Review: Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art"

I. The investigation begins with a hermeneutic circle.

II. The Thingly Character of the Work of Art.

Equipment is intermediate between thing and work. To see this, we must do a phenomenological analysis of a work of art.

Consider a painting of a pair of peasant shoes by Van Gogh.

Complex example: used to show both
• essence of equipment
• nature of the work of art

A work of art is not a piece of equipment (substance) with aesthetic quality (property).

To understand a thing according to its "authentic" or real nature, we must "think differently".

III. The Work and Truth.

Work functions like a symbol, i.e. something (an essence) is made present in it.

Two essential features of the work of art:

1. The work "sets up a world and keeps it in force"

2. "The work moves the earth itself into the Open of a world and keeps it there."
   a. In equipment, the material is put to the service of the tool. The material "disappears into the tool"—it is used up.
   b. In a work of art, the material does not disappear but "shines forth [as if?] for the first time". The material becomes present in a dramatic way.
   c. Thus, in setting up a world, "the work moves the earth itself into the Open of a world and keeps it there".
   d. The "setting forth of the earth" happens in such a way so that the work "sets itself back into it". In other words, there is a kind of reciprocal and symbiotic relation between the work and the earth.
   e. Why is there such a relation between the earth and the work? This has to do with the nature of stone, color, metal, etc. Matter is transformed into its "undiscloseable presence" as the "self-secluding" earth.
These two essential features—the setting up of a world and the setting forth of the earth—appear together in the unity of the “work-being” of the work of art.

What is the relation between the setting up of a world and the setting forth of earth in the work of art?

Truth as “correctness in representation” already presupposes the notion of truth as unconcealedness (in Greek *Aletheia*). To recognize that two things agree (are congruent, similar, equal, etc.) one must first “see” that they agree. Their agreement must be apparent or “in the open—unconcealed”.

IV. Truth and Art (“What is truth that it can happen as art?”)

What is the “work-being of the work”? Heidegger attempts to describe this in terms of the relation between the work and truth.

1. To create is to cause something to emerge.

2. A work's becoming a work is a form of truth happening.

3. The occurrence or “happening” of truth in a work is the creative bringing forth of a unique being—it occurs once and only once.

4. What is the nature of this “createdness”? It is described dialectically by Heidegger as part of the intimate relation (rift) of conflict and belonging between earth and world.

5. It is in this relation that Truth establishes itself. Thus, the createdness of the work is truth being “fixed in place in the figure” (i.e. in the work's structure or Gestalt). This is accomplished by the use of the earth, which in being used is not used up but set forth or “set free to be nothing but itself”.

6. Thus, "art…is the becoming and happening of truth".

V. Earth and World

1. The work of art is the happening of truth.

2. Truth is disclosure.

3. Each disclosure precludes other possible disclosures. Ex. necker cube, duck/rabbit, etc.

4. World is the horizon of all our horizons—a totality of possible disclosures which constitute intelligibility for us.
5. But this also implies other horizons of disclosure that lie outside our world—that are concealed. Perhaps this is what Heidegger means by "earth". It is the other side of the clearing—the "unfathomable". [See Julian Young, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Art*, 40.]

6. This distinction between world and earth is not unlike Nietzsche's distinction between the *Apollonian* and the *Dionysian*. One finds this also in Hölderlin’s writings.

VI. The Sublime

On 68, Heidegger says that in the work of art, "truth happens...with extraordinary awesomeness". It has been argued, by Julian Young, that Heidegger introduces the concept of earth to account for both the *awe* and the *reverence* associated with great art.

Both of these concepts are linked with "infinite mystery". To grasp something as "holy" or awesome is to grasp it in its infinite *unintelligibility*, i.e. as infinitely unconcealing.

That which exceeds our power to fully apprehend it is the *sublime*.

The rising up of that which is infinitely unintelligible is *earth*.

So, while the *world* is "set up" and comes into the open in the work, at the same time the *earth* "rises up through" the work and is "set forth". [Cf. iceberg as perceived by the experienced mariner, rather than as an ice floe experienced by the novice.

This is what gives the great work *authority*.

*Cf.* *genius* and the role of the *sacred* in religious works of art.

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Revised 16 Nov 08