

CHAPTER FOUR

Mimesis, Art, and Truth

Just as the influences of Heidegger's mentors provide clues to his thought, so the observations of those he influenced—from Tillich to Gadamer, Rahner to Marcuse—prove equally enlightening. Tillich, who reformulated Heidegger's concept of being to offer a new vision of the Protestant experience of God, provides a unique example. For in writing two dissertations on Schelling that consider myth and guilt respectively, Tillich displays an important cross fertilization within contemporary theology.¹ Indeed, his theology suggests that Heidegger's project is not monolithic, but instead unfolds across many historical fronts. Moreover, Tillich offers a point of detachment or distance in terms of which to evaluate the evolutionary path of Heidegger's thought, to witness its breaks as well as its continuity.

In a recently published lecture from 1954, Tillich remarks: "The answers one finds in the later Heidegger, for example, do not come from existentialism but from the Medieval, Catholic mystical tradition within which he lived as a seminarian."² Gadamer underscores this point while addressing the question of why Heidegger retained an orientation to religious issues despite forsaking a career as a theologian: "...it was Christianity once again that challenged the thought of this man and held him in suspense; it was once again the old transcendence and not the modern worldliness [*Diesseitigkeit*] that spoke through him...it was clear to Heidegger that it would be intolerable to speak of God like science speaks about its objects; but what that might mean, to speak of God—this was the question that motivated him and pointed out his way of thinking."³ In the "Letter on 'Humanism'" (1947), Heidegger emphasizes the deeper claim of being governing his thought beyond the anthropocentric focus found in existentialism, along with the need to redefine freedom as *Dasein's* entrance into a space of openness (*Spielraum*), rather than as mere volition. By developing this postmetaphysical stance, we will discover both the importance and provisionality of Heidegger's analysis of human freedom in his 1936 Schelling-lectures.

Specifically, the religious motifs unearthed in these lectures necessitate retrieving Meister Eckhart's insights into our deeper ontological capacity to "let be"

(*Gelassenheit*). Where Heidegger had emphasized the essence of human freedom, freedom in the Eckhartian sense implies a plurality of ways in which we can exhibit this power rather than as a simple unity. Indeed, we can distinguish the freedom appropriate to thought as anticipating the event of truth, as an initiation into unconcealment. The sense of initiation, however, also has religious connotations which become evident in Heidegger's appeal to the "piety of thinking." In the religious sphere, freedom can involve a testimonial of faith, as the appropriateness of a relation to God. And of course we cannot neglect the role that art may play in exhibiting a future enactment of freedom, namely, as cultivating the power of *poiesis* or nurturing the creativity at the heart of unconcealment.

Upon amplifying this plurality, we realize that Heidegger's thought includes the permutations of analogy. By comparison, the univocity of the concept remains a stark adversary. Yet the heterogeneous character of Heidegger's thought continues to be elusive. Indeed, the more we try to thematize the thread of his connection to the religious tradition, the more we minimize the religious tenor operative in a new attunement of thought. And, conversely, the more we try to extract a univocal ontological focus for his language, the more we compromise his task to the dictates of representational thinking. Any attempt to address the religious influences on Heidegger's thought must take this paradox into account. As suggested above, the affinity between a prior religious interest and the direction of his thought cannot easily be grasped, but must instead intersect with another path. This "other path" implies the circuitous route of a detour, namely, art. Art, religion, philosophy—the juxtaposing of these three should give us occasion to pause especially in light of their systematic organization in Hegel's Absolute Idealism. We must find an alternative to this Hegelian configuration of the realms of Absolute Spirit, which revels in the tension of each and draws us back into the creativity of the analogical relations.

This chapter will be divided into two parts. First, I will consider the significance of Heidegger's novel treatment of art, which prepares the way for and later deepens the transformation of thought at work in his 1936 Schelling-lectures. Secondly, I will examine the place that the concern for myth occupies in Heidegger's thinking. We will discover to what extent a polymorphic analogy as practiced in the work of art can unfold in the realm of religion as well as philosophy.

THOUGHT AS SACRIFICE

I. *From Mimesis to Essential Thinking*

Thought, representation, fantasy, and image may appear synonymous in many respects. Yet in order to distinguish the vast differences among them it is necessary to consider the unique character of art. Perhaps Heidegger takes the greatest step

toward re-establishing art as a distinctive enterprise which so directly harbors the event of disclosedness as to mark its origin. Yet both Schelling and Hegel must be given their due in bringing the importance of art to the foreground on a par with any other medium of the truth. Indeed, in their dialectics each portrays art as a measure of truth in contrast to discursive forms of cognition. In decidedly different ways, Schelling and Hegel uphold art as embodying the "ideal" and hence as reconciling nature and freedom, subject and object within the Absolute. In the idealistic elevation of the idea to the pinnacle of what is, art invariably takes precedence over almost any other mode of "appearance."

Schelling, however, diverges from Hegel on one key point, a divergence which will bring him closer to the stance Heidegger adopts in his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1936). For Schelling construes art as exhibiting the peak of an intellectual intuition in which the Absolute can manifest itself and radiate forth in all its diversity. By contrast, Hegel distinguishes art as the sensuous medium in which the Absolute can reveal itself, although with a lesser degree of mediation than can be achieved through the symbolic medium of religion or the conceptual element of philosophy. Scholars continue to debate whether Hegel actually viewed art as an inferior medium for God's appearance versus religion and finally philosophy.⁴ At the close of "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger questions Hegel's claim that, relative to the other claims of Absolute Spirit, art remains a tribute to the past.⁵

In Schelling's case it is clear that art enjoys a special status insofar as without its occurrence there would be no way to bridge the gap between the infinite and finite, between the ideal and real, and hence no concrete locus of truth.⁶ Perhaps we should not be surprised that Heidegger finds a kindred spirit in Schelling and prefers his brand of idealism, despite its vestige of a metaphysics of presence, over his counterpart, Hegel's Absolute Idealism. Nor should we be surprised that Heidegger composes his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" in tandem with delivering his 1936 lectures on Schelling. As scholars have suggested, despite his emphasis on the Absolute, Schelling turns to art as a vessel of truth in which the moments of revealing/concealing are held in tension.⁷

Inspired by Hölderlin, Heidegger takes the next step toward bringing art into the foreground and establishing its role as defining the interplay of world and thing, the active differentiation of being and beings. Heidegger undertakes this radicalizing move and reorients his inquiry to the twofold, to the ontological difference. Art thereby re-emerges as the emissary of disclosedness, and cultivates alternative forms of manifestation which can counter the homogeneity endemic to technological existence. Thus art marks the transition to the "other beginning," and harbors the attunement whereby thought can respond to the truth of being. Like Schelling, Heidegger considers art in its partnership with philosophy rather than as inferior to it.

Does Heidegger ontologize art? We might more properly say that ontology betrays a finite element which comes to life in art. Indeed, art epitomizes the circularity implied in any investigation by interrupting the sequence of beginning and end. As Heidegger suggests in "The Origin of the Work of Art," art is completely infused by the pregnancy of its beginning that its strength lies in continually revolving within that original circuit and space allotted to it. Indeed, the work of art stands by itself, and gathers forth its own possibilities insofar as they harbor diverse ways of unconcealment. In this regard, the authorship of the art work remains as discrete and inconspicuous as the self-engendering process of nature (*physis*) which brings forth what otherwise recedes and withdraws.

For Heidegger, *physis* and *poiesis* are distinct, although each coordinates an emergent process which brings to fruition new limits of manifestation. The correlation between nature and art is, of course, a favorite motif of German idealism. Indeed, Kant first recognized this link in the *Critique of Judgment*. Schelling acknowledges the same connection in discovering within nature the prefigurement of the self-organizing process of creativity; this creative process finds its consummate form in art, in the intuition gauging the compatibility of sameness in difference vis-à-vis beauty. But Heidegger takes perhaps the most radical step in coordinating nature and art, *physis* and *poiesis*, as the reciprocal process of assigning boundaries to the process of unconcealment. Insofar as the "moment" of being initiated into truth defines the heart of philosophy, Heidegger restores art to its ownmost realm adjacent to that of philosophy. In "The Age of the World-Picture," Heidegger describes this moment as one of "correspondence": "Correspondence [*Die Entsprechung*], thought as the fundamental characteristic of the being of whatever is, furnishes the pattern for the specific possibilities and modes of setting the truth of this being, in whatever is, into the work."⁸

In contrast to the claim of authorship, art exhibits a more primal form of ownedness. Indeed, the true signature of art lies in giving birth to the singularity of the event itself, to the wellspring which unfolds according to the limits set by the work. But what then distinguishes one work of art from another; what constitutes the unique signature of each? The answer lies in the hallmark of "style." The tendency toward differentiation that distinguishes art is really a tenet of style, of giving it full reign. In his Nietzsche lectures, Heidegger points to the individual experience of this originality as entailing "rapture," as holding open the space for or enduring the tension of creativity.⁹ In this way, art comes under the guidance of a higher law which resists the programmatic steps of representations and courts instead the impromptu movement of play. Correlatively, style now becomes the conduit, the avenue for this play (*Spiel*). Play resets the limits of appearance, and exchanges a heavy handed imposition of control for a stewardship toward the ineluctable process of unconcealment.

But how can this guardianship, whose mandate is one of style, be relevant to a disciplined endeavor as philosophy? Just as art is the vessel of the muses, so philosophy requires its own discipleship, which places the insights it fosters in a kind of receivership or trust. We have indicated how the philosophical endeavor proceeds by becoming free for whatever invites questioning. Yet such a cooperative venture—which presumably constitutes the discipline, the manner of discipleship for philosophy—remains indeterminate without a vanguard to illustrate that possibility. According to Heidegger, art provides that vanguard by embodying the most appropriate freedom: letting be. Indeed, the creative venture of art lies in eliciting what can manifest itself in a determinate, novel and nuanced way. Rather than seeking out a representation which imposes itself on something already present, the artistic process enters into an alliance with what is not present, constellating new limits in which an original appearing can occur, i.e., of *style*.

In this way, art defines the partnership between the withdrawing movement of the “nothing” and the re-emergence of new possibilities. That cooperative relation, however, is the sacrifice required in order to receive the bounty of unconcealment. Such sacrifice, which entails the self-deferral of authorship, epitomizes the finitude of art. By exemplifying this finitude, art portrays the balance between law and freedom which philosophy presupposes. The advent of the “it gives” harbors its own directive of reciprocation. Insofar as this movement becomes increasingly differentiated, the thinker can attain his/her special discipleship as a guest within the expanse of unconcealment. As this guest, the philosopher understands his/her vocation as the strangest of the strange, the “uncanniest of the uncanny.”¹⁰

We must be careful not to suggest that art is merely tangential to philosophy. Instead, the encircling movement of art brings out through its play the tension between the resetting of limits and what takes a stand within the clearing. In the nomenclature of ancient philosophy, this “twofold” alternates between emphasizing being and then beings. Art bears witness to this twofold, though in a way which does not yet seek the evocation of its name. In a philosophical lexicon, the twofold unfolds as the double genitive, beings of being and the being of beings. The attempt to think the dynamics of that differentiation, which Heidegger earlier called the “ontological difference,” distinguishes the topic of philosophy. But in order for philosophy to come into its own a proper response to the inception of this twofold, to its original differentiation, is necessary. That response distinguishes the law of freedom requisite for the philosophical task, namely, to enter into a relation with what is alien in order to aid in evoking the twofold, to let it be in the torsion of the double genitive. This alien dimension turns out to be language as the “house of being.”

For Heidegger, it is necessary for thought to relinquish its privileged claim to the twofold, in order to be granted more primeval access to difference through the tutelage of art. Indeed, art points to the recovery of the twofold in another element,

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