

The strife that is brought into the rift and thus set back into the earth and thus fixed in place is *figure, shape, Gestalt*. Createdness of the work means truth's being fixed in place in the figure. Figure is the structure in whose shape the rift composes and submits itself. This composed rift is the fitting or joining of the shining of truth. What is here called figure, *Gestalt*, is always to be thought in terms of the particular placing (*Stellen*) and framing or framework (*Ge-stell*) as which the work occurs when it sets itself forth¹⁸.

¹⁸ OWA p 64

The 'framing' of the work; Heidegger's reworking of the 'figure' and 'ground' argument

Of what then consists this 'framing' of the work? If we are to imagine any kind of framework around the work it shouldn't be ascribed to anything as the traditional conception of formed matter. This is because these are precisely the concepts that Heidegger attempts 'to empty', as he says. We are not talking about the material frame, nor the immediate vicinity (as in the gallery, the public square etc). The framing of the art work is much more encompassing. It represents a high point of a particular cultural milieu—great art being able to see through received wisdom to unveil "truth". The structure of the work is precisely the emptying of the form-matter pair and their replacement with the happening which is the Heideggerian *figure*. Heidegger is careful with choosing his words in order to make clear that the artwork does *not* have, does not actually *possess* a framework but that it is precisely this framework, this structure (or placing). What takes place in the artwork then? What is this kind of happening that happens *as* a work of art? From this point onwards everything that will be said is part of the *figure*.

In order to conceive of this structure it should be made clear that the work is the configuration of three things. First an original struggle between what in Heidegger's phrasing is called 'clearing and withdrawal'. This means more simply that the artwork opens up in its own way the Being of beings. So the artwork is simultaneously the coming to presence of a being and at the same time the site of the forgetting of Being. Second it is the site where the struggle of what Heidegger calls 'earth' and 'world' takes place, and thirdly of the conflictual union of the two.

One of Heidegger's first steps towards an ontological consideration is the consideration of the artwork as the place of *un-concealment* of truth as Being. In other words towards showing that Being is not an entity but it has itself the structure of the *disclosure of truth*. In Heidegger's theory, the artwork is seen as inaugurating an epoch and performs the phenomenological bracketing or *epoche*. The artwork, in other words, inaugurates history. Heidegger is not referring to *historie* in the sense of external history or historiography but refers to deep history, *Geschichte*.

Art is historical, and as historical it is the creative preserving of truth in the work... Art is history in the essential sense that it grounds history... To originate something by a leap, to bring something into being from out of its essential source in a founding leap—this is what the word ‘origin’ [*Ursprung*, literally primal leap] means.¹⁹

The great artwork founds and projects a plan as the future of a historical people. This side of the artwork is fundamental to Heidegger’s argument about the preservation of the artwork. Preservation is as equally important as creation, as a point to which I return in Chapter 4.

By addressing the problem of *origin* Heidegger disengages art from the logic of ‘cause and effect’. *Origin* is not thought here as cause in the sense that it could correspond to a pre-determined outcome. The question of origin is thought out of the question of truth. Heidegger undoes the ‘usual view’ which *a priori* engages art with the supratemporal and eternal, a kind of higher truth so to speak. This higher value that is normally attributed to art transcends the very tight temporal limits within which it occurs. Heidegger in the *Origin* links the issue of art directly to the issue of truth and thus reinstalls art within the temporal limits of a ‘happening’. For Heidegger there is no order of precedence between the two. Art will be found to be the origin of truth. So we should think here of art *as* origin. The traditional interpretations of artworks prevalent in discussions of aesthetics are inadequate to render the essence of the artwork. He says that “allegory and symbol provide the conceptual frame within whose channel of vision the art work has for a long time been characterized”²⁰.

World and *Earth* come into their own within the work of art which thus becomes the place of truth. It is not truth as correspondence between thing and intellect, it is rather the kind of truth that is the same as Being. In order to come closer to this ontological truth we have to see what Heidegger means by the opening up of world. The work founds the determining relations of the world in which it emerges as it brings about the differentiation and articulation of what Heidegger designates a *world* and *earth*. For example, world could be considered the surrounding environment and the

¹⁹ OWA p 77

²⁰ OWA p 20

conditions of creation of the artwork and earth could be the artwork's meaning and interpretation of the constellation of forces that created the artwork. If the artwork is found to have a primordial dimension, then it would not succumb to being presented as the object of disinterested pleasure. It would rather have a more immediate relation to what it means to create and what it means to be. Heidegger in this way intends to differentiate artistic production from the production of 'mere equipment'.

Artwork: part thing and part equipment

Let us see now how Heidegger gets to explain the artwork as the site of truth. He makes a decisively deconstructive move by focusing on the *work*. "In order to discover the nature of the art that really prevails in the work, let us go to the actual and ask the work what and how it is"²¹. And in his efforts to avoid the traditional aesthetic categories Heidegger starts by examining an aspect of the artwork that is usually ignored, that the artwork is a thing. The artwork proves to be part a thing and part equipment. This in the first instance involves an interrogation of two things of which the artwork partakes: the thingly element of the thing and the equipmental being of equipment (for instance, a tool being used for a purpose).

The problematic discussed here is related directly to the reality of the artwork. That the work of art is something real we can very easily observe by first accepting that the artwork is a thing. "Beethoven's quartets lay in the storerooms of a publishing house like potatoes in the cellar"²². The reality of the work of art has led to the contestation that the work of art is a thing. Heidegger explains in a rather poetic manner:

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. The thingly element is so irremovably present in the artwork that we are compelled to say conversely that the architectural work is in stone, the carving is in wood, the painting in color, the linguistic work in speech, the musical composition in sound. "Obviously", it

²¹ OWA p 18

²² OWA p 18

will be replied. No doubt. But what is this self-evident thingly element in the work of art?²³

Stone, colour, speech and sound are for Heidegger mere things. It is precisely the mere things that seem to evade us because of their intrinsic character. Heidegger's belief is that mere things such as stones and rocks, things of the earth when explained by philosophical or scientific theories they are somehow deformed. In other words the weight and measure of stone will not uncover its nature, and even if we break it to pieces this will not tell us what the stone *is*. The material properties of a stone or a rock do not tell us what and how the stone or the rock *is*. Science is not able to reveal to us the rock's burden for example. The thingly element of an object is therefore what precisely cannot be understood from the standpoint of a scientific explanation. The thingly element of an object is Heidegger's fundamental question: what does it mean "to be"?

How are we to understand this better? If we think that science gives us a sort of an equation for mere things then we usually believe that the rock is being explained and reduced to something else. But we get the wrong impression if we think we have mastered its essence. In fact with this kind of procedure the exact opposite is true. In reducing it to a calculative fact what we do is we simultaneously add something to it. In adding something to the thing we usually think we get closer to it, we master it. However for Heidegger this impression is false and we couldn't get furthest from the thing's essence. Science doesn't let the elemental be the sort of elemental thing it is. For Heidegger the thing must be stripped back to its barest most naked point: the very Being of a thing. For Heidegger the artwork lets the *isness* of the mere thing appear. For instance, Van Gogh's painting of "*Wheat Field With Crows*" (Pic 1, 1890- Auvers sur Oise). It is being viewed, not as an object for practical functional usage, but rather, as an artwork, as object that speaks to the spectator in a multiplicity of ways. What that object says depends on the interrelation of the various factors in play at the point of visualisation. For instance, a person knowledgeable about Van Gogh's life will know that he suffered from mental anxiety and physical pain at the time of creating this artwork, and that the paintings imagery, with its foreboding black skies and menacing black crows, may go some way to explicating Van Gogh's state of mind. However,

²³Ibid.

someone not party to this knowledge will have a different experience of the painting, and in this case, the artwork as a thing will reveal itself in a different manner. Indeed, the artwork will speak in a seemingly different voice depending on the spectator. The paintings' essence is in its revealing, and this can never be a set or established dogma. But who are we to say that the spectator without the biographical knowledge of Van Gogh is not getting a clearer picture of the paintings' meaning? Could not the knowledgeable spectator be imposing ideas onto the artwork, which the painter himself may not have even considered? The point is not to determine right or wrong, or better or worse. The point is that in both cases the artwork is speaking to the spectator, in both cases the artwork is revealing itself. The painting can be described according to many facts about Van Gogh's life, and other factors such as his technical or stylistic tendencies. The point is that the painting should never be reduced to the sum of these details. These details should never come to determine the artwork. The artwork is more than that. As Heidegger puts it in the *Origin*: "It is precisely in great art—and only such art is under consideration here—that the artist remains inconsequential as compared with the work"²⁴.

In the *Origin* he discusses the meanings and interpretations of the thing in order to get to the essence of the word 'thing'. Heidegger harks back to ancient times to get to the roots of the words and their pre-modern meaning and signification. In his effort to define the concept of the thing, he goes back in the history of western philosophical thought, from within which the thing was initially defined as the subject—as what lies beneath—as the bearer of characteristics and properties, as the unity of the multiple of what is given to the senses and as the 'formed matter'.

When such a question is brought under consideration concerning the meaning of the word, then we are not trying to accumulate the opinions and aspects that it has already accepted in the past in order to line them up one after the other. Heidegger draws our attention to the fact that we are asking historically when we are asking about that which is happening, even if that belongs to the past. Continuing on the way to thinking about the nature of the thing, Heidegger follows a series of questions. To the question 'what is a thing in being a thing?' one can answer, generally speaking, that 'a

²⁴ OWA p 40

thing means an entity'. The thing is, that is to say, 'something which is and is not nothing'.

Every being is a thing such as the stone or the work of art. However, this general meaning of the thing does not help us to distinguish the work of art—which is of course a very different thing from the thing itself (mere thing). One notices that the name by itself does not denote the distinguished and particular way-of-being of every entity. For Heidegger the subject and predicate structure of the sentence, which has been prevalent in philosophy since Aristotle, is not able to reveal the thingliness of the thing, in other words what its essence is. Following Heidegger we reach a very fundamental question. How can it be that humans project their own propositional understanding onto things if things have not somehow already become visible? In other words, things must "be" prior to our "understanding" of them. Later on he remarks that things are the most close to us because "we never first perceive a throng of sensations e.g. tones or noises"²⁵ but we hear the Mercedes in immediate distinction from the Volkswagen"²⁶. The schema of 'matter and form' seems to apply to mere things, and it seems to apply to every entity whatsoever. Heidegger remarks, though, that this is so only because we tend to conceive the 'coming-to-be of things', including mere things, on the analogy of human creation for use.

Heidegger's emptying of the traditional 'form-matter' pair

From within the historical definitions of the thing it is precisely the pair 'matter and form' that Heidegger sees as having held sway throughout the history of aesthetics and has also extended far beyond the field of aesthetics.

But is not precisely this pair of concepts, matter-form, usually employed in the domain in which we are supposed to be moving? To be sure. The distinction of matter and form is *the conceptual schema which is used*, in the greatest variety of ways, *quite generally for all art theory and aesthetics*. This incontestable fact, however proves neither that the distinction of matter and form is adequately founded, nor that it belongs originally to the domain of art and the art work. Moreover the

²⁵ OWA p 26

²⁶Ibid.

range of application of this pair of concepts has long extended far beyond the field of aesthetics²⁷.

The dominance of form and matter are thus what Heidegger intends to shatter in this essay. Following a reverse thinking procedure he attempts as he says to ‘expand and empty these concepts’. For Heidegger the pairing of the subject-object relation along with the conceptual pair “matter-form” is the conceptual machinery that representational thought, as in thought which is based on absolute Logic and Reason, has at its command and “that nothing is capable of withstanding”²⁸. Historically, form was correlated with the rational and matter with the irrational, that which is without logic. These interpretations however do not reveal the essence of the thing. They are placed on the level of what is commonly accepted. However, according to Heidegger, poetic or creative thinking, as the essence of all arts has to go against the previously accepted and the self-evident or self-explanatory. This is what the artwork achieves.

This is an important point. From the work of art we may be guided to the uncovering of the thingly element of the thing and of the being of the tool or equipment. The essence of equipment as well as the essence of the thing is what could be revealed by the work of art. This doesn’t mean that for Heidegger the work of art is something more important than equipment. What is at stake here is something deeper: what a thing is, what a piece of equipment is, will be defined by the essence of the work of art.

Creation as the artist’s ‘know-how’

Heidegger remarks that artists are not called artists because they make an artifact, as does the shoemaker for example. He explores further into this differentiation between the production of equipment and the production of artworks. Like the shoemaker, the artist has a pre-theoretical way of knowing the world which comes prior to any engagement with other human beings. Provisionally I could say that the artist has a different ‘know-how’. However, this will not be different from what Heidegger sees as the *creation* of the work. If anything, the artist’s know-how is for Heidegger the advent of creation itself.

²⁷Ibid. p 27

²⁸ OWA p 27

Since tools or objects are made to be useful—what Heidegger calls equipment—they occupy an intermediate position between mere things and works of art. Perhaps a grasp of their nature will smooth the way towards an approach of the essence of the artwork. The truth of equipment as an entity is the fact that the equipment is a tool for someone and more precisely for the one that uses it. The character of the equipment lies within its usability. This usability, however, is not the essential characteristic of equipment. The real essence of the tool is uncovered when *we rely* on it. At this point Heidegger's philosophy comes close to Nietzsche's or Schopenhauer's in the sense that as an interruption of *world* and a setting forth of *earth* the artwork becomes precisely a happening. This allows us only our encounter with the world as embodied human *Dasein*, but interrupts our homogeneous and thus common understanding.

Theory turning to practice: the example of Van Gogh's shoes

Heidegger turns to a painting of shoes by Van Gogh (pic.2) in order to see if there is anything different to observe in the painting, something that we usually do not notice. The painting represents a thing: within an undefined space we see a pair of shoes. The thing which is being represented is a tool, since the shoes have a certain use: they are used for walking and working. From the painting Heidegger says we cannot even see where the shoes stand. The space surrounding them is undefined. And yet the whole world of 'the peasant woman's' life can be revealed through these shoes as they lie there in the picture.

And yet—from the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the impending childbed and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to

the earth, and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-within-itself²⁹.

However, Heidegger remarks that perhaps it is only in the picture that we grasp all this. The being of equipment was discovered through an engagement with the painting. The equipmental being of equipment is what the peasant woman does not need to question or think about. The peasant woman is sure of her world. In other words, when the peasant woman uses a farm instrument or a kitchen knife, or dons a pair of working shoes, she does not regard the being of these items, of equipment. The fact that the shoes are being used disappears into the peasant woman's habitual and everyday relation to them. This relation is for Heidegger an abandoning of them, what we referred to above as 'reliability'. For Heidegger, uncovering the truth of these relations is something that can be made explicit in our encounter with the painting. We no longer view the shoes as equipment. If the peasant woman were to view her shoes in the guise of art, one presumes, she too would look on them in a different light. However, this does appear to be more than a little idealization at play here in Heidegger's interpretation of the painting of the shoes. Historically speaking Heidegger idealized the peasant life. He harked back to a time when the hard working country folk were the backbone of German life. Perhaps in the Van Gogh paintings he sees a vision of his own hopes and aspirations, which as we shall see completely contradicts the reality of the peasant lifestyle that Van Gogh is representing.

The crucial point here is that not only the peasant shoes have been revealed for what they are. Something crucial for an understanding of the nature of the artwork has also emerged.

This painting spoke. In the vicinity of the work we were suddenly *somewhere else* [my italics] than we usually tend to be³⁰.

This "somewhere else" is the sphere within which the peasant woman lives, works and dies; in showing us the role of the peasant, the painting has shown us the world of

²⁹ OWA p 34

³⁰ Ibid p 35

the peasant. For Heidegger, it is as if the painting of the shoes can somehow transport the spectator into the lifeworld of the peasant woman. This is of course Heidegger's overall intention in the article. Heidegger wants to classify 'great' art as that which reveals the truth of the time and place. This is precisely what Van Gogh offers Heidegger in the middle period of his philosophy. Whereas the Greek temple (the other example used by Heidegger) was the high point of ancient Greek art, and the cathedral was the high point of medieval art, so Van Gogh comes to exemplify the peasant world of his time and place. Into this simple painting of the peasant woman's shoes Heidegger sees the exemplification of a whole world that is more than just a depiction of shoes. Within the true essence of the work of art lies the uncoveredness, the revealing of a world. A point raised by art historian Meyer Schapiro as we shall see is that the 'world' mentioned here by Heidegger is not the world of the peasants, but the world of Van Gogh's whereabouts when he was in the city of Paris as the shoes belonged to him and not the peasant woman as suggested by Heidegger.

The world of the work of art is not here the system of reference to which the painting refers. The world of the work of art *is* the work of art itself.

Is it our opinion that the painting draws a likeness from something actual and transposes it into a product of artistic—production? By no means. The work, therefore, is not the reproduction of some particular entity that happens to be present at any given time; it is on the contrary, the reproduction of the thing's general essence³¹.

This interpretation does not refer to either a mimetic or a reproductive ability of the work of art. This essence that Heidegger is seeking after is the essence of truth. "Art is truth setting itself to work"³². This claim is further elaborated by Heidegger's discussion of the workly being of the work in terms of it opening up a world and setting forth the earth and their interrelation.

Heidegger starts by exploring the nature of truth by examining first the world as the creative element of the work. "Towering up within itself, the work opens up a world

³¹ OWA p 37

³² OWA p 44

and keeps it abidingly in force”³³. The concept of ‘world’ Heidegger will examine with the aid of another artwork, this time a non-representational artwork, an ancient Greek temple. It is important to notice beforehand that, according to Heidegger, *in essence* these two artworks, the representational painting by Van Gogh and the ancient temple, are the same. This primarily poetic, or creative essence of the artwork is what Heidegger talks about as the essence of all arts, including poetry and those arts created out of the medium of language.

He says that it is the work’s workly character, in other words what sort of thing the artwork actually *does* that is immediately related to the notion of truth. The artwork is not the symbol of some eternal truth. Rather art is truth- fixing- itself- in- the-work. In order to elaborate this Heidegger says that the artwork opens up a world and sets forth the earth. The world of a people is described here as the “governing expanse” of the context of relations in which human actions acquire meaning. It is as such a *common* horizon.

The *world* stands for the usually unnoticed background understanding of a common horizon of beliefs and practices of a historical people. There is also the concept of the world as an ontological structure which means the totality of what there is, in other words the totality of beings. *World* here has an ontological dimension, while *earth* has as we will see a pre-ontological dimension, as showing the present.

So *world* and *earth* do not correspond to what one could broadly describe as the natural and the cultural. Both have a more fundamental dimension. Furthermore their relation is not dialectical, it does not lead to a higher synthesis. Rather the *world* is grounded on the *earth* and the *earth* juts through world. The interrelation of art and world is important as it is precisely their interrelation as strife (*Riss*) which becomes ‘form’ in Heideggerian aesthetics. Saying that the *world* is *in* the artwork means that the *world* is not opened prior to the creation of the work.

The world has a historical dimension. Heidegger distinguishes three distinct historical epochs: antiquity, the Middle Ages and modernity. These correspond to a simultaneous reformulation of truth. Truth as ‘*adequatio*’ as Heidegger says consisted

³³Ibid. p 44

in the transformation of truth as correspondence. This change entailed a simultaneous transformation of Being. When we encounter such works as the temple at Paestum or the Bamberg cathedral, we see that they are not the works they were. However, excellent their state of preservation, their worlds, have either withdrawn or perished. We encounter them as belonging to tradition, as works to be conserved, henceforth they remain merely as such, objects. As such they are “dead” and belong to the past which is ever lost to us.

The ancient temple does not represent anything. The building however, circumscribes God’s presence and lets it be outside in the open space. However, the temple and the sacred precinct, the sacred space around it does not lie about somewhere in the void.

It is the temple-work that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself 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. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people³⁴.

This means that it articulates the space where a historical people live and create, their tradition, in a sense its everyday experiences with the world, their shared understanding, beliefs and practices. I would also add that the artwork in the case of the ancient Greeks, to whom Heidegger refers by using an example of the temple, would also bring the whole *Mittelwelt*, the in-between world of their gods and mythologies into view. This shared background of mortals with their gods would also come into view. It is the whole people’s *style* then that the artwork articulates and transforms. The artwork opens up the very *Da* (the ‘there’) of a people’s being-there. The artwork’s role then is to make manifest a world that is already there and to bring this common horizon and usually unnoticed framework of relations to the fore. This does not mean that the artwork creates a world that has not come into existence yet. Rather the artwork is the rendering visible, the manifesting of this usually unnoticed background understanding. However, the *world* is grounded and is opened up, in short cannot be conceived without the other element which the artwork sets forth and this is what Heidegger calls ‘earth’. So far we have seen how the artwork manifests the

³⁴ OWA p 42

world and that it articulates a people's saying. But in doing this, in letting a people's saying come to light, the artwork also sets forth the earth. Let us see now how the artwork sets forth the earth.

The artwork as a disruption of 'World' and a 'setting forth' of 'Earth'. The 'presencing' of earth: the paradoxical presencing of the unintelligible in matter (artwork)

Heidegger declares that when the work opens a world it sets 'forth the earth'. The ancient temple serves once more as Heidegger's example in order to explain his suggestions. The 'setting forth of earth' Heidegger discusses with reference to the example of the ancient temple. He makes a comparison between the way the material is ordered with the making of an equipment, an axe for example and the ordering of the material as used in the temple. The material of the axe is 'used up' and disappears into usefulness³⁵. The usefulness of the tool is what takes the matter of the tool away from our attention. The usefulness of the tool 'uses' the matter.

In a rather poetic manner Heidegger describes the way the material is ordered in the temple. The work of art, in so far as it lets a world appear thought it, does not let the matter vanish but keeps it out in the open: through its gravity and the serenity the rock becomes a rock, the colours attain their brightness. "[...] the temple-work, in setting up a world, does not cause the material to disappear, but rather causes it to come forth for the very first time and to come into the Open of the work's world"³⁶.

The strife between 'Earth' and 'World'

The crux of the Heideggerian interpretation of the artwork is the relation between world as the revealing element and earth as the self-concealing element in the unconcealment of truth. Of the two elements in the artworks, then, one—the *world*—is self-revealing and the other—the "earth" self-concealing. Heidegger characterizes the relationship between the two as a permanent "strife", a "struggle", the fighting of a battle" and it is this struggle which first makes possible the realization by each element of its own peculiar nature. This is what gives art its dynamism for Heidegger. The artistic form of the artwork (*Gestalt*) consists in precisely this establishment, the

³⁵ OWA p 46

³⁶ OWA p

fixing in a medium, of the basic strife between the self-closing medium (as in the earth) and the disclosure which the medium bears and supports (as in the world). As it has already been said, for Heidegger all artworks may partake of this single essence but what distinguishes one work from another is the particular framing or ordering of its material, its form in other words. The earth, though self-concealing, is not monotonous, for its concealment is neither unvaried nor inflexible. It can take an “inexhaustible variety of simple modes and shapes” and it is part of the function of the artist to exploit these possibilities. What is peculiar to art and what constitutes it as art is the precise manner in which it discloses the ‘truth of Being’, in contrast to other ways in which an ultimate disclosure may occur. It is this particular point which becomes the focus of Heidegger’s late essays after the ‘Origin’, where he fails to support it. In what follows I explain Heidegger’s erroneous path towards an overcoming of the premises he criticized of traditional aesthetics. My intention is to emphasize the failures in Heidegger’s philosophical thinking.

The epochal character of the artwork: the fallacy of the ‘realization’ of an authentic community in the collective artwork. The problematic nature of the Origin essay.

So far we have seen how the production or creation of the work of art for Heidegger cannot be solely reduced to the creative activity of the artist. However, this is not all. He claims that the work in order to be a true work of art has to find ‘preservers’. Preservation is just as important as creation. The whole contradictory problematic of this essay can be better understood if we pay attention to what Heidegger is saying with regards to the ‘preservation’ of the artwork. Preservation is of course the term Heidegger uses precisely in order to avoid using the traditional aesthetic categories of spectator and beholder. But let us see what he is saying with regards to preservation. First the role of the preservers is equally important to that of its creation. Furthermore the work is for Heidegger *always* tied to preservers. “Even the oblivion into which the work can sink is not nothing; it is still a preservation”³⁷. How does Heidegger mean ‘preservation’, though?

In order to proceed to see how Heidegger thinks that the work is preserved we have to recapitulate the basic ideas so far. Heidegger makes it clear that what is to be

³⁷ OWA p 67

preserved in the work is not its observation as an object of a disinterested encounter but precisely the opposite. The artwork is the site of two different opposing energies or impulses. The power of the artwork is to show the present as the site of the unintelligible and as such to sketch the future of a historical community. This put simply means that the artwork serves at once as the rendering visible of the limits of historical knowledge and at the same time it is the instigator of new meaning. By knowing the ‘willing’ of the artwork, this power, the thrust of the artwork encapsulated in the configuration of the artwork, the preservers realize precisely this: the un-concealedness of truth.

Preserving the work means: “standing within” of preservation, however is a knowing. Yet knowing does not consist in mere information and notions about something. He who truly knows what is, knows what he wills to do in the midst of what is³⁸.

At this point Heidegger clarifies what he means with an explanatory comment which links his views in the ‘Origin of the Work of Art’ to those in *Being and Time*. The kind of standing within preservation, he says, is a knowing.

The willing here referred to, which neither merely applies knowledge nor decides beforehand, is thought of in terms of the basic experience of thinking in *Being and Time*. Knowing that remains a willing, and willing that remains a knowing, is the existing human being’s entrance into and compliance with the unconcealedness of Being. The resoluteness intended in *Being and Time* is not the deliberate action of a subject, but the opening up of human being, out of its captivity in that which is, to the openness of Being³⁹.

This means that the human being comes to ‘know’ truth precisely as un-concealment, as disclosure of what is, in other words the Being of the artwork. The ‘unconcealedness’ of Being the struggle between the opening of world and the presencing of the unintelligible is in matter. The contradictory, unintelligible side of

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹ OWA p 67

the work of art should be preserved precisely as that contradictory and as the unintelligible.

But Heidegger ‘covers up’ and ‘conceals’ when he sees in the earth of the painting the idealized life of the peasant woman. Let us imagine what the peasant woman’s reaction would be to the painting. How would she be engaged by the painting? Would she be startled before the purposelessness of the painted shoes? This would seem rather unlikely. Possibly the painting would leave her indifferent, especially if one bears in mind the life of the peasants whom Van Gogh picked as his subject-matter. These people lived in extreme poverty living mostly on potatoes. What better proof of their miserable lives than the heavy atmosphere painted by Van Gogh in “The Potato Eaters” (1885) (pic. 3). The faces of the people seem heavy, disfigured dark and shadowy. One could almost see the colour of the earth on which they worked all day long reflected in their brownish-green faces. Would these people feel thankful for their world? Would any painting of shoes seem extra-ordinary to these people? It seems that the philosopher is far from preserving the openness he says we ought to preserve by bringing ourselves before this painting. Heidegger tries to reconstitute *a* certain truth to the painting, to use Derrida’s phrasing. Moreover, although he is willing to accept that the painter painted these shoes many times, he seems to forget the differential seriality of the paintings, thus subsuming the difference of *a* particular painting under the repetitious essence of Van Gogh’s art as a whole. This means that he is not able to account for a different response to the painting.

Nevertheless, Heidegger maintains that preservation is of the same importance, that it has the same value as creation. This involves the position of the artist. Art historian’s Meyer Schapiro’s point in an article he wrote in 1968 was that the artist was a city dweller at the time.⁴⁰ Thus he solves the problem of the ownership of the shoes. But I believe that the fact that the painting was made at a time the painter was a city dweller and that the shoes were his own does not contradict Heidegger’s philosophical approach. It could have been the case that Van Gogh painted the shoes by memory for example. The error in Heidegger’s thinking is found again within his deeper claims about the artwork showing Being or reality, precisely as the site of the *unintelligible*,

⁴⁰ "The Still-Life as a Personal Object-- A Note on Heidegger and van Gogh." In Simmel, M. L. ed., *The Reach of the Mind: Essays in Memory of Kurt Goldstein, 1878-1965*. New York: 1968: 203-9

that which cannot be reduced to a single interpretation. The way Heidegger idealizes the earth in the painting, by idealizing the life of the peasant woman, certainly contradicts his own claims.

Let us also think about the position of the individual artist in all this. Let's say that Van Gogh was indeed a city dweller at the time of painting the particular picture of the shoes. Arguing now, taking in mind Schapiro's point about the ownership of the shoes, we have to imagine the conditions of Van Gogh's whereabouts as well. My point is that even if one can claim for sure that the artist was the owner of the shoes, it is worth trying to imagine what he was trying to express by painting his own shoes. In other words, again we are brought before the problem of the everydayness of Van Gogh, the artist and the art which is expressing this everydayness. Even if Van Gogh had been a city dweller at the time, was he a happy city dweller? Would he have found anything extraordinarily great wandering about in Belgium? What we know of his life in the city certainly contradicts this. If one has a picture of Van Gogh in mind this would be of a tragic figure of a wretched, a starving individual wandering alone in the streets of Belgium. That is an issue that Schapiro's point perhaps deals with in order to attack Heidegger's idealization from another viewpoint. Yet, as we shall see, the problem is not the 'ownership' of the shoes but what the shoes symbolized for Van Gogh at the time when he was painting them. Perhaps it is here that Schapiro is playing more with the idea of projection of meaning to the painting. As we shall see in the following chapter more extensively, philosopher's Jacques Derrida's point is precisely to let us see the issue of projection of meaning to the painting. Perhaps, although Schapiro makes a valid point, Heidegger's approach remains 'less of a projection', and deals with the painting in a 'less prejudiced' perhaps manner. This is something to keep in mind and will be discussed later.

I here want to raise some critical points which bring my discussion back to Heidegger's efforts to overcome traditional aesthetics. First, it seems to me that Heidegger's discussion brings us again before the problem of 'disinterestedness'. Even though this is not to be conceived as what is normally understood as disinterestedness. This can hold true especially as Heidegger asserts that through our engagement with the artwork we must be ready to transform our 'accustomed ties to the world'. And he is pretty explicit on what he means by this.

To submit to this displacement means: to transform our accustomed ties to the world and to earth and henceforth to restrain all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to stay within the truth that is happening in the work. Only the restraint of this staying lets what is created be the work that it is. This letting the work be a work we call the preserving of the work. It is only for such preserving that the work yields itself in its createdness as actual, i.e. now: present in the manner of a work. (OWA 66)

Thus although Heidegger would never admit to a kind of ‘aesthetic consciousness’, and to an encounter with the painting ‘devoid’ of all interest’, as in the case of Kant and Schopenhauer, he nevertheless accepts the fact that the ‘*resolute self*’ must have achieved a state of resoluteness which would appear as the most authentic kind of appropriation of *Dasein*’s Being. This as I have discussed remains incompatible on the one hand with 1) his own theory of truth since the truth of the shoes of the peasant woman is revealed as a certain *kind of truth* and on the other with 2) his larger ontological project. With regards to what has been discussed earlier in Chapter one, Being is not supposed to become an entity. What is sought by Heidegger is Truth as unconcealment and Being as Difference. Therefore his theory failed by ascribing a certain kind of truth, the truth of the painting of the shoes corresponding to the world of the peasant woman. As we shall see analytically further in Chapter two, this is Jacques Derrida’s point in the presentation of the debate between art historian Meyer Schapiro and Heidegger.

I want to recap what has already been established as the threefold structure of the work of art. This consists of a threefold movement of the work of art. First, the latter is itself the site of the opening (clearing) of beings and the simultaneous withdrawal of Being, which is formulated in an epochal dimension. Second this takes place as a struggle between the un-concealing of world and the simultaneous concealing of earth where that latter is to be conceived as the unintelligible in matter. The artwork thus brings the presencing of the unintelligible (the earth) in the matter and at the same time ‘creates’ the world in rendering visible the relational space in the midst of which a historical community dwells.

Furthermore with regards to Heidegger's criticism of Nietzsche's last metaphysical position and the principle of the will, I believe Heidegger again falls short of what he sought to achieve. If the willing—as the driving artistic force—is the transformation of art and truth into a kind of *transcendental state of being*, this means that Heidegger is not able to overcome the Nietzschean presupposition of art and truth being brought into a higher synthesis. In other words, this means that art is the same as reality, because they are synthesized into one first principle: the will of *Dasein*. Heidegger's alternative philosophy of art thus fails in this respect. If truth is the fixing-itself-into-the-work-of-art, and if the work of art is the *strife* of 'world' and 'earth' this means that Heidegger's efforts to overcome the difficulties he sees as arising from traditional aesthetics ultimately fail. Because there is a fixing of world and earth into the artwork which once found and established cannot be changed. It will always be the same. This of course defies any 'aesthetic value' and equates it to a commodity which has a particular meaning, a particular audience and a particular representational quality.

Truth, the particular truth of the artwork, has become the site of dialectical synthesis of the oppositional relationship between being (resolute *Dasein*) and non-being (non-authentic way of being). In the case of Heidegger's theory of Being, the theory needs a better formulation for his philosophy of art in order to overcome the problems presented above. Instead of giving a primarily historical dimension to the painting, Heidegger idealizes the life of the peasants and conceals the primarily historical dimension to the painting. Heidegger is not consistent with regards his views on the particular example he is using. His theory leaves the particularity of *a* particular painting aside and thus his larger project of linking the artwork to the Being of beings as a whole remains unargued for. This will only occur in his later writings which I will examine in the second and third chapters of my thesis. Afterwards I will seek to find in Paolini's own thinking (as seen in his writings and artworks) an example of the practical opening of Heidegger's philosophy.