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Inspiration, Kenosis, and Formative Thinking about Art

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Abstract

This paper endeavours to mount a case for a specific study of inspiration within 'the system' that art has largely become, by offering the concept of kenosis. The term kenosis is taken to imply a twofold dynamic, a 'self-emptying' and a 'being-emptied,' oriented towards a greater creative fulfilment. In proposing a direction for creative activity at the level of formative thinking, I raise these questions, among others: Can there be some mediating territory between different sources of inspiration, external and internal, which may be thought to take-hold-of an artist from within? Can this taking-hold be construed as a self-divesting model of inspiration? And how might kenosis mitigate art's self-sufficiency within the contested space of inspiration versus non-inspiration for art and its practices? I have proposed a philosophical assessment of art's place in the human account of reality, of art's self-proclaimed liberation, and an account of the key concepts of 'detachment,' Abgeschiedenheit, and 'letting-be,' Gelassenheit, for substantiating kenosis in contemporary creative terms.

Keywords: *art, contemporary art, inspiration, kenosis, 'detachment' (Abgeschiedenheit), 'letting-be' (Gelassenheit), Eckhart, Heidegger, Levinas, Nancy, Barthes*

This paper concerns the so-called problem of inspiration in the changes, which are seen to exist in the unfolding and understanding of art from a broadly philosophical perspective. It considers to what extent there is the possibility of introducing contemporary notions of creative inspiration and their bearings in/for modern philosophy, and whether such approaches and appraisals can be relevant to the art of our own times; and whether a 'space' for art and its discussion can admit any reference to a *transcendent* element of some kind, to an external source of inspiration, whether operating obscurely or obliquely in such practices; or whether the art of our time must still be conceived in terms largely self-explanatory and self-sufficient. Indeed, to quote the editor of this volume, whether a mechanism of reference to any external source of inspiration, such as the transcendent, "has the capacity to grow into a disclosed and consciously explored, even dominant fact, shaping the direction of change

in the arts?"¹ Here one is charged with bringing the philosophic venture and the artistic impulse closer together, to become aware of the conceptual and experiential possibilities of an uncommon enterprise: to articulate art in praise of *mind* and *hand*.

Etymology of the term Inspiration

By way of entry into the discussion, the word *inspiration* itself is derived from the Latin, *inspirare*, 'to breathe in,' 'to inhale.' The Oxford English Dictionary defines inspiration as: "a supposed creative force or influence on poets, artists, and musicians, stimulating the production of works of art; a person or principle stimulating artistic or moral fervour and creativity; stimulation by a divine or supernatural agency or influence; a sudden brilliant, creative or timely idea; a drawing in of breath: inhalation." With such a definition in mind, how may the dynamic of the term *inspiration* be found, determined, or even countermanded, in and by the artistic activity and creative works of contemporary times? To gain some entry into the nature of 'thinking' about art in relation to inspiration, we will commence with a Medieval philosopher on the nature of the 'understanding':

The understanding always works internally. The more refined and immaterial a thing is, the more powerfully it works internally. And the more powerful and refined the understanding is, the more that which it knows is united with it and is more one with it. This is not the case with material things – the more powerful they are, the more they work outside themselves.²

I will have more to say about Eckhart's thought in relation to 'detachment' (*Abgeschiedenheit*) and 'letting-go' (*Gelassenheit*), two concepts which may be conceived as having a bearing on my interpretation of *kenosis* (as 'self-emptying' or 'self-being-emptied') in the setting of art-making, as well as a more specific bearing on Heidegger's enlistment of 'letting-be,' *Gelassenheit*, in relation to what he calls *essential thinking*. But here, let us take as a starting point, this remarkable insight on 'the understanding' from Meister Eckhart. For it seems that until we come to some deeper comprehension of *understanding* itself (to *under-stand* is to 'stand under': to think, to perceive or apprehend), the equally taxing project of *thinking* about art will never offer up the possibilities of inspiration considered as an internal or external source of articulation in thought or practice. Indeed, there may yet be the kind of understanding which is a *prefiguration* of inspiration, to the extent that the human understanding is capable of becoming united with the object of its knowledge; of being *inspired* by it; but it appears to operate internally, according to Eckhart, and therefore secretly, and in a hidden way. Inspiration appears to be either an undisclosed and highly idiosyncratic thing, peculiar to the individual as a sort of personal

1 Bogna J. Obidzińska, Editor, *Art and Philosophy*, forthcoming issue, December 2014, cited in a communication to me, November 2013.

2 Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart, Teacher and Preacher*, Bernard McGinn, Ed. (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986), 259.

possession, or else a common external resource from which many individuals may draw, simply by summoning up some impulse within themselves.

Rather than evoking an 'embarrassed smile,' can the principle of inspiration, unpredictable as to its time, its utterances and influences, still elicit a more profoundly moving account of human experience and expression? Can inspiration be something tracked or merely *traced* in the circumstances and conditions of contemporary practice? I hope to develop such questions in due course.

Moreover, A. G. Sertillanges may be right in recommending certain considerations to the thinker which can have far-reaching effects: he suggests

a certain passivity of attitude which corresponds to the nature of the mind and of inspiration. We do not know very well how the mind works, but we know that passivity is its first law. Still less do we know how inspiration comes; but we can notice that it utilizes our unconsciousness more than our initiative...

Try to project your thought into the object of knowledge, not to keep it within yourself... You must look through the mind in the direction of things, not into the mind, which is more or less forgetful of things. In the mind we have the means of seeing, not the object of sight: let the means not distract us from the goal.³

Looking 'through the mind in the direction of things,' to the being of things thought and made, is wise counsel as we consider the possible scope of inspiration in philosophical discourse. For if we cannot know directly 'how inspiration comes,' but that it somehow 'utilizes our unconsciousness more than our initiative,' as Sertillanges attests, then certain questions arise for us in examining the complexities of invoking inspiration in contemporary practice, for now there appears a contentious space, a marked demarcation, between inspiration and art's so-called 'self-sufficiency.' Indeed, and by extension, is any claimed 'originality' on the part of the artistic personality merely a cipher for some external source of inspiration, or can it be internally generated? If so, what is its possible value to the individual and to others, to appreciative society at large, if what is simply implanted in the individual is devoid of the trials of longing and labour? Is inspiration something given from 'on high' as some transcendent avowal or promise, or is it something arising from the human subject and any natural giftedness or skill he/she may possess?

And a further question suggests itself. According to Hegel, skill in artistic production "comes not by inspiration," but is solely the province of "reflection, industry and practice"; indeed, the higher an artist's achievement, Hegel attests, the more *profound* should be his investigations of heart and mind, which remain unknown "without learning them," and which "are only to be fathomed by the direction of a man's own mind to the inner and outer world." Such terms and conditions were exemplary requirements for Hegel, undergirding and reinforcing his creative individual as a "thinking consciousness."⁴

Moreover, the direction of our minds towards 'the inner and outer world' would suggest an inwardly or outwardly born incentive, coming not, apparently,

3 Antonin-Gilbert Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life: Its Spirit, Conditions, Methods*, Mary Ryan, Trans. (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 132.

4 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, Bernard Bosanquet, Trans. (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 35.

by inspiration, but by some autonomous divining, willed by, or granted to, the individual, by means of which skill, reflection and industry become manifest in the works of artistic production as expressions of the fathoming of mind and heart. Noble sentiments in themselves, but do they still have resonance for thinking about contemporary artistic activity today, which seems such a heteronomous practice, overladen (or is it overburdened?) with the assertions of self-consciousness. I hope to draw out some implications from these questions. But here, some contrasts with Heidegger.

Heidegger and 'What is Ownmost to Art'

I turn to Heidegger in order to show that, not that he was particularly interested in notions of inspiration or its manifestations, but that he suggests what I would call, *intus legere*, a 'reading-inside-things,' itself a *habitus* of mind in the attempt to *think Being*. Indeed, Heidegger's seminal project was in part a radical questioning: the *overcoming* of metaphysics, and simultaneously the overcoming of *aesthetics*, which also means "overcoming a certain conception of beings as what is objectively representable." For Heidegger, the overcoming of metaphysics and consequently aesthetics, "means freeing the priority of the question of the truth of being in the face of any 'ideal,' 'causal,' 'transcendental' and 'dialectical' explanation of beings." Such a move is not an ousting of existing philosophy, Heidegger argues, but rather "the leap into its first beginning."⁵

Could such an impetus be transposed to the conditions and happenings of contemporary art, in that some kind of inspiration might be accorded to this very *withdrawal* from any explanation of creative practice, which might accede to external sources, whether ideal, causal, transcendental and dialectical? Is this demeanour of the artistic human subject, this refusal to accommodate such sources, itself a virtue, a liberation, for creative action? And what might be the costs of jettisoning any access to such sources? Perhaps a partial explanation may be found in what Heidegger now proposes as 'ownmost,' or proper to the sphere of art.

What Heidegger posits as ownmost is what is *proper* to art, as such, and which, accordingly, enables thinking in relation to art. Situated in respect of Western art and its works, this ownmost begins to align itself as a freeing mechanism: that is to say, with freeing the truth of being over against any 'ideal,' 'causal,' and 'transcendental' and 'dialectical' explanation of beings. What Heidegger calls the 'lack of art,' is a phenomenon over against which stands, or arises, the ownmost. I quote this remarkable passage in full:

The lack of art here does not arise from incapacity or decadence but rather from the power of knowing that the essential decisions through which that [knowing] must pass which up until now seldom enough occurred as art. In the horizon of this knowing, art has lost its relation to culture...

⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (from Enowning)*, Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, Trans. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 354.

Lack of art is grounded in knowing that the exercise of perfected capabilities – even according to the highest measures and models that have existed up to now – from out of the most perfect mastery of the rules can never be ‘art’; that the planned furnishing for producing such that corresponds to existing ‘artworks’ and their ‘purposes’ can have wide-ranging results without ever forcing, out of a distress, an originary necessity of what is ownmost to art, namely putting the truth of being to a decision; that a dealing with ‘art’ as means for an operation has already placed itself outside what is ownmost to art and thus remains precisely too blind or too weak to experience the lack of art or even to let it merely ‘count’ in its power for preparing for history and for being allotted to being.

Lack of art is grounded in knowing that corroboration and approval of those who enjoy and experience ‘art’ cannot at all decide whether the object of enjoyment stems generally from the essential sphere of art or is merely an illusionary product of historical dexterity, sustained by dominant goal settings.⁶

In this complex passage, what is this ‘ownmost to art,’ such that it puts ‘the truth of being to a decision’? Heidegger implies that if art is employed as an ‘operation,’ as a mechanism of ‘engagement’ with things not properly belonging to art, such as corroboration and approval on the part of those who manage it by ‘dominant goal settings,’ and who thus immerse themselves in *jouissance*; such as these make a decision contradictory to the essential sphere of art; hence, something is lost: this is art’s *lack*, a lack which is neither constitutive nor restorative of art to culture. Here, as Heidegger attests, ‘art has lost its relation to culture,’ and thus to a humane comprehension of culture.

Does what is ownmost to art eliminate the possibility of its enjoyment as art? Is the enjoyment and experience of art simply an *illusionary* or illusory product? What is his meaning here? Might we conjecture a veiled reference to some ‘mode’ of inspiration within this ownmost of art? What is its relationship with any external source of inspiration, to a transcendent element of any kind, though operating obscurely? And might this ownmost be some mode of *understated* inspiration?

Stress is laid here on what Heidegger calls *the arising of art itself*; for in asking the question whether art-activity, or art and being active in it, or “letting what is ownmost to art itself first come forth as necessary,” Heidegger is asking whether being active in art, including art-making, is consonant with different layers and directions of grounding the necessary ‘arising’ of art.⁷ What we have to achieve, if we can, is a movement away from any ‘externalization’ of art as an art-product, and thus safeguard art within its own(most) terrain of being and expression; to restore to art a thinking practice which is thinking the decision *for* art.

A French Connection: Levinas and Nancy

At this point I turn to a reading of ‘Art and Criticism’ in the context of *Reality and Its Shadow*, by Emmanuel Levinas. I raise here the notions of art as poise

⁶ *Ibid.*, 355-356.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 356. Cf. also: Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Albert Hofstadter, Trans. (London: Perennial Library, 1935/1975); and Joseph Kockelmans, *Heidegger on Art and Artworks*, Phaenomenologica, Vol. 99 (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985).

and counter-poise, placement and displacement, and how we can proceed to define inspiration *with words* and its connectedness with art, when this thing called Art, for the *truthful* artist at least, essentially eludes the reach of description, discourse and critique, even the relational and the rational; when to get at what is inside art really entails 'looking out from art'.

In this respect, Levinas begins with ordinary perception. He argues that:

"What common perception trivializes and misses, an artwork apprehends in its irreducible essence. It thus coincides with metaphysical intuition. Where common language abdicates, a poem or a painting speaks. Thus an artwork is more real than reality and attests to the dignity of the artistic imagination, which sets itself up as knowledge of the absolute..."⁸

Moreover, speaking of the 'critic' of art, he exclaims:

"[a critic] can be defined as the one that still has something to say when everything has been said, that can say about the [artwork] something else than that work. One then has the right to ask if the artist really knows and speaks. He does so in a preface or a manifesto, certainly; but then he is himself a part of the public. If art originally were neither language nor knowledge, if it therefore were situated outside of 'being in the world,' which is coextensive with truth, criticism would be rehabilitated. [Criticism] would represent the intervention of the understanding necessary for integrating the inhumanity and inversion of art into human life and into the mind..."⁹

The inference here is that the critic inevitably says something *else* in terms other than the work, but that the artist knows and speaks, by way of an address, only what the work will allow him to know and to speak.

And yet:

The Artist stops because the work refuses to accept anything more, appears saturated. The work is completed in spite of the social or material causes that interrupt it. It does not give itself out as the beginning of a dialogue... a work would not belong to art if it did not have this formal structure of completion, if at least in this way it were not disengaged.

Is to disengage oneself from the world always to go beyond, toward some region of Platonic ideas and toward the eternal which towers above the world?

To go beyond is to communicate with ideas, to understand. Does not the function of art [therefore] lie in not understanding? Does not obscurity provide it with its very element and a completion *sui generis*, foreign to dialectics and the life of ideas? Will we then say that the artist knows and expresses the very obscurity of the real?... Does not the commerce with the obscure, as a totally independent ontological event, describe categories irreducible to those of cognition?¹⁰

I have quoted extensively from Levinas, for such thinking appears compelling in its import for the art of contemporary times. And what of the notion of 'obscurity'? Is it so evidently the province of art and artists to know and express the 'very obscurity of the real'? If so, then the function and role of art would appear to lie in 'not' understanding, lie in an incomplete completeness, but at what costs for itself and for the receivers of art?

Moreover, Levinas wants to show this 'ontological event' within art. "Art does not know a particular type of reality," he argues, rather it contrasts itself with knowledge. Art "is the very event of obscuring," he says, "a descent of

8 Emmanuel Levinas, "Reality and its Shadow," in: *A Continental Aesthetics Reader*, Clive Cazeaux, Ed. (London: Routledge, 2000), 117.

9 *Ibid.*, 117-118.

10 *Ibid.*, 118.

night, an invasion of shadow." In contrast with theology, "art does not belong to the order of revelation; nor does it belong to that of creation, which moves in just the opposite direction.¹¹ What is this opposite direction of art? Can it really be said that 'creation,' human creation, moves toward a non-revelation, a concealing? That it even moves toward a non-creation? Consider Picasso's statement: 'painting [for me] is a sum of destructions'; a movement toward some uneasy co-existence with reality, even with the resistances of an artist's materials in coming 'to be.' To repeat: What is this *opposite* direction of art? I would signal here my own interpretation of *kenosis* as a space and condition for art's happening, for the sake of 'a truth' of art.

More on this term and its implications shortly. First, let us turn to the thought of Jean Luc Nancy, which seems to posit a kind of 'negative' or 'inverse' inspiration; the kind that appears concealed from contemporary art *itself*, and as having what Nancy calls a 'double specificity.' His analysis here evokes ideas of 'art and desire,' and of their incommensurability.

Nancy: Contemporary Art and its Quarrel

Let us begin by quoting from his *Philosophical Chronicles*:

Art is the name for a practice with a double specificity: it can be identified, in the final instance, only in terms of works (productions, constructions, creations, tangible things), and not in terms of categorized objects (as would be the case with knowledge, power, salvation, happiness, justice, etc.); on the other hand, this practice has its unity only in the unity of its concrete modalities (painting, music, cinema, performance, etc). The specificity of 'art' is thus found twice over in exteriority and in diversity, or even in disparity: it has neither the categorical unity of the object, nor the intuitive unity of the sensible work...

Thus contemporary art, with its quarrel, brings forth a desire that is neither the desire for an object nor the desire for a meaning but a desire for feeling and for feeling oneself feel – a desire to experience oneself as irreducible to a signification, to a being or an identity. A desire to enjoy in sensibility, the very fact that there is no unique and final form in which this desire would reach its end...The desire for art – like the dream-wish, and perhaps...like the dream-wish of the community or...of the 'us' – would then be the desire beyond every sensible object, the desire for the sense of desire itself.¹²

Contemporary art, on this analysis, has its 'quarrel,' in that it brings forth the kind of 'desire' which is neither a desire for the things of art, nor for existential meaning, but rather a desire for 'feeling,' and for 'feeling oneself feel.' Insofar as there *is* a desire for art, it appears as a desire 'beyond' art, beyond 'every sensible object' or any manifestation of art as style or taste; a desire 'for the sense of desire itself.' But how is this not simply an accumulation of affective states in the experiencing subject, devoid of reflection on *why* it has this desire beyond any object in any case? Is such desire not a *negative* inspiration in the context of contemporary art, if it is so succinctly the raw material of irreducibility to being and identity? Has art, on these terms, not been *reduced* in favour of irreducibility of the subject?

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹² Jean Luc Nancy, "Philosophical Chronicles," in: *Perspectives in Continental Philosophy*, Franson Manjali, Trans. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 60-63.

If we are, as Nancy maintains, impelled towards 'an overflow of meaning,' is this not a vehicle of inspiration? Would such inspiration have to be posited as an immaterial thing or essence, which, by the occasions of desire, finds its empathic way into material things and practices? How might we achieve this, and is such inspiration – *being inspired* – something we are given *to be* by some thing or someone other? Is art, then, the means of being bestowed by a sympathetic inspiration from *outside* ourselves? Does art simply and truly function to this end?

I have raised Levinas' issue of the *opposite* direction of art, and I signalled my own response of *kenosis* as a space and condition for art's happening for the sake of 'a truth' of art. Here I acknowledge Nancy's argument that we have an *urgency* to give ourselves an 'overflow of meaning'; to sense and feel according to "a truth" that *no* meaning can saturate; but this exigency must expand beyond its own limits, must accept 'a truth' within reach, if, as I propose, *kenosis* is to have its grounding and its discharge in the conditions of creative living.

Let us in the given context return to certain fundamental questions raised at the outset of this paper: Can there be some *mediating* territory between different sources of inspiration, external and internal, positive or negative, which may be thought to take-hold-of an artist *from within*? Can this taking-hold be construed as a self-divesting model of inspiration? And how might *kenosis* mitigate art's self-sufficiency within the contested space of inspiration versus non-inspiration for art and its practices? I will endeavour now to negotiate these issues by situating *kenosis* and its implications for thinking and practice.

Kenosis as a Model for Thought:

Firstly, *kenosis*, properly understood, from the Greek, means 'self-emptying,' 'self-abasement,' or 'renunciation'; that is, a divesting of the status of a superior nature in taking-on the condition of a lesser one; a setting-aside of power in favour of identification with someone or something in a more dependent state. Such are its meanings in mythical or theological terms. But has it any relevance for philosophical thinking about creative practice? And in the context of this paper, what are its possible ramifications for contemporary debates about 'inspired' artistic values and activities?

Philosophically, any supposed *mediating* or *intermediate* territory arising between different sources of inspiration, external and internal, has either been by way of some 'intercession' on the part of the Ancient Greek Muses, or as arising within the individual as an impulse self-induced, such that artworks are 'released' into life, or are 'given birth to.' I would argue that this process can be identified with the term *kenosis*, something released in its emptying-out, a self-emptying, or a being-emptied, oriented towards *taking-up* a greater fulfilment. Such an orientation also raises the issue of creative *responsibility*.

Rather than proposing the question: 'who is responsible for creation?', perhaps we should ask: 'who *takes* responsibility for creation?' Who takes responsibility, the artist or the defining institutions, art critics, historians or philosophers,

who surmise *what creation is*? Is it personal, trans-personal, social, ethical or political? For who *takes* responsibility not only involves individual volition, but also the collective decisions of influential individuals. It would seem to harness a greater potential for meaning, and its living embodiment, to suggest that the artist who takes responsibility for his/her artistic creations is taking *that* on by being self-forgetful, by stepping back, by waiting patiently for some delayed, more comprehensive gratification. Such is a feasible role for *kenosis* in contemporary practice. But what of its relations with actual creative work?

As Roland Barthes has argued, the work of a practicing artist raises these questions:

What are others for me? How am I to desire them? How am I to lend myself to their desire? How am I to behave among them? Uttering each time a 'subtle vision of the world' (thus speaks the Tao), the artist 'composes' what is alleged (or rejected) by his culture and what his own body insists on: what is avoided, what is evoked, what is repeated, or again: forbidden/desired: that is the paradigm which, like two legs, enables the artist to walk, 'insofar as he produces.'¹³

Insofar as an artist produces, his work is a vehicle for *composition*: for addressing those desires put to him by prevailing culture. His work, ideally, is an interrogation of that culture, and a return to it, in predominantly *self-forgetful* terms. For in forgetting himself inspiration might be 'rehabilitated,' to renegotiate Levinas' terms. What he said of criticism might be accorded to a specific state of inspiration, which could thus represent an 'intervention,' a necessary move "*for integrating the inhumanity and inversion of art into human life and into the mind.*"¹⁴

This self-forgetfulness would seem to be in direct contrast to the *supposed* work of 'no-artist,' with one "who is transparent to critic, audience, curator, and is 'disclosed' in art forms"; this "no-artist brings [the] totality and self-sufficiency of artistic creation further to the forefront"; and any talk of "inspiring agents, regardless of their status, are known and revealed"; thus, "little space [is left] for naïve questions about what inspired particular works."¹⁵ The task here is to contrast this 'uninspired' art with a philosophy which is neither fanciful nor phantasmal, but rooted in rigorousness in what it thinks about, namely 'art,' such that it be adequate to the task of thinking through present-day art-making. Here *kenosis* may point the way, if it be heeded, to a new territory, one which may surface as a new 'inspiring agent.'

Kenosis and Transcendence

As it was put to me, might this new territory "surface as an in-itself-transcendent element of the structure?"¹⁶ If there is a suggestion here of something transcending human experience, of an exalted or visionary language, or even

13 Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms*, Richard Howard, Trans. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 173.

14 Levinas, "Reality...", 118.

15 Bogna J. Obidzińska, cited in a communication to me, November 2013.

16 *Ibid.*

of a *supernatural* agency finding its way into immanent life, then we have to countenance an evident unpredictability and uncertainty in any such *breaking-open* of a space in the realm of the human. This can be proposed by a confidence only the few and the rare can muster. However, if the surfacing or the opening-up of the transcendent is an *invigoration* for thought and practice, then we would have to be persuaded that the secularizing tendencies of Western culture have not entirely succeeded in *disintegrating*, even *disembodying*, the sacred, and that the sacred must now communicate itself by an apparent contradiction, by some definitive self-emptying, by taking on the character of *kenotic occurrences*, whereby such happenings become *events* with an eventfulness and a fullness without reserve.

However, there are some risks in importing a theological term like *kenosis* into the conditions of contemporary philosophy, not the least of which is its *intelligibility*. One reason is that it would seem to oppose the stance of traditional Western metaphysics and its engrossment *with beings*, with a counter-argument of the *priority of Being*. That is to say, *kenosis* arises as it *seeks Being* while questioning the all-pervasiveness of *beings*. Moreover, *kenosis* should not be overburdened with too much theorizing; we should start to think generously *with* the concept, though it should not be extended to unlimited phenomena lest it be sapped of necessary energies. Somehow, we have to telescope our thinking in order to focus more acutely on the substance of its unfolding. One such operation would imply that, rather than accepting too hastily any proclaimed disintegration of the transcendent as *the* kenotic occurrence *par excellence*, we might actually visualize it as a drawing-near, a coming-close of the transcendent, its taking-up of a dwelling place within human activity as a *self-divestment* worthy of acceptance: a divesting of power or authority for the purposes of a transformation *into* human affairs.

Kenosis, the Space of Art, and 'the Self'

Moreover, any exploration of *kenosis* as a space and condition for art's happening has to address a counter-position: that of 'crypto-self-withdrawal.' It is argued that there is "a lot of crypto self-withdrawal happening these days; artists are often not aware of it; their identities have been mediated by the external that is not transcendent, but social, or political; their expression [therefore] is heteronomous, not in the sense of a conscious submission to a 'muse,' but of submission to a demand of the receiver, being a sophisticated social machinery, and in a sense under duress."¹⁷

In light of this, it is important to distinguish between crypto self-withdrawal and self-forgetfulness, or what I would call 'positive *kenosis*.' Self-withdrawal, whether adverted to or not (crypto), is essentially a 'distancing,' 'a drawing away from,' as the term implies; it is a turning aside from any positive *kenosis*, envisaged as liberating the self from bondage to accepted forms or formulas,

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

whether of art or life; that is, 'self-withdrawal' is a turning aside to embrace, willingly or unconsciously, a largely *negative kenosis*, where what is emptied out is any advertence to an external or transcendent movement of inspiration, which may simply result in an artist becoming a *cipher* for shifting moods and undifferentiated states of consciousness, whether his own or those of wider society.

To withdraw also has the sense of to 'discontinue,' 'cancel' or 'retract' from an obligation (eg. 'he withdrew his support'); an act of self-withdrawal draws one away from any larger field of obligations. Indeed, if the artist's identity is merely something 'mediated' by external forces such as the social or political, then this *is* what is meant by being *under duress*. I have no wish to psychologize here, but the distinction between self-withdrawal as a state of relaxed indifference, or even of anxious or perplexed compliance, and that of positive self-forgetfulness is, to my mind, a compelling reason to offer kenosis a place in contemporary thinking about art.

Furthermore, "if art is something which must be destroyed, a proposition common to many experiments of Modernity,"¹⁸ Barthes says, can destruction somehow lie at the heart of inspiration: as a doing away with, a cleansing, a stripping bare, to reveal *truth*? If so, what kind of inspiration is this? Is it in the name of the *agents* of inspiration, those claiming no particular ontological status for their work, or devoid of transcendent reference?

Furthermore, in another context I raised the following observations which still have a bearing here. Any noteworthy aesthetic philosophy, I argued, must not only adopt a critical position, validating the questioning artistic personality; it must also disclose the space wherein the conscientious artist can become a 'truth teller' within the community. It can encourage a social engagement with art by means of created works, which *challenge* or *provoke*, albeit in the interests of truth: *a-letheia*, truth's 'de-concealing.' This domain of invocation, and of potential *kenosis* (or 'self-emptying'), may yet become a vehicle for cultural rectitude, exemplified in the artist who assigns his/her work to the restoration of the human spirit in its life-affirming properties: by being a marker of those provocations of *the Good* which take the shape of humane virtue. The crucial task before us is to regain our sense of the truth-telling capacity of an artist's being – a deeply intimate way of going about a formally critical task – and to substantiate art's essential 'way of being' in the world as a transforming value.

Moreover, if Barthes is correct in arguing that for Popular Art "it is important that things be finite, not important that they be finished, that a work [not] be given the internal organization of a destiny (birth, life, death),"¹⁹ then this may be said of much contemporary art, that it disavows, avoids, empties out. Does contemporary art, then, exercise some 'reverse' drive, disrupt the internal organization of a cultural or social destiny? If the axiom of popular art is its 'repetition,' all doing much the same thing, the popular becomes the great leveller of morals, and thus any neglect of the roots of inspiration, as a source

18 Barthes, *The Responsibility...*, 198.

19 *Ibid.*, 200.

within oneself, or as a transcendent value, is a failure to initiate a social or civic morality within art.

By contrast, perhaps, we should look to High Art, so-called, to institute any needed inspiration: to offer an alternative to a purely carnal ground for creativity, which has hitherto served to undermine the essence of contemporary art. For if most of contemporary art and its theories seem 'supremely self-aware,' then this can only have been at the cost of an artist's deeper vocation to an inalienable expression: to release into life, give-birth-to, those richer transfigurations which significant art alone can give to the human spirit.

Kenosis and Contemporary Art

It should be evident by now that my use of the term *kenosis* in the context of a philosophical assessment of contemporary art is both complex and difficult; for its defence is dependent upon a number of shifting factors, not the least of which is whether artists themselves would support such a notion in regard to their work, or whether it is simply too foreign a concept to be relevant to artistic thought and practice. However, allowing for any theoretical misplacement of the term for art, it has nonetheless aroused interest in contemporary circles which treat of the relations *between* art and philosophy, and for the purposes of this paper I hope it may open-up further dialogue with art practitioners. But in this day and age, it will be argued, what artist would willingly engage in a self-emptying process or accept being self-forgetful, especially in such artistically competitive times, unless it were for the sake of some *truth of art* deeply imbedded in his/her nature, and in what might such truth consist, if it did not also bring with it some prospect of recognition and success, the fruits and rewards of work, for are not these the necessary accompaniments of artistic liberty?

Furthermore, we have come to a position where some clarification of the term appears necessary. In order to avoid any continuing ambiguity, I take *kenosis* to mean the act(s) of emptying oneself of some 'internal' content or substance and, a 'being-emptied (out)' of this internality by some other source, influence or subject; *some other source* being taken here to mean any external influence or transcendental source or subject having the powers of an *agent*, a freeing-agent, as distinct from the powers of coercion and constraint. *Kenosis* may then be conceived as not simply a movement of 'self-abandonment' or 'self-denial,' although it requires these dynamics for its mature evolution; and it would seem so for the further purpose of delineating a space for 'a reality' of some sort to emerge into the open; the reality being such things as: issues, narrations, situations, people, paints, matter, medium, as has been suggested. Insofar as the concept of *kenosis* is a valuable one, operating in different modes, then it may conceivably generate a space *for itself* in the art world, and so an aspect of this disclosure afforded by *kenosis* involves an exploration of more conceptual possibilities.

Moreover, some reference to concrete creative practices would make the concept of kenosis more substantial, in the sense that an audience, a spectator, or a receiver of an artwork also enters into the condition of co-creator and co-constitutor of *meaning* in art, along with the artist. How might this be situated in the context of *kenosis*? I cannot claim to speak *for* any artist, nor can I highlight any particular artwork, which might demonstrate ‘the how’ of the working of kenosis. An artist does not require any exterior defence, by way of some philosophical judgment for his/her work, which seems on the surface to deny the creative self in the very revelation of art and artworks. So the possibility of citing individual artists and their works, their motivations and self-assessments, as demonstrative of kenotic processes, is beyond the scope of this present paper. However, as I have indicated, insofar as artists sympathetically engage with the concept of kenosis in relation to their work, then some ensuing discussion and debate would be welcome.

Having said this, if kenosis is taken to mean or suggest a *being emptied-out* by some other source, influence or subject, then this latter seems the most confronting, replete as it is with an emptying out of the human will, with the requirement of complete ‘detachment’ in regard to the processes and the fruits of one’s labour; something which is compelling for thinking about art *in relation to* inspiration. In the present enquiry, I surmise that in reality, in its lived constitution, kenosis insists on being different in kind and degree from simple self-withdrawal, and is *more* than an act of self-abandonment or self-denial. Kenosis would seem to undergird any acts of a self-conscious self with the demand (or implicit command) for a deeper submission to the conditions of human *audacity* (of audacious living) in both material and spiritual terms. Here kenosis must be postulated at the level of depth, not mere appearance. Kenosis discloses itself as a phenomenology of intimacy bearing its conceived subject-matter out of *inwardness*.

Kenotic Occurrence: Eckhart and Generation

In order to further instantiate my use of a kenotic model, I return to Meister Eckhart and his reflections on the nature of ‘generation’ and ‘change.’ Later, I will introduce his concept of ‘detachment’; the basis of detachment, *Abgeschiedenheit*, is a willingness to forego the will, to embrace a kind of ‘will-less-ness’ in seclusion or solitude, to undergo kenosis; and *Gelassenheit* (a letting-go or releasement), a kind of ‘will-less thinking,’ an essential or meditative thinking, as Heidegger would later propose it to be. At this stage, however, let us commence with the following passage from Eckhart:

[E]very action of nature, morality, and art in its wholeness possesses three things: something generating, something generated, and the love of what generates for what is generated and vice versa...Generation’s purpose and final cause is existence – that what is generated should be.²⁰ [Moreover] it is clearly evident that every agent of nature, morality, and art in general intends as the goal and repose of its whole action...that its effect exist and receive existence...Existence is through the substantial form and generation. Everything which precedes that is dissimilar – the

20 Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart...*, 150.

agent always finds something not its own in it. This is why it hates it and gets rid of it through the process of change until it finds itself in the offspring through generation...Every agent and subject of generation intends [to make] another something like himself.²¹

Eckhart speaks of 'every action...' constituted of some wholeness or completeness as possessing three things: a generating agent, the thing generated, and the consequent love or attachment for what is generated or 'made.' The act of generating or making is that *what* is generated or made "should be." An artist, it may be surmised here, creates a work that 'it might be.' Similarly, kenosis may be interpreted here as the working-out of *change* until a work, an artist, a human life, *finds itself*, himself in the offspring through generation or *production*. Indeed, whatever precedes substantial form and generation, which is *dissimilar* to it, according to Eckhart, such an agent 'always finds something not its own in it.' This is the reason why he detests it, and wants to expel it, though change, until the agent *finds itself* in the making. And then the curious idea that every agent intends to make 'another something' like itself. Could it be an act of kenosis, this getting rid of, this emptying out, of what is not its own, through change (if not exigency), such that what comes forth in the (final) making is something 'like himself'? Kenosis then has the character of a disassembling or a reworking of *dissimilarity*, such that it appears more *like* the agent who creates it.

Furthermore, Eckhart defines *creation* as the conferring of 'existence after nonexistence'; by which he means:

in its essential or original cause a thing has no existence, and the same is true of the art and intellect [of the artist]. All things are ... in the mind of the maker...they do not have any of their formal existence until they are causally produced and extracted on the outside in order to exist...As far as its formal existence goes, any external thing is mutable, creatable, and created... [One] should know that every agent makes something like himself.²²

I highlight the significant idea that every agent makes something 'like himself.' This *likeness* looks like the one who instils something of his own into it. A simple example is that of human reproduction: a human agent, a father, reproduces some aspect of himself, some likeness to himself, in his offspring, his children. He furthers himself, so to speak, in acts of pro-creation and generation. In this sense, a father, as generator, is an agent of the prolongation of his own kind. May we conjecture, then, that a work of art or a literary work is not unlike the one who makes it, the true essence of its formal aspect being fashioned into existence? For as Sertillanges says of the writer: 'what comes out of me must *resemble* me,' must take on some aspect of my inner disposition, must be grounded in this disposition so as to resemble it.

Moreover, for Eckhart, creation is the production of things out of *nothing*. This production of created things, *pro-ducere*, 'to lead into being,' is raised in the following example:

[Here] everything that generates and in general every agent has the existence of its effect as the necessary goal of its action. This is where it comes to rest...When the [act of] existence is

21 *Ibid.*, 151.

22 *Ibid.*, 148-149.

received and accepted, every agent rests from its work and is pleased with it...This is why joy in a work is the sign of a habit that has been generated...Once again, this is why in the change or disposition which precedes the act of existence that comes about through generation there is always labour, difficulty, resistance, motion, and unrest due to the absence of the existence which the agent intends as its goal. When it [existence] is received through generation, every motion ceases. Delight, love, and rest follow.²³

Eckhart believes that in and with the change, which precedes the acts of existence 'there is always labour, difficulty, resistance, motion, and unrest due to the absence of the existence which the agent intends as its goal.' But when existence, some existent thing, is received through generation, all these seemingly contradictory movements of resistance and unrest come eventually to rest – in delight; as if, by some divining of the creative person, all that resists the repose of received existence begins to fall into place as a composed whole. I suggest that what he describes here is an instance of *kenotic occurrence*: that the artist is instrumental in the workings of change, the emptying and transforming properties of change, which rectifies (or restores) the 'absence' of an existence to its place as *presence*, and thus substantiates repose in the completed composition of a work. The impetus for artistic creation is then, that a work *might be*: that it possess external, inhering existence outside, alongside, both the artist and receiver of the work.

Eckhart and Detachment:

Let us turn now to a theme, which is paramount in Eckhart's thinking – the concept of detachment, *Abgeschiedenheit*. Detachment, in principle, is that which leads a person to where he/she is most 'receptive.' According to Eckhart:

[A]s far as my reason can lead and instruct me, I find no other virtue better than a pure detachment from all things; because all other virtues have some regard for created things, but detachment is free from all created things.²⁴

He then proceeds to define detachment as that which remains *within itself*:

Perfect detachment has no looking up to, no abasement – not beneath any created thing or above it. It wishes to be neither beneath nor above; it wants to exist by itself, not giving joy or sorrow to anyone, not wanting equality or inequality with any created thing, not wishing for this thing or that. All that it wants is to be... So it is that detachment makes no claim upon anything.²⁵

Further, he quotes Avicenna:

The excellence of the spirit that has achieved detachment is so great that whatever it contemplates is true, and whatever it desires is granted, and whatever it commands one must obey.²⁶

And then, Eckhart emphatically declares:

23 *Ibid.*, 149.

24 Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart, Selections from His Essential Writings*, Emilie Griffin, Ed. (Mahwah, Paulist Press, 2005), 104.

25 *Ibid.*, 106.

26 *Ibid.*, 107.

And you must know that to be empty of all created things is to be full of [the divinity], and to be full of created things is to be empty of [the divinity].²⁷

I draw liberally on Eckhart's account of detachment in its essential features, yet it seems to be a distinctly improbable movement *for* contemporary man. For the task is to somehow address contemporary individuals with the most sobering prospect of all: to willingly accept what appears to be a limiting character: a spirit not just of humble demeanour, but of outright abnegation of self. And the most taxing component of all: *emptiness*; to be willingly empty, to be made empty, of all created things, which is also, paradoxically, to be made full, to be replete with divinity or transcendence. If this is a movement required of those who devote themselves wholeheartedly to an interior way of life, how can we make sense of it in the flux of contemporary living? More especially, what are its likely manifestations, its requirements, for artistic individuals?

Some further definitions are needed: The German word *Abgeschieden* means 'seclusion' or 'retirement'; *Abgeschiedenheit*, defines one who is 'solitary,' 'secluded' or 'retired.' So the impetus of one who is *detached* is to be impelled towards a state of solitary seclusion; not just physical seclusion but a certain solitariness of mind and heart; one in which the possibilities of detachment are enacted for one leading a serious contemplative or meditative life. Here we have some prospect of enticement for the creative individual: for most artists know and value the 'space' which solitude and relative seclusion open-up for their creative work: such a space enables *the work* to come-forth, to breathe, to be inspired or inspirited. But how are we to make deeper sense of the kind of *emptiness* Eckhart proposes for an artist? Is it possible, indeed, profitable, for a contemporary artist to be entirely *neutral* in regard to his life and work, such that *perfect detachment* 'has no looking up to, and no abasement,' and is neither 'beneath nor above any created thing'? Such detachment does not wish for this or that; all that it wants is *to be*, making 'no claim upon anything.'

In making no claim upon anything, or anyone, can an artist nonetheless expect to 'make it' in the conflicted atmosphere of the contemporary art world? Only so, I would argue, if the work of art alone has the power *to speak*, to make an address, from inside itself; and this must be fashioned through some measure of abnegation of the self or self-will, some emptying out of the artist's content or substance, which is more than an expressionist drive, but subsists rather in an *un-conflicted* way of being and creating. And what will enable this to happen, for some essential thinking and making to occur, is precisely that 'letting-go' or 'letting-be' which signals *Gelassenheit*, our next theme for development, principally in Heidegger.

Heidegger and *Gelassenheit*:

If for Eckhart, *Gelassenheit*, 'releasement' or 'letting-go,' was inextricably bound up with a *non-willing will* and with detachment, then the same term in

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

Heidegger concerns itself with a kind of *essential* thinking: a thinking *on the way*, a path toward some *future thinking*. As Barbara Dalle Pezze has argued:

Gelassenheit [may be] experienced as the essence of thinking, a thinking that is not intended as representing, as self-determining thinking, but is conceptualized as “meditative thinking.” Meditative thinking is the kind of thinking that thinks the truth of being, that belongs to being and listens to it. To understand *Gelassenheit* as the essence of thinking means to have a different and more radical insight into the essence of who we are.²⁸

Here meditative thinking is an attempt to enact what Dalle Pezze calls, ‘a thinking transformation,’ one which will enable us to go *towards* *Gelassenheit*, a pathway on which a different conception of our ‘innermost being’ may be hinted at. While thinking as a representing belongs to the context of the will, it is still in thrall to a kind of subjectivism which *Gelassenheit* wants to subsume. As Dalle Pezze points out:

Gelassenheit, as the essence of future thinking, does not belong to the realm of willing. What characterizes the search carried out in Heidegger’s Conversation [on a Country Path about Thinking] is the fact that the context of the search requires distance and detachment from the traditional context in which thinking is related to willing. The question of the essence of thinking, posed in terms of *Gelassenheit*, is in fact a question about the essence of thinking as a “non-willing” [Nicht-Wollen].²⁹

In Heidegger’s *Conversation*, a tripartite dialogue ensues between a scientist, a scholar and a teacher about the *true* nature of thinking. As Heidegger puts it: “the statement that the nature of thinking is something other than thinking means that thinking is something other than willing. And that is why...what I really wanted from our meditation on the nature of thinking, I [the teacher] replied: I want non-willing”³⁰ Further, Heidegger states that by this non-willing ‘I willingly renounce willing.’ By “renouncing willing,” he says, “we may release, or at least prepare to release, ourselves to the sought-for essence of a thinking that is not willing”³¹ Indeed, as John Caputo puts it, we need to pass through this phase, because it is a “preparation for the final stage of release-ment where we have left the sphere of willing behind altogether, where man, as with Eckhart, has no will at all.”³² Such a non-willing is a first decisive step towards *Gelassenheit*, as Dalle Pezze argues:

By willing not to will, we move one step closer to *Gelassenheit*. Letting go of our willing is the first step that allows *Gelassenheit* to “wake up” [*Erwachen*] in ourselves. It is not, though, that we act to wake it up. Actually this is not at all a waking up. As Heidegger points out, it is an “awakening of release-ment,” in the sense of “keeping awake for release-ment”...Keeping awake for *Gelassenheit* means to let-go of willing, in order to contribute to the “awakening” of *Gelassenheit*....By letting-go of willing, we let ourselves be in the position of being let-in into *Gelassenheit*.

28 Barbara Dalle Pezze, “Heidegger on *Gelassenheit*,” in *Minerva – An Internet Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 10, 2006.

29 *Ibid.*

30 Martin Heidegger, “Conversations on a Country Path about Thinking,” in *Discourse on Thinking*, John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund, Trans. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 58-59.

31 *Ibid.*, 59-60.

32 John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger’s Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), 171.

What we face here is a twofold mode of releasement:...we need to let-go of thinking as a representing that tends to explain everything in terms of reasons. This letting-go means that we keep ourselves awake for releasement which [also] means that we open ourselves to something, a 'mystery' that...is actually be-ing itself, and is that which lets us in into *Gelassenheit*.³³

As *Gelassenheit* is called to be "from somewhere else," as Dalle Pezze suggests, it is 'let-in' *within* ourselves. While we must recognize that *Gelassenheit* is not something which we can determine or define clearly as a whole, as Dalle Pezze says, because it "*will continue to be hermeneutically the same and something different,*" it may nevertheless allow us to "*abide in a kind of secure vagueness, in which our thinking will be at rest and dwell.*" Indeed: "*Once we free ourselves from willing, we prepare ourselves for the 'awakening of releasement'; the more we detach ourselves and we 'wean ourselves from willing,' the more we contribute to the 'awakening of releasement.'*"³⁴ In summary, Heidegger proposes a renunciation of willing in order that we may release, or prepare to release, ourselves to the 'sought-for essence of a thinking that is not willing.'

Thinking towards *Kenosis*:

By extension, can there be a sought-for essence of a thinking *towards* *kenosis* which takes shape as a non-willing? For the two-fold mode of releasement characterized by Dalle Pezze has its parallel, I would suggest, in the two-fold mode of *kenosis* I have argued for thus far: a self-emptying and a self-be-ing-made-empty. As releasement or letting-go is simultaneously a 'letting-be,' and appears characteristic of *Gelassenheit*, so also may *kenosis* be construed as a *setting-in-place* outside itself, whereby conscious reasoning is dispensed with, hollowed-out, in the interests of a setting-in-place of a *dwelling-space* for thinking and making. Such a space ideally opens up a non-willing making as a *pouring-out*, whereby what is emptied out is what is most foreign to it, so that it may be filled with what is most proper to it: an *allowing to be* of what is its very own, its ownmost.

Finally, if we may conceive an artist's *will-less* painting, writing, composing or performing as a *sum* of renunciations, as an emptying out, not simply as an erasure of things in their un-making, but rather as a re-working or re-making in order to bring something vital and luminous into play; and if thinking is an adventure towards the un-thought, which is also in its essence something 'claimed by Being,' as it was for Heidegger, and if *kenosis* may be conceived as the singular advent of an un-making, to its being reclaimed in/for material fact so as to be made full again, then we may now posit *kenosis* in terms of a non-subjective self, a *kenotic self*, in its release from any representational thinking into a more authentic relation with the *mystery* of be-ing itself and with the world, and thus a more potent means of exchange with, and discharge into, the vicissitudes and eruptions of creative life.

33 Dalle Pezze, "Heidegger...."

34 *Ibid.*

Conclusion

Can kenosis be conceived as a self-divesting model of inspiration? If contemporary art appears threatened by talk of inspiration, it is due to the fact that particular works, movements and styles are seen as the legitimate locus of purely human decisions and makings. What need have we to appeal to a source outside ourselves for any justification of what artists do? Such a line of argument is difficult to counter. However, the question of inspiration cannot be held at a discount, if what is meant by inspiration is being open to something *greater* or *other* than oneself, in the trust that something be given, bestowed and welcomed in the name of a truth of art, even by some transcendent verity.

Here we need to recognize that any alternative in the shape of *no artist*, is really *no work* at all, just as any concept of 'lack of author,' unless it is an acknowledgement of professed anonymity or kenosis, is similarly beleaguered. However, self-sufficiency willingly engages self-deception, in that any question regarding the inspiration standing at the origin of the concept of contemporary art as self-sufficient must also allow art to speak for itself; 'letting what is ownmost to art itself first come forth as necessary,' as Heidegger encourages us to do; for in permitting art itself to first come forth in this *necessary* way, we may be less inclined to unqualified assumptions regarding its self-sufficiency.

It might be argued, therefore, that it is by an adherence to its beginnings *in an origin*, by the taking-up of an inspiration not simply enjoined upon it by an art historical tradition (the past of art always has it relays to the present), that contemporary art may map out a renewed landscape for itself. Rather than adhering to some *quasi* inspiration, which has all the marks of aesthetic narcissism, and rather than art being created with an absence of the Muse, from a decided lack of the artist's relation with another, or with a significant or transcendent other, we might well endorse a *self-divesting* kenotic model of inspiration: one oriented towards an in-dwelling in the space of repose opened up by a spontaneous, will-less, self-less, art making.

Along Heideggerian lines: What task is reserved for thinking *at the beginning of art*? The question seems critical enough for contemporary practice today, for the thinking that arises from the place of art in society is crucial to the experience of art and its survival. Art's flourishing will be proportionate to its quality, and its quality will be determined by the impact of its beginning. If it is the aim of thinking to provide a reflective basis for contemporary practice, then in these uncertain times the task of the artist is to draw-forth works from a seemingly incompatible dimension: *invisibility*, from the *givens* of Nature and the human. If this is proper to the sphere of art, then it may signal a qualified but as yet untested inspiration in the self-assertive conditions of contemporary practice.³⁵

Finally, it is in the inclining of the *created thing* itself toward our thought, as if the very thought *of us* were held within it, which enables us to speak of

35 Cf. Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of Art and the Destination of Thinking," in *Distanz und Nähe* (Festschrift für Walter Biemel), cited in *Reading Heidegger, Commemorations*, John Sallis, Ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1972/1983); and Martin Heidegger, "What Calls for Thinking," in *Martin Heidegger, Basic Writings*, D. F. Krell, Trans. and Ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1964/1993).

thought at the beginning of art. The beginning of art is the joyous enchantment of what is given to the mind and heart to be and to accomplish in the realm of the human. What is thought, and thus made, is the *gift* given to us in thinking back towards that which in the first place draws us toward itself, and thus holds us in *the way* of thinking. One may reasonably conjecture, but not without hope, that contemporary art, with its inchoate and fluid entities in the labyrinth of theory it has created for itself, having seemingly refused the restoration of things to an *original* state, may also have forfeited its claim to hold us in an abiding path of thinking. Moreover, in relation to any disclosure shaping the direction of change in contemporary arts practice today: do we assume such change is happening, and in *what* direction? Like every origin for art, intended or hidden, the question begins *with a beginning*.

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