

The Shimmering Shining: The Promise of Art in Heidegger and Nietzsche

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In response to Hegel's thesis concerning the "end of art," John Sallis suggests that the future or the "promise of art" may be opened in thinking through Heidegger's essay "The Origin of the Work of Art." Sallis proposes that this promise of art may lie in the capacity to "set forth various elements through transfiguration into shining." In this paper I reflect on what this suggestion concerning the promise of art may mean. Furthermore, I propose that "The Origin of the Work of Art" shows a resonance with Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* that Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche obscures, and that this resonance is suggested in Sallis' earlier work on Nietzsche's book. I suggest that the Gestalt configuration of "world" and "earth" in Heidegger's essay echoes the configuration of the Apollonian and Dionysian in Nietzsche's thought. I further suggest in the conclusion that this resonance enables one to draw the connection between "The Origin of the Work of Art" and Heidegger's later work in which the promise of art opens up a different mode of dwelling upon the earth.

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Introduction: The End of Art

It looked, of course, just like the typical aftermath of the evening's opening festivities—just a bunch of empty beer bottles, ashtrays with cigarette butts, a collection of half-full coffee cups, some candy wrappers, and newspaper pages strewn about upon the floor. Perhaps one might guess that an artist had been at work amidst the detritus as there was an empty easel, a paint-smeared palette, and some paintbrushes lying around. One might wonder what the ladder was for, but the cleaning man at the prestigious Mayfair gallery in London obviously simply assumed that someone had gotten the ladder out for some unknown reason and forgotten to put it back. So, naturally, he swept up the trash and tidied up the place. The incident caused quite a stir in the artworld, however, with the story even generating some bemusement in the pages of *The New York Times*, for the

cleaning man had disposed of a new installation, a work of art for which the gallery had set the value at “six figures as it was an original Damien Hirst” (Hoge 2001).¹

While surely there must have been considerable laughter among the artworld cognoscenti, one individual who did not find the story so amusing was the noted philosopher and art critic Donald Kuspit. In the recent book *The End of Art*, Kuspit uses the story at the outset of his argument as one example among others of symptoms of the death or end of art. Art has come to an end and has been replaced by “postart,” a term invented by Alan Krapow to refer to a new category of art that “elevates the banal over the enigmatic, the scatological over the sacred, cleverness over creativity” (Kuspit 2004, 1). Kuspit traces the beginning of the end of art to the point when art lost its aesthetic character, the point when the observable features or sensible qualities of the work of art were no longer of any relevance to the work being a work of art. The development leading to the anti-aesthetic postmodern art Kuspit decries leads backward from Hirst, through Andy Warhol, to Marcel Duchamp. Kuspit argues that the future of the visual arts, any promise of art, lies in a recovery of aesthetic experience and something of the seriousness of purpose found, for example, in Van Gogh and Kandinsky.

Arthur Danto also sees the development of art in the late 20th century as having resulted in the end of art. For Danto, as for Kuspit, the development that led to the end of art was the point when “visuality drop[ped] away, as little relevant to the essence of art as beauty proved to have been” (Danto 1995, 16). Danto’s favorite example is Warhol’s *Brillo Box* (1964). Though the material of the work is silkscreen ink and house-paint on plywood, it is visually indistinguishable from the cardboard boxes found in the supermarket. The endpoint of such a development is the point where there doesn’t even have to be an object at all. One of the more recent examples Danto points to as a sign of this end of art occurred in 1990 when, in order to help finance the purchase of a Minimalist collection, a good bit of which, Danto notes, was conceptual and thus did not exist as objects, the director of the Guggenheim sold off three works of the modern masters—a Modigliani, a Chagall, and a Kandinsky. A penny for your thoughts? Well, if you’re clever enough, the Guggenheim will give you a Kandinsky. What is doubly ironical is that Kandinsky was an especially philosophical artist, and this development, when the work of art can be the pure concept itself, marks, for Danto, “the philosophical coming of age of art,” the point when there is a “coming to awareness of the true philosophical nature of art” (Danto 1995, 30).

This thought, as Danto notes, is “altogether Hegelian,” and Danto thus takes us back to the point where the notion of the end of art is first introduced in Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics*:

Art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past. Thereby it has lost for us genuine truth and life, and has rather been transferred into

¹ The artist is one of the most successful contemporary artists, reportedly Britain’s richest living artist, the best known of a group of conceptual artists who dominated the 90s British art scene. Hirst, of course, found the incident hysterically funny, since his work is all about the relationship between art and the everyday, and also, one might perhaps assume, because it didn’t take too much effort to recreate the work of art.

our *ideas* instead of maintaining its earlier necessity in reality and occupying its higher place. What is now aroused in us by works of art is not just immediate enjoyment, but our judgment also, since we subject to our intellectual consideration (i) the content of art, and (ii) the work of art's means of presentation, and the appropriateness or inappropriateness of both to one another. The philosophy of art is therefore a greater need in our day than it was in the days when art by itself yielded full satisfaction. Art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is. (Hegel 1975, 11)

Of course, Hegel did not mean that there would be no more art. What Hegel meant was just that the journey of *Geist* or Spirit through human history would have to leave art behind. The sensuous presentation in art would have to be surpassed by thought in the development towards Spirit's full self-conscious awareness. It might seem that Hegel's thesis has been decisively refuted by the subsequent history of art; Danto, nevertheless, points out that the unfolding of that history, with its succession of avant-garde manifestos all seeking to define art philosophically, and the inevitable philosophical reflections on art in conceptual art, all appeal not to the senses "but to what Hegel here calls judgment, and hence to our philosophical beliefs about what art is" (Danto 1995, 31). Thus, it might seem that Hegel had anticipated these postmodern developments in which art as sensible presentation has been surpassed by thought.

While Hegel thought the time—his time, our time, the time after the end of art—would call for a greater need for the philosophy of art, Danto describes the period in the philosophy of art from Hegel onward, at least as practiced by philosophers, as "singularly barren, making of course an exception for Nietzsche, and perhaps for Heidegger" (Danto 1995, 31). In the concluding chapter, titled "The Promise of Art," of his recent book *Transfigurements: On the True Sense of Art*, John Sallis takes up a reflection on the philosophy of art in Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, and there we find the suggestion that this promise of art may lie in its capacity to bring forth "various elemental dimensions of nature" (Sallis 2008, 187). To grasp what Sallis might mean it will be necessary to follow the course of his reflection through Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger.

The focus of Sallis' reflection is Heidegger's celebrated essay *The Origin of the Work of Art*. As Sallis deftly unfolds his reflection, it becomes clear how much Heidegger's essay is a response to Hegel's thesis about the end of art. It is not until the Epilogue attached to the essay, however, that Heidegger refers directly to Hegel, and there he cites the passage concerning the pastness of art. Hegel's thesis about the end of art only follows from what Heidegger describes in the lectures on Nietzsche, given during the time when he was composing the essay, as the "raging discordance between art and truth" (Heidegger 1979, 142). This discordance begins, of course, with Plato's understanding of art in *The Republic* as being "thrice removed from the truth," with the determination of truth as *intelligible* and art consigned to be nothing more than imitation of *sensible* things, a poor copy of what already is a poor copy (Plato 1892, 602e). Sallis thus draws out the line of thought that leads to the thesis of end of art: "if, as with Hegel, art is determined as the sensible presentation of truth, then the further inference to its pastness requires only that truth be shown to exceed the possibility of sensible presentation" (Sallis

2008, 154). The future or the promise of art can thus only be opened in twisting free of the metaphysical opposition of the intelligible and the sensible and the discordance between art and truth. This would involve both a rethinking of truth and a new interpretation of the sensible, or as Sallis puts it, “a redetermination of the sense of truth and the truth of sense,” and this, as Sallis explains, is Heidegger’s objective in *The Origin of the Work of Art* (Sallis 2008, 171).

Heidegger’s Nietzsche

In the lectures on Nietzsche, working through the late unpublished notes, Heidegger points out how Nietzsche’s thought amounts to a reversal of Hegel’s thesis concerning the end of art. As Sallis explains: “Whereas for Hegel art is something past, something surpassed by religion and philosophy, for Nietzsche it is religion and philosophy that are now something past and art that offers the possibility of surpassing the nihilism to which they have led. For Nietzsche it is art that holds promise for the future” (Sallis 2008, 161). For, as Nietzsche had put it in the famous “History of an Error,” the truth that Hegel finds incapable of being presented in the sensible, now becomes insignificant, a mere fable (Nietzsche 1998, 20). Since it sides with the sensible, it is art that opens the future. Sallis draws attention to a note found in the early notebooks, written around the time Nietzsche was writing *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which Heidegger finds an “astonishing preview” of Nietzsche’s later thought: “My philosophy an *inverted Platonism*: the farther removed from true being, the purer, the finer, the better it is. Living in semblance [*Schein*] as goal” (quoted in Sallis 2008, 162).² It is important to call attention to the fact that *Schein*, here translated as “semblance,” can also be translated as “appearance” or as “shining.” For something to appear it must shine forth, and the young Nietzsche set as a goal the inversion of Platonism by living in the shining of appearance, and this is the astonishing preview of the later thought in which art is thought as the countermovement to nihilism.

Nevertheless, Heidegger concludes that Nietzsche’s thought must be surpassed as the raging discordance between art and truth is only overturned and not overcome in Nietzsche’s thought. As if he had found Nietzsche, the masked philosopher, unmasked in the unpublished notebooks, where his “philosophy proper was left behind as a posthumous, unpublished work” (Heidegger 1979, 9), Heidegger focuses on two passages from Nietzsche’s last year. In one note, Nietzsche acknowledges that his first work was devoted to this relationship between art and truth, and he makes the startling confession that “even now I stand in holy dread in the face of this discordance” (quoted in Heidegger 1979, 74).³ In the second passage, in a line that has been described as “at once crystalline and tumultuous, brilliant and violent” (Heller 1988, 159), Nietzsche exclaims: “We possess *art* lest we *perish of the truth*” (Nietzsche 1968, §822).⁴ Thus, here at

²The note, dated “end of 1870–April 1871,” is found in Nietzsche’s notebooks (Nietzsche 1978, 207) and is cited by Heidegger (Heidegger 1961, 180; 1979, 154).

³Heidegger cites from the *Grossoktavausgabe* (XIV, 368) and later (Heidegger 1979, 142) reveals that the note is from 1888.

⁴Heidegger cites the note at (Heidegger 1979, 75).

the end, in some of Nietzsche's last notes, Heidegger finds that the discordance between art and truth never rages more severely, and this proves decisive in marking a limit to Nietzsche's thought.

An additional reason Heidegger thinks Nietzsche's thought must be surpassed is that it still remains within, as much as it aims to overcome, the tradition of aesthetics, which focuses on the "mere-enjoyment of art" (Sallis 2008, 163). Though Nietzsche tries to overcome aesthetics by shifting the focus from the perspective of the viewer to that of the artist, he still focuses on the feeling or experience of the artist. Yet another limitation Heidegger marks in Nietzsche's aesthetics, Sallis again notes, lies in Nietzsche's understanding, in several passages from the late notebooks and one key section of *Twilight of the Idols*, of the aesthetic state of the artist in terms of rapture [*Rausch*] understood as "form-engendering force" (Sallis 2008, 168). Heidegger maintains that rapture, as the form-engendering force, is only one side of the creative process, and Nietzsche leaves out the other side, which involves an "ascent beyond oneself" (Heidegger 1979, 136). Furthermore, as Nietzsche's thought focuses on the state of the artist, the viewer or recipient is also understood by reference to the state of the artist; thus, the effect of artworks is the arousal of the art-creating state of rapture.

Heidegger rejects this and suggests another approach, an inquiry into art that would begin altogether differently, proceeding neither from the perspective of the viewer nor from that of the artist but from the work of art itself. In *The Origin of the Work of Art* Heidegger attempts to reopen the future of art by resolving the discordance between art and truth with the thesis that art is a happening of truth. This involves a rethinking of the notion of truth as well as the essence of art, and also a redetermination of the sensible.

The Origin of the Work of Art

Heidegger begins by examining the thingly character of the work of art: "There is something stony in the work of architecture, something wooden in a carving, colored in painting, spoken in a linguistic work, sonorous in a musical work" (Heidegger 1971, 19). And yet Heidegger goes on in the first part of the essay to question this thingly character; and thus, even though Heidegger does acknowledge the materiality of the work, as for example, in the stone, the wood, or the color, the work of art is not a mere thing. Heidegger only discusses two works of art, a Van Gogh painting and a Greek temple, and it is at this point that he turns his attention to the painting. It is a painting of a pair of shoes. Though Van Gogh made numerous paintings of pairs of shoes, Heidegger does not identify which painting he is considering, but it really doesn't matter, as what he says could be applied to any of the paintings. Most viewers likely continue to see the painting as a representation of shoes. Heidegger's interpretation, in which the shoes are described as belonging to a peasant woman, generated some controversy when the art critic Meyer Shapiro claimed that Heidegger misinterpreted the painting, as the shoes, Shapiro claimed, were really Van Gogh's own shoes. Derrida later pointed

out that Shapiro missed entirely the point of Heidegger's essay.⁵ The representational theory of art had already been decisively rejected, and thus it doesn't matter what shoes Van Gogh was looking at in painting his painting. The truth that is at work in the painting of shoes is not a matter of correspondence to something that is outside the painting, but is rather something that takes place within the frame of the painting. Shapiro thus still moves entirely within the framework of art as imitation while Heidegger's essay is situated outside this framework.

What is happening in the painting then if it is not an imitation of a pair of shoes? Heidegger admits that when we look at the painting we see only a pair of shoes in an undefined space. There is no context to suggest where the shoes are; and yet, Heidegger suggests that the artwork brings forth the world of the peasant woman and "lets us know what shoes are in truth" (Heidegger 1971, 35). Rejecting the notion of truth as an accurate representation or static correspondence, Heidegger rethinks truth as an event, something that happens. Recalling that the Greek term for 'truth' [ἀλήθεια] implies an uncovering or revealing, Heidegger emphasizes the event in which the pair of shoes "emerges into the unconcealedness of its being" (Heidegger 1971, 36).

As Heidegger describes this event of the happening of truth, it involves a double movement, a "setting up of a world and the setting forth of the earth" (Heidegger 1971, 48). Both "world" and "earth" are, for Heidegger, poetic terms; they refer not to objects that can be seen, but rather to these two movements that take place in the event of truth. In the movement where a "world" opens up, something comes forth, is unconcealed. But this revealing always takes place against a background where something else is concealed. The "earth" for Heidegger is this sheltering background: "That into which the work sets itself back and which it causes to come forth in this setting back of itself we called the earth. Earth is that which comes forth and shelters" (Heidegger 1971, 46). These two movements of revealing and concealing, of bringing forth and setting back, are diametrically opposed and yet somehow brought together at once. Heidegger refers to the meeting place, the site of conflict, where these two opposed movements come together as a "rift" and the conflict that ensues in this rift zone as "strife." What is going on here in this happening of truth, Heidegger then makes clear, can be understood in terms of the Gestalt figure-ground composition: "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" (Heidegger 1971, 64).

⁵ Derrida explains: "Thus Shapiro is mistaken about the primary function of the pictorial reference. He also gets wrong a Heideggerian argument which should ruin in advance his own restitution of the shoes to Van Gogh: art as 'putting to work of truth' is neither an 'imitation,' nor a 'description' copying the 'real,' nor a 'reproduction,' whether it represents a singular thing or a general essence. For the whole of Shapiro's case, on the other hand, calls on real shoes: the picture is supposed to imitate them, represent them, reproduce them. Their belonging has then to be determined as a belonging to a real or supposedly real subject, to an individual whose extremities, outside the picture, should not remain bare [*déchaussées*; also, "loose" (of teeth)] for long" (Derrida 1987, 312).

In Heidegger's essay it is not only the sense of truth that is rethought but also the truth of sense. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger had given an account of how sensible things show themselves and emerge into presence by standing out in a world. *The Origin of the Work of Art* thus furthers this "recovery of the sensible" in its account of how sensible things come to presence in this strife or intimacy of "world" and "earth." Sallis explains that, because this process of emergence in this strife of "world" and "earth" occurs in the work of art, an inquiry into the origin of the work of art can provide an access to understanding "the way in which elements and things come to manifest" (Sallis 2008, 184).

Heidegger's investigation into how the sensible emerges in the work of art takes place in his consideration of the Greek temple. As Sallis understands it, "It is primarily a matter of considering *how* the sensible is *there* in the artwork" (Sallis 2008, 170). The temple is chosen as an example precisely because it, as Heidegger asserts, "cannot be ranked as representational art" (Heidegger 1971, 41). Heidegger draws attention to two features of the work of art that occur in the temple: once again, we have the setting up of a "world" and the setting forth of the "earth." The temple opens up the "world" of the Greeks, but it does this against the background of the "earth." In opening up a "world" against this background of "earth," the work of art sets forth the "earth" in the sense that we first become aware of the background from which a "world" arose. We become aware of the "earth" as background, and thus, as Heidegger emphasizes, "*The work lets the earth be an earth*" (Heidegger 1971, 46). It is important to keep in mind the Gestalt figure-ground composition and thus that which Heidegger means by setting forth the "earth" should not be understood as a bringing forth into the foreground. The "earth" that is set forth is not what stands out clear and present in the foreground but is the background from which all emergence comes forth. "The earth appears openly cleared as itself," Heidegger cautions, "only when it is perceived and preserved as that which is by nature undisclosable" (Heidegger 1971, 47).

This interaction of "world" and "earth" is crucial in understanding Heidegger's rethinking of the sensible in the work of art. Heidegger observes that works are set forth in this or that material—stone, wood, metal, color, language, tone—and Sallis draws attention to Heidegger's insistence that in the work of art the material does not disappear, but rather comes forth "for the very first time" in the setting up of a "world" (Heidegger 1971, 46). Sallis cites this important passage, in which Heidegger writes:

The rock comes to bear and rest and so first becomes rock; metals come to glitter and shimmer, colors to glow, tones to sound, the word to say. All this comes forth as the work sets itself back into the massiveness and heaviness of stone, into the firmness and pliancy of wood, into the hardness and luster of metal, into the brightening and darkening of color, into the sounding of tone, and into the naming power of the word. (Heidegger 1971, 46)

Sallis notes here "a kind of double or reciprocal relation between the artwork and the work-material: the artwork is made of the material, and yet also the artwork lets the material be set forth in the opening of world" (Sallis 2008, 185).

Sallis draws our attention to this double dynamic of the sensible character of the work of art. When the metals glitter, colors glow, and tones sound, the work-material goes through a *transfiguration* where the work-material becomes something more than mere material. Heidegger's point is to emphasize that the work of art is not to be thought of in terms of the mere material of the physical object that stands before us. Heidegger even states, "Nowhere in the work is there any trace of a work-material" (Heidegger 1971, 48). In response to this, Sallis then wonders, "What, then, is the stone of the temple if not a work-material? What is the color of the painting if not, first of all, a work-material" (Sallis 2008, 185)? Late in the essay, Sallis finds Heidegger's response to this question when he explains that what seemed like the thingly character of the work-material is the "earthy character" of the work (Heidegger 1971, 69).

Sallis finds here a need to press beyond Heidegger's thought. Noting that the Greeks considered metals as liquid and not earth, Sallis wonders what could be the earthy character of a Greek bronze sculpture of Poseidon. This leads Sallis to his closing suggestion that perhaps the thingly character of the work-material might include other elements than the earth that Heidegger emphasizes. Sallis wonders whether "artworks are set back into various elements, [whether] they thus set forth various elemental dimensions of nature," and thus he suggests that perhaps "the promise of art" would lie in setting forth "various elements through transfiguration into shining" (Sallis 2008, 187). It should be obvious at this point that he does not mean "shining" in the sense of a polished surface, but rather simply the coming forth into appearance, whether that shining forth is through the burnished clay or the rough-cut wood.

Resonance of *The Birth of Tragedy* in *The Origin of the Work of Art*

At this point I would like to draw some attention to a striking resonance or echo of Nietzsche's thinking in Heidegger's essay, a resonance that is obscured in Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche in the lectures, and thus also in Sallis' reflection here where Heidegger's caricature of Nietzsche's thought, drawn mostly from a few passages in the late unpublished notes, is allowed to stand without interrogation. In his earlier superb book on *The Birth of Tragedy*, Sallis opens up a reading of Nietzsche's first book that shows how that work might be considered an "astonishing preview" of Nietzsche's later thought; and it seems that if one attends to that reading, the influence of *The Birth of Tragedy* on *The Origin of the Work of Art* is rather striking. Not only does the title of Heidegger's essay echo that of Nietzsche's book, but also the Gestalt composition of "world" and "earth" in the happening of truth in Heidegger's essay, this bringing together of two opposed movements of unconcealing and concealing, echoes that coming together of the Apollonian and Dionysian art drives that Nietzsche had seen in the origin of the work of art that was Greek tragedy.

As Sallis notes, Nietzsche opens *The Birth of Tragedy* by explaining that the profound secret teachings of the Greek view of art are disclosed "not, to be sure, in concepts, but in the intensely clear figures [*Gestalten*] of their gods" (Nietzsche 1967, 33; 1987, 27). Supplementing Nietzsche's text with a few stories concerning

the names and deeds of Apollo, Sallis, calling attention to the play of the word *Schein* in Nietzsche's text, shows why Apollo, the god of light, is "the 'the shining one' [*der Scheinende*]... [and] also ruler over the beautiful illusion [*schönen Schein*] of the inner world of fantasy" (Nietzsche 1967, 35; 1987, 30).⁶ The Apollonian drive is that which sets forth something into the shining of appearance. Nietzsche proposes that "we might call Apollo himself the glorious divine image of the *principium individuationis*" (Nietzsche 1967, 36). To identify something as "this" and not "that" is to draw a boundary, enclose a figure. The Apollonian drive is then at work in all fashioning of images; it is responsible for all figuration, all attempts to impose form upon chaos and makes sense of existence. As Plato had likened the whole world of appearance to a dream, Nietzsche thus connects this Apollonian shining forth to the beautiful illusion of the dreamworld.

If the figure of Apollo discloses the shining one as responsible for all projection of images and figures into the shining of appearance, the figure of Dionysus discloses the Dionysian as involving, paradoxically, disfiguring. While it is still a matter of attending to the figure of the god in order to understand the secret teachings of the Greeks concerning the Dionysian, Nietzsche says very little about the figure of Dionysus. Nevertheless, this is not at all surprising since things are altogether different for the sylvan god. Sallis explains: "The figure of Dionysus is different. It is a figure drawn, or rather withdrawn, in such a manner that it can have no direct image, even though, on the other hand, it can become in its way directly manifest, to say nothing quite yet of the appearance of Dionysus on the stage of Greek tragedy" (Sallis 1991, 42). If there is to be a figure of Dionysus that shines forth at all, it would have to be through the shining one, as Nietzsche suggests in seeing the appearance of Dionysus as "the work of the dream-interpreter, Apollo" (Nietzsche 1967, 73). Thus, it would have to be only on the stage of Greek tragedy, after that miraculous coupling of the Apollonian and Dionysian has already taken place, that the figure of Dionysus most shines forth in Greek art. Dionysus was, of course, the patron god of tragedy: the plays were initially performed at the theater of Dionysus. Nevertheless, though Nietzsche does say that "all the celebrated figures of the Greek stage—Prometheus, Oedipus, etc.—are masks of the original hero Dionysus" (Nietzsche 1967, 73), in all the extant tragedies that have come down to us, there is only one in which Dionysus appears as himself. This is in the *Bacchae* by Euripides, and there the appearance of Dionysus is surely an enigmatic one. As Sallis' exposition brings forth, Dionysus comes on the scene of the *Bacchae* as the masked god, the god whose identity is concealed, the one whose identity is a doubled identity, both male and female, foreigner and Greek, thus the one whose identity subverts identity. As Jean-Pierre

⁶Sallis explains: "Here as well as throughout *The Birth of Tragedy* the word *Schein* will need to be read in its full spread of sense, since clearly it is not here a matter of simply polysemy. Even the very briefest sketch of phenomenological analysis could indicate that it is a matter of senses so interlinked and mutually dependent that they form a field or spread rather than a series of distinct senses: in order for something to have a certain look, it must show itself, must shine forth; only insofar as it shines so as to have a look can it then become an appearance, for instance, an appearance of something else that perhaps does not shine forth; and only insofar as something has a certain look can it look like something else that it is not, hence become a semblance; finally, both appearance and semblance can develop into various modes of illusion, for instance, something can look so much like something else that it gives itself out as that other thing" (Sallis 1991, 25–26).

Vernant has put it: “Like wine, Dionysus is double: most terrible yet infinitely sweet” (Vernant 1988, 400).⁷ If the Apollonian involves drawing boundaries that would disclose a figure, the Dionysian, in subverting identities, withdraws those boundaries, dissolving the figure.

Nietzsche, of course, connects the Dionysian with *Rausch*, which is often translated as “intoxication” or “rapture.” Drawing not only from *The Birth of Tragedy* but also a couple of contemporaneous passages from Nietzsche’s notes and lectures, Sallis emphasizes that the Dionysian state should be taken as “one of *ecstasy*, of being outside oneself” (Sallis 1991, 53). The Dionysian is that movement of excess, of crossing the boundaries and limits that disclose a figure and establish identities. The figure of Dionysus, as Sallis explains, is thus “an excessive figure, one that exceeds the circuit of metaphysics, a figure in excess of metaphysics, resounding from beyond closure” (Sallis 1991, 42). As the figure of Dionysus exceeds the circuit of metaphysics, beyond the understanding of being in terms of presence, Sallis suggests that “[o]ne could call it also *das Masslose*—that is, abyss. Yet not without also submitting the discourse to an abysmal effect, a doubling that crosses what is said with an unsaying, that spaces the discourse” (Sallis 1991, 42).

As Nietzsche excavates the origin of Greek tragedy, the coming together of the two opposed art impulses in Greek tragedy can be understood in terms of the figure-ground Gestalt composition, with the Apollonian shining forth of images taking place against a Dionysian background. The Apollonian projection of beautiful illusions came forth, as Nietzsche recounts the story, in response to, and thus against the background of, a Dionysian insight into the tragic character of existence, brought forth in the story in which the demi-god Silenus, companion of Dionysus, reveals the abysmal truth concerning human existence: “‘Oh wretched ephemeral race, children of chance and misery, why do you compel me to tell you what it would be most expedient for you not to hear? What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second best for you is—to die soon’” (Nietzsche 1967, 42). It is due to this insight that Nietzsche draws the comparison between the Dionysian man and Hamlet: “both have once looked truly into the essence of things, they have *gained knowledge*, and nausea inhibits action; for their action could not change anything in the eternal nature of things; they feel it to be ridiculous or humiliating that they should be asked to set right a world that is out of joint” (Nietzsche 1967, 60). In response to this, in order for action to be possible, in order to go on living at all, the “veils of illusion” are necessary and thus art, “the saving sorceress, expert at healing” comes on the scene: “She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live” (Nietzsche 1967, 60).

⁷ Vernant makes clear why Dionysus is the masked god: “Dionysus wants to be seen to be a god, to be manifest to mortals as a god, to make himself known, to reveal himself, to be known, recognized, understood . . . But Dionysus reveals himself by concealing himself, makes himself manifest by hiding himself from the eyes of all those who believe only in what they can see, in what is ‘evident before their eyes,’ as Pentheus himself puts it at line 501, when Dionysus is there before him, under his very nose, but invisible to him beneath his disguise. It is an epiphany alright, but of a god who is masked” (Vernant 1988, 391). Sallis draws attention to Vernant’s remarkable text in his exposition of the *Bacchae*. One may also note the connection here between the doubled identity of Dionysus and the play of the *pharmakon* in Derrida’s famous discourse (Derrida, 1981, 105).

In addition to the healing capacity of the Apollonian, Greek tragedy also brought forth the Dionysian experience, and Nietzsche describes the Dionysian as arising in response to Apollonian shining:

And now let us imagine how into this world, built on shining [*Schein*] and moderation and artificially dammed up, there rang out in tones ever more alluring and magical ways the ecstatic sound of the Dionysian festival; how in these all of nature's excess in pleasure, suffering, and knowledge became audible, even in piercing shrieks... The muses of the arts of "shining" paled before an art that, in its intoxication [*Rausch*], spoke the truth. The wisdom of Silenus cried "Woe! woe!" to the serene Olympians. The individual, with all his limits and restraint succumbed to the self-oblivion of the Dionysian states, forgetting the Apollonian precepts. *Excess* revealed itself as truth. (Nietzsche 1967, 46; 1987, 45-46)

Thus, in the coming together of the Apollonian and Dionysian in Greek tragedy there is a continuous cycling reciprocal movement in which the shining forth of beautiful illusions is necessary in order to deal with the Dionysian insight into the abysmal nature of existence; and then the Dionysian insight is necessary in order to tear through those Apollonian veils of appearance, shattering the dream and its beautiful illusions. This, in turn, must inevitably be followed again by the further shining forth of images. Both art impulses on their own could be pathological, the Apollonian leading to a naïveté or escapism in holding fast to the beautiful illusions and the Dionysian leading to the nausea that inhibits action. The key to Nietzsche's thinking about Greek tragedy is that both contradictory impulses are brought together at once. The Apollonian art impulse is healing and necessary in order to make sense of existence and go on living, while the Dionysian art impulse is also healing and necessary in order to shatter those illusions and thus keep our truths from becoming too fixed. So there is in the work of art that was Greek tragedy as Nietzsche understood it this repeating cycling of the two opposed movements of drawing and withdrawing, figuring and disfiguring—what Sallis refers to as the "abysmal effect" that spaces Nietzsche's discourse— so that the shining forth of the figure that comes forth is a shimmering shining.

Since one will scarcely find a mention of Apollo in Nietzsche's late writings, but a veritable crescendo emphasizing Dionysus and the Dionysian at the end, it is sometimes thought that Nietzsche's mature thought veers toward only one polarity of the opposition sketched in *The Birth of Tragedy*. A closer reading, however, would suggest that both the Apollonian shining forth of figures and Dionysian disfiguring continue to play into Nietzsche's thinking on art in the late writings. Indeed, what Nietzsche means by the "Dionysian" in the late writings seems to involve both movements he had earlier seen at work in Greek tragedy, and this is no more clear than in those sections of the late writings Heidegger calls attention to where rapture [*Rausch*] is understood as "form-engendering force." In the passage from *Twilight of the Idols* that Heidegger cites, Nietzsche writes: "What is essential in rapture is the feeling of enhancement of force and plenitude" (quoted in Heidegger 1979, 98).⁸ Just a little later in the same text, Nietzsche explicates the "meaning of the conceptual opposition I introduced into aesthetics, between *Apollonian* and *Dionysian*" and there he says that both are "conceived as types of

rapture [*Rausch*]” (Nietzsche 1998, 48; 1985, 72).⁹ Here we see that Dionysian *Rausch* has come together with the Apollonian form-engendering shining of *Schein*. Sallis notes the “reciprocity, the double directionality” in which this conception of rapture as form-engendering force must be thought: “Rapture engenders form, yet form is the realm—the spacing—in which rapture becomes possible” (Sallis 2008, 167). Sallis further suggests this “connection between rapture, which engenders form, and form, which grants to rapture the very spacing of its occurrence, could then be represented as an active spiral, as a spiraling in which each carries the other still further” (Sallis 2008, 167). Sallis does not call attention here to the echoing of the continuous reciprocal cycling of the Apollonian and Dionysian in the *Birth of Tragedy* in this conception of rapture as form-engendering force in *Twilight of the Idols*, but his earlier text on Nietzsche’s first book seems to suggest such a resonance. In any case, it seems that Heidegger obscures Nietzsche’s thought in claiming that he emphasizes only one side of the creative process and leaves out any sense of an ascent beyond oneself. This obscuration seems to conceal somewhat the influence of Nietzsche’s thought on Heidegger’s thinking in *The Origin of the Work of Art*.

If indeed *The Birth of Tragedy* offers a preview of Nietzsche’s mature thought, it is in the emphasis on the importance of art and this double movement of the shimmering shining in all our attempts to make sense of existence. Heidegger’s attempt to resolve the discordance between art and truth by calling attention to the double movement of revealing and concealing in ἀλήθεια is already suggested in Nietzsche’s characterization of truth as a woman who will not be unveiled, stripped naked, and possessed by dogmatic philosophers. The artist-philosophers Nietzsche anticipates coming will still love their truths, Nietzsche acknowledges, but they “no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn” (Nietzsche 1974, 38). Thus, despite the line from the late notebooks where Heidegger finds the discordance between art and truth still raging, perhaps the resolution of the discordance is already suggested in Nietzsche’s thought. It has been said that Nietzsche’s thought, from *The Birth of Tragedy* to the late writings, might be regarded as “a more and more radical meditation” on the thought that “we have art lest we *perish of the truth*” (Taminaux 1987, 99). In *The Birth of Tragedy*, we have art, the necessity of our Apollonian illusions, in order not to perish of the abysmal truth expressed by Silenus. In the later writings this is echoed in the thought that we have art, the necessity of our perspective truths, in order not to perish of the truth that there is no truth (of reality as it is in-itself). A further sense, however, to this line found in the later writings is that we have art, the necessity of recognizing our truths as fictions, in order not to perish of the consequences that follow from dogmatic conceptions of truth.¹⁰

Nevertheless, perhaps the most remarkable echo of *The Birth of Tragedy* in *The Origin of the Work of Art* might be the Apollonian/Dionysian Gestalt

⁸ Here I am using the translation from Krell’s translation of Heidegger’s text, which is retained in Sallis (Sallis 2008, 166). The passage cited here comes from a section (§8) titled “On the Psychology of an Artist” from the chapter “Reconnaissance Raids of an Untimely Man” in *Twilight of the Idols* (Nietzsche 1998, 47).

⁹ For consistency I have substituted “rapture” for “intoxication” as the translation of *Rausch* in this passage.

configuration in Nietzsche's thinking resounding in the configuration of "world" and "earth" in Heidegger's account of the origin of the work of art. That the projection of "world" in Heidegger's thought echoes the Apollonian shining forth of images might be more obvious, but how, one might question, is Nietzsche's thought of the Dionysian related to Heidegger's conception of "earth"? The key to this connection lies in understanding the background from which all projection comes forth in both Nietzsche and Heidegger's thinking regarding the work of art. To recapitulate, the figure of Dionysus is that which is hidden behind the mask. The "earth," for Heidegger, is that which is also hidden, the undisclosable background from which all emergence comes forth. Both the Dionysian and Heidegger's "earth" must be thought of as the abyss, this abysmal ground, against which and from which all shining forth comes into presence not only in the work of art but in all our attempts to make sense of existence.

If we return now to the Van Gogh painting we might consider just what, in Heidegger's thinking, the element of "earth" is in this particular work of art.¹¹ It is certainly not the earthy color of the painting, nor some depiction of earth, as in clods of soil on the shoes. This is specifically what Heidegger says we do not see in the painting: "From Van Gogh's painting we cannot even tell where the shoes stand. There is nothing surrounding this pair of peasant shoes in or to which they might belong—only an undefined space. There are not even clods of soil from the field or the field-path sticking to them, which would at least hint at their use. A pair of peasant shoes and nothing more" (Heidegger 1971, 33). There are perhaps two senses to Heidegger's notion of "earth" in this work. The first sense has to do with the composition of the painting. Perhaps the reason why Heidegger chose this particular painting to illustrate his thinking is that the composition of the painting is such a simple figure-ground configuration. The shoes stand out against this background that is only an "undefined space." The "earth" then is this undefined space, this "nothing more." What comes forth from this background of "earth" is this "world":

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 the raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its

¹⁰ This passage, for example, suggests this further sense in which we have art lest we perish of the truth. Using a metaphor from the "language of painters" to rethink the notion of truth, perhaps there is already here a resolving of the discordance between art and truth: "Let at least this much be admitted: there would be no life at all if not on the basis of perspective estimates and appearances; and if, with the virtuous enthusiasm and clumsiness of some philosophers, one wanted to abolish the 'apparent world' altogether—well, supposing *you* could do that, at least nothing would be left of your 'truth' either. Indeed, what forces us at all to suppose that there is an essential opposition of 'true' and 'false'? Is it not sufficient to assume degrees of apparentness and, as it were, lighter and darker shadows and shades of appearance—different 'values,' to use the language of painters? Why couldn't the world *that concerns us*—be a fiction?" (Nietzsche 1966, 46–47).

¹¹ An image of the Van Gogh painting *A Pair of Shoes*, 1886, can be found here: <http://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/vgm/index.jsp?page=1576&lang=en> (accessed April 6, 2013).

unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. (Heidegger 1971, 33–34)

Part of the difficulty with Heidegger's essay is that the word "earth" is used in different senses. The "silent call of the earth" vibrating in the shoes is not the undisclosable sheltering background of "earth" in the Gestalt composition that Heidegger sees at work in the work of art. The "silent call of the earth" is what is brought forth in the foreground, in the shoes. The "silent call of the earth" is here part of the "world" that shines forth in the painting. The truth that occurs happens within the conflict or "strife" between what comes forth in this projection of "world" and the background of the "nothing more" that is the "earth" in the configuration of the painting. Whereas a worker in the fields may not be paying any attention to the shoes she is wearing, the painting brings forth the "equipmental quality" of the shoes and thus discloses "what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, *is in truth*" (Heidegger 1971, 36).

Yet another possible sense of "earth" is brought forth later in the essay when Heidegger says that the thingly character of the work-material is the "earthy character" of the work (Heidegger 1971, 69). The thingly character of the work-material in the Van Gogh painting is simply the paint. Again, it is not that the paint in this case has an earthy color; it is rather that the work of art in this case comes forth from paint. Of course, from this work-material an infinite number of possible paintings could have been painted. The paint then is the abyssal ground or "earth" from which the painting comes forth.

Conclusions: The Promise of Art

Perhaps now it will be possible to make some concluding remarks on Sallis' suggestions regarding the promise of art. What promise is opened up in setting forth various elements through transfiguration into shinning? First of all, it seems that it should be obvious, contrary to Sallis' concern, that if the "earth" in the Gestalt configuration of "world" and "earth" in Heidegger's thought is understood in either sense suggested above, then "earth" should not be thought of as one element as opposed to other elements, but is rather that which includes all the elements in the elemental dimensions of nature. Perhaps this suggestion might be taken to mean a call for works of art that bring forth something elemental, as, for example, a sculpture in wood that allows the element of wood to shine forth, or metal that brings forth the metal, stone that brings forth the stone, or paint that brings forth the paint, not merely as a medium to depict something else, but rather as a means of bringing forth that elemental medium. Of course, this would only seem to recapitulate one of the defining dogmas of modern art, that is to say, Clement Greenberg's reduction of art to the terms of its material medium, his view that even "the great masters of the past achieved their art by virtue of combinations of pigment whose real effectiveness was 'abstract,' and that their greatness is not owed to the spirituality with which they conceived the things they illustrated so much as it is the success with which they ennobled raw matter to the point where it could function as art" (Greenberg 1986, 223).¹² Greenberg thought that the visual arts should focus on sensuous presentation and thus abandon any

ideological concern. Each of the arts, he thought, should “expand the expressive resources of the medium, not in order to express ideas and notions, but to express with greater immediacy sensations, the irreducible elements of experience” (Greenberg 1992a, 556).

It seems that the development of modern art exhibited two contrasting responses to Hegel’s thesis about the end of art, and yet both perhaps only confirmed Hegel’s thesis. Whereas Hegel thought that the sensuousness of art would have to inevitably be surpassed by thought, conceptual artists like Duchamp challenged Hegel in demonstrating that art, too, could be an exploration in thought. As Danto has pointed out, however, this development led to the point where works of art no longer exist as objects, and thus, as purely conceptual, these works would seem to only confirm Hegel’s thesis. Greenberg, on the other hand, ardently resisted conceptual as well as any ideological art, and his emphasis on sensuous presentation of the irreducible elements of experience, in affirming the pure sensuousness of art, challenges Hegel. Yet, as we know, the endpoint of Greenberg’s theory led from the abstract expressionist paintings of Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman, both of whom Greenberg championed, to the subsequent developments of post-painterly abstraction and minimalism. In abjuring all narrative and external references, Robert Rauschenberg’s *White Paintings*, those pure white canvases that eliminated even the barest gesture that one finds in Pollock and Newman, took Greenberg’s theory to its endpoint, anticipating minimalism by a decade. These bare white paintings, and the subsequent development of minimalism, seem to mark a limit beyond which no further art could follow, and thus perhaps also confirm Hegel’s thesis. It is thus not at all surprising that these developments led, as Danto has argued, to the end of modern art at some point in the late 1960s, with the subsequent decade being a time when not much happened in art history, a period “as dark as the tenth century... a decade in which it must have seemed that history had lost its way” (Danto 1995, 12–13).

At the end of his reflection, Sallis offers only the barest suggestion in pointing to Cézanne, Klee and the Spanish Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida, an artist whom Heidegger had called attention to, as artists whose work shows the promise of art. Would the promise of art only be opened in thus going backward, back before art had lost its way in the exhaustion of late modern art? Perhaps one might think of the development of modern art, using Nietzsche’s thinking about art, as a movement from the Apollonian to the Dionysian. The development of painting from the pre-modern realism of Courbet, through the gradual dissolution of form and imagery from Monet’s Impressionism to Van Gogh’s ecstatic brushwork to Kandinsky’s abstract paintings, exhibits this movement toward a more Dionysian painting. Pollock’s action paintings, Newman’s color field experiments, and Rauschenberg’s white canvases might all be thought of as a further movement

¹² Greenberg’s emphasis on the “purity” of art led to his insistence that each of the arts should focus on what “was unique to the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thereby each art would be rendered ‘pure,’ and in its ‘purity’ find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence” (Greenberg 1992b, 755).

toward the Dionysian in painting. Pollock's paintings have the energy of Dionysian excess, the paint exploding across the canvas, liberated from any hint of Apollonian boundaries that would delimit form.¹³ Newman's plain fields of color develop Greenberg's theory in allowing paint to be paint in expressing the immediacy of the sensation of color and suggest perhaps only the slightest gesture of the Apollonian with the vertical bands of color or "zips" demarcating some spatial structure.¹⁴ In Rauschenberg's whites we face the abyssal ground of painting.¹⁵ In Heidegger's language perhaps we might say that these paintings are all "earth." What would be the "world" that comes forth in the truth that happens here? They seem to be perhaps attempts to do what Heidegger's thought suggests is impossible in bringing forth and disclosing "that which is by nature undisclosable" (Heidegger 1971, 47).

Contemporary art today, however, is marked by what Danto, echoing Lyotard's description of the postmodern condition, has described as the period after the end of art: "less a period than what happens after there are no more periods in some master narrative of art" (Danto 1995, 10).¹⁶ As Danto puts it, this is a time when artists have been "liberated from the burden of history" and thus are "free to make art in whatever way they wished, for any purpose they wished, or for no purpose at all" (Danto 1995, 15). If we think now, not of individual works of art, but rather of the state of the visual arts today, this point, after the end of these attempts to set out a master narrative of art, and thus demarcate and set limits to what can be a work of art, might be thought of as an endpoint in this movement toward the Dionysian. Yet now, since artists are free to make art in whatever way they wish, it should not be surprising that particular works of art can be more Apollonian or Dionysian or some combination of both. The postmodern paintings of Julian Schnabel—the plate paintings, for example, where fragments of pottery shards are used along with paint in producing portraits—seem to be examples of works of art where Apollonian and Dionysian elements have come together.¹⁷

While some may find this point when anything can be a work of art, including what most might only see as trash, lamentable, it is a point when the possibilities are wide open and artists have the same reason for cheerfulness that Nietzsche found in the wake of the death of God when he saw a new dawn arising over a wide open sea upon which the lovers of knowledge could venture out again in experimenting with knowledge (Nietzsche 1974, 280). Artists are perhaps freer now than ever before to venture out and experiment with the possibilities for art. What perhaps matters most, however, is what is "said" in the work, in the truth that occurs in the work of art. What is said in the work of art can obviously be

¹³ See, for example, Jackson Pollock, *Number 8, 1949*, 1949, at the Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, State University of New York. An image of the painting can be found here: http://www.artchive.com/artchive/p/pollock/pollock_8_1949.jpg.html (accessed April 6, 2013).

¹⁴ See, for example, Barnett Newman, *Onement I*, 1948, at the Museum of Modern Art: http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=79601 (accessed April 6, 2013).

¹⁵ See, for example, Robert Rauschenberg, *White Painting* [seven panel], 1951, at The Guggenheim Museum: http://pastexhibitions.guggenheim.org/singular_forms/highlights_1a.html (accessed April 6, 2013).

¹⁶ Lyotard's description of the postmodern, of course, is "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard 1984, xxiv).

¹⁷ See, for example, some images of Julian Schnabel's plate portrait paintings here: <http://www.julianschnabel.com/category/paintings/portraits> (accessed April 6, 2013).

spoken in the language of concepts or in the sensible language of colors, forms, and tones. There will likely always be a place for art that does nothing more than call attention to the beauty of nature or the ugliness and horrors of human existence, art that expands the expressive resources of the medium and appeals to the immediacy of sensation, or art that says something about the nature of art, even pointing out how anything could be a work of art. Perhaps it is even possible for art to be capable of what Nietzsche thought was the highest aim of Greek tragedy. Heidegger, again, obscured Nietzsche's thought in regarding his "aesthetics" as involving mere pleasure and enjoyment. What marks Nietzsche's thinking on art is the possibility of finding ourselves transfigured in the experience of art.¹⁸ This thought might be there in Heidegger as well. Heidegger says two curious things about the experience of standing before the Van Gogh painting: "This painting spoke. In the vicinity of the work, we were suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be" (Heidegger 1971, 35). Strangely enough the painting speaks. This explains why, at the end of the essay, Heidegger says that the "nature of art is poetry" (Heidegger 1971, 75). In this saying, in the shimmering shining of the truth that occurs in the painting, we find ourselves transported to another place. Perhaps this suggests the possibility of finding ourselves transfigured and points also to what Heidegger was getting at in the later work, when he suggests, echoing Nietzsche's thought in the *Birth of Tragedy* once again, that art is a "saving power" in opening up a "poetic dwelling" that is a different mode of being-in-the-world than that which still today, more than ever, threatens to consume the earth and every living thing upon it.¹⁹

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¹⁸In this passage Nietzsche opens the door to modern art in the suggestion that art is not imitation, but he also suggests what he thought was the highest aim of Greek tragedy—the possibility of finding ourselves transfigured: "That life is really so tragic would least of all explain the origin of an art form—assuming that art is not merely imitation of the reality of nature, placed beside it for its overcoming. The tragic myth, too, insofar as it belongs to art at all, participates in this metaphysical intention of art to transfigure. But what does it transfigure when it presents the world of appearances in the image of the suffering hero? Least of all the "reality" of this world of appearance, for it says to us: 'Look there! Look closely! This is your life, this is the hand on the clock of your existence'" (Nietzsche, 1967, 140).

¹⁹At the end of *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger, inspired by some lines from Hölderlin, suggests that an alternative to the technological thinking that has been the destiny of Western thought may be opened up through the "saving power" of art in which "poetically dwells man upon this earth" (Heidegger 1977, 34–35).

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