

artículos

AFFIRMING SOLITUDE: HEIDEGGER AND BLANCHOT ON ART

Gary Peters

York St John University (Reino Unido)

*g.peters@yorksj.ac.uk***ABSTRACT**

The following reflections are intended as a preliminary to a more extended and in-depth series of case studies, focused analyses of actual artworks, and the issues arising from their particularity within what will be described here as a Heideggerian post-aesthetic aesthetics. The essay is not written from the perspective of a professional or academic philosopher or of a practising artist (even though I am one), neither fields of which have sufficiently engaged with the existential and aesthetic predicament sketched out below. Thus, the attraction of both Heidegger and Blanchot is not just related to their well-known discussions of inbetween-ness, but, more essentially, to the peculiarly in-between location of their own thought and trajectory of thinking: Heidegger from “out of” philosophy “drawn” towards art; Blanchot from within the space of literature towards the exteriority of ontological thinking. The intention is to identify similarities and differences in their thought, but this is only perceived as relevant to the extent that it allows an initial reassessment of a de-subjectivized existential and aesthetic mode of thinking that has been largely abandoned by academic philosophy and art practice alike (albeit for very different reasons). If nothing else, the hope is that a different voice might be heard in the clamorous exchange between philosopher and artists, one that is sensitive to the complex predicament of the artist in a post-Heideggerian world, and which above all remains faithful to the project of the artist and the artwork in the face of the philosophical valorization of “Art”.

KEYWORDS*Art, solitude, loneliness, affirmation, preservation, creation, questioning, attunement.***RESUMEN**

Las siguientes reflexiones se presentan como preliminares a una serie de estudios de caso más extensos y profundos, análisis focalizados de obras de artes reales, y los temas que surgen de sus particularidades dentro de lo que se describirá aquí como una estética heideggeriana post-estética. El ensayo no está escrito desde la perspectiva de un filósofo profesional o académico ni de un artista operante (aunque yo lo soy), ninguno de cuyos campos se ha comprometido suficientemente con el dilema bosquejado más adelante. Así pues, la atracción de Heidegger y Blanchot no solo tiene que ver con sus bien conocidas discusiones sobre la inbetween-ness, sino, más esencialmente, con la ubicación particularmente in-between de su propio pensamiento y trayectoria del pensar: Heidegger desde “fuera de” la filosofía “sacado” hacia el arte; Blanchot desde dentro del espacio de la literatura hacia la exterioridad del pensar ontológico. La intención es identificar similitudes y diferencias en su pensamiento, pero esto solo es percibido como relevante en la medida en que permite una reevaluación de un modo de pensar existencial y estético des-subjetivado, que ha sido ampliamente abandonado por la filosofía académica y la práctica del arte (aunque por razones distintas). Sin más pretensiones, la esperanza es que se pueda escuchar una voz diferente en el intercambio clamoroso entre el filósofo y los artistas; voz que es sensible al complejo dilema del artista en un mundo post-heideggeriano, y que sobre todo permanece fiel al proyecto del artista y a la obra de arte frente a la valorización filosófica del “Arte”.

PALABRAS CLAVE*Arte, soledad, afirmación, preservación, creación, preguntar, afinamiento.*

AFFIRMING SOLITUDE: HEIDEGGER AND BLANCHOT ON ART

The more this thrust comes into the open, the stronger and more solitary the work becomes [...]. The more solitary the work, fixed in the figure, stands on its own and the more cleanly it seems to cut all ties to human beings, the more simply does the thrust come into the Open. (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 66)

This solitude has itself begun to speak, and I must in turn speak about this speaking solitude, not in derision, but because a greater solitude hovers above it, and above that solitude, and another still greater, and each, taking the spoken word in order to smother it and silence it, instead echoes it to infinity, and infinity becomes its echo. (Blanchot, 1978, p. 33)

The following reflections are intended as a preliminary to a more extended and in-depth series of case studies, focused analyses of actual artworks, and the issues arising from their particularity within what will be described here as a Heideggerian post-aesthetic aesthetics. The essay is *not* written from the perspective of a professional or academic philosopher or of a practising artist¹, neither fields of which have sufficiently engaged with the existential and aesthetic predicament sketched out below. Thus, the attraction of both Heidegger and Blanchot is not just related to their well-known discussions of inbetween-ness, but, more essentially, to the peculiarly in-between location of their own thought and trajectory of thinking: Heidegger from “out of” philosophy “drawn” towards art; Blanchot from within the space of literature towards the exteriority of ontological thinking. The intention is to identify similarities and differences in their thought, but this is only perceived as relevant to the extent that it allows an initial reassessment of a de-subjectivized existential and aesthetic mode of thinking that has been largely abandoned by academic philosophy and art

¹ Although I am one as it happens.

practice alike (albeit for very different reasons). If nothing else, the hope is that a different voice might be heard in the clamorous exchange between philosopher and artists, one that is sensitive to the complex predicament of the artist in a post-Heideggerian world, and which above all remains faithful to the project of the artist and the artwork in the face of the philosophical valorization of “Art”.

Where Heidegger, as *thinker-philosopher*, describes the increasing solitude, and consequent inhumanity of the artwork; Blanchot, as *writer-artist*, speaks of a solitude that is integral to the very act of speaking. Such speech/writing does not describe but is *inscribed* by the very solitude that brings it into being. Not the solitude of man but the solitude of language itself as it smothers all humanity in the infinite echo of its own interminable delivery. So, while it is true that both Heidegger and Blanchot speak about this speaking solitude”, the *thought* of the former incessantly “*speaks-of* the leap from one space to another and the infinitely postponed commencement of an “other beginning” (Heidegger, 1999, pp. 124-126) freed from all humanist comforts; the *writing* of the latter *speaks-from within* what he calls the “space of literature”, that is to say, from within art and through the artwork. Blanchot speaks as, and on behalf of, the artist, not in order to speak-of Being or indeed of truth but to speak-as artist and to speak-for the artwork: that’s the difference. In other words, the task of the philosopher is to think, while the task (or the curse) of the artist is to make, to think, but then continue to make within the transformed space of this thinking/making. Artists, as long as they want to remain artists, will always come back to the artwork. Where Heidegger ultimately brushes aside the artist and the artwork in the name of art, understood as the setting to work of truth’s unconcealment, Blanchot’s writing is rooted in and articulates the very *experience* of the artist being brushed aside by the artwork and by art. In a sense the question he addresses is: what would art be like after Heidegger? Or, how does the artist experience his or her own essential solitude and the solitude of art?

Having said that, it is certainly true that Blanchot's most sustained engagement with the essential solitude does not in fact take place within what might be called his art practice (his novels) but within the quasi-philosophical/poetic *écriture* to be found in such texts as *The Space of Literature* and *The Infinite Conversation*. Indeed, how *could* such thinking and writing take place within the artwork when it is precisely the artwork's solitude that creates the "space of literature" that comes to frame Blanchot's singular writing. The "space of literature"—the space created by the creation of artworks—is not interior to those works (a romantic concoction) but, on the contrary, represents a radical exteriority, the "Outside" from within which the artist experiences the exile inherent in the creative process. At the same time, it is also the case that Heidegger's speaking-of the solitude of the artwork does not take place within his more "traditional" philosophical texts, commentaries and lectures (not that many of them could really be described as such), but rather within the quasi-philosophical/poetic writings of "late" works such as *Contributions to Philosophy* and *Mindfulness*. Prior to these works which explicitly attempt to think, speak and write from *within* or, as Heidegger expresses it "*from out of*" philosophy, he himself admits that he has only managed to "speak about" philosophy, without the necessary attunement to the solitude that such essential thinking requires. (Heidegger, 1995, pp. 55-56)². In light of this, the current essay is far from suggesting that there should or could be identified any radical opposition between the work of Heidegger and Blanchot—such dialectical thinking would be anathema to both of them anyway. Clearly there are differences but these originate in different experiences of the same essential solitude identified by both and described in overlapping terms that bespeak a fascinating intertwinement of philosophy and art or, to use the language adopted below, preservation and creation. But, to be clear, neither

² A perspective very much shared by Gilles Deleuze of course.

speaking-for philosophy or art, they are both *in-between* and in this sense both share a solitude that is ultimately an essential component of the “errant” work they produce.

But, it might be asked, who cares about all of this speaking-of, speaking about, speaking-from out of or within, speaking being the articulation of an experience that, as with all experience, remains incarcerated within the ontic and the existential? Well, perhaps here is one fundamental difference between Heidegger and Blanchot: the thought of the latter, for all of its famed neutrality and lifelong promotion of the effacement of the artist (including himself), still retains an existential dimension (admittedly stripped of its humanist trappings) which offers a rare (perhaps unique) aesthetic response to the anti-aesthetics of Heidegger. This, perhaps, will help explain why, in spite of the fact that, as will be re-iterated below, solitude is a characteristic of the artwork and not the artist for both Heidegger and Blanchot, the current essay is repeatedly drawn into the existential orbit of the exiled artist, not as “loner” but simply as artist. Philosophers will no doubt read this as a misunderstanding of the ontological import of the essential solitude under discussion and as an inexplicable retreat into pre- (or sub) Heideggerian existential phenomenology: a mixture of intellectual confusion and cowardice. But then one might ask what exactly *is* the import of Heidegger’s infamous ontology of art if it remains within what we might call the “space of philosophy”? A conviction underlying the following reflections is that without an account of (yes) the existential experience of being exiled from one’s work, and without the aesthetic experience of creating new work *from out of* the space that this incessant process of exile creates, all talk of solitude is abstract. This is not to valorize beings above Being, or to perpetuate subjectivist/humanist aesthetics in the face of their inevitable demise; it is, rather, simply an attempt to speak of artists and their work in the face of art’s infinite withdrawal —call this withdrawal truth or not, that’s not the issue here. This is why Blanchot consistently speaks of specific artists and their works, and it is why Heidegger does so only rarely (and

with rather mixed results). This is also why Blanchot's *experience* of the essential solitude is an affirmative one: *he, the subject, the writer* affirms solitude. Not his own solitude but the solitude of the work. And the very act of affirmation, as will be described below, itself creates a solitude which has existential as well as ontological import. Heidegger, on the contrary, explicitly avoids both affirmation and negation, and the concomitant dialectics of choice, in an effort to separate his thought from the foibles of the existential or aesthetic *act*. So it might be worth trying to unravel some of these differences and similarities.

To repeat, the word affirmation is much used in Blanchot's oeuvre, appearing in a multitude of different contexts with an ever shifting range of meanings. Sometimes it is the reader/receiver who affirms the work with an "innocent" or "pure yes that blossoms in immediacy" (Blanchot, 1983, p. 196), sometimes it is the writer/producer who says "yes" to the "risk" of the work's solitude (Blanchot, 1983, p. 22); on other occasions it is the work that affirms *itself* from out of an anonymity which itself becomes an object of affirmation: "the reading of a poem is the poem itself, affirming itself in the reading of the work" (Blanchot, 1983, p.198). What is more, the explicit absence of a dialectical dimension to Blanchot's manner of thinking means that the "yes" cannot be relied upon to immanently emerge out of its contradiction of the "no" as a productive *praxis*, but must *itself* be affirmed through an incessant affirmation of affirmation that helps explain, perhaps, Blanchot's constant need to see this word on the page. Most importantly of all though is the way in which Blanchot—and here he does resemble Heidegger—returns his thinking to a moment of essential affirmation, prior to the secondary choices associated with "yes" or "no", to what he calls the "primordial Yes and No" before the beginning of the artwork.

At the very moment of the choice art still holds us back in a primordial Yes and No. There, before any beginning, the somber ebb and flow of dissimulation rumbles. (Blanchot, 1983, p. 244)

The moment of choice described here is, in its primordiality, better described as a moment of *decision* where art itself is affirmed. The simultaneous affirmation and negation that is art is not intended to signify a static totality where the artist can have it all ways, but describes, rather, the incessant *movement* of art, the ‘setting to work of truth’ as described by Heidegger in terms of unconcealment/concealment and by Blanchot as revealing/re-veiling. It is the primordial movement of art—the ebb and flow of “yes” and “no” in Blanchot’s language, the ‘strife’ of “world” and “earth” in Heidegger’s—that produces the fascination necessary to draw both the thinker and the writer towards or into the solitude of this interminable approach/withdrawal. And here might be identified another essential difference between the thinker and the artist: where Heidegger always speaks of “hearkening” or “heeding” the “call” of truth as it withdraws and “draws” the thinker *towards* it, for Blanchot, to be fascinated is to “surrender” to fascination, a “yes” that both affirms the essential solitude while, more importantly, allowing the anonymous absence such solitude represents to affirm *itself*.

To write is to surrender to the fascination of time’s absence. Now we are doubtless approaching the essence of solitude. Time’s absence is not purely a negative mode. It is the time when nothing begins, when initiative is not possible, when, before the affirmation, there is already a return of the affirmation. Rather than a purely negative mode, it is, on the contrary, a time without negation, without decision, when here is nowhere as well, and each thing withdraws into its image while the “I” that we are recognizes itself by sinking into the neutrality of a featureless third person. (Blanchot, 1983, p. 30)

But then we might place alongside this “surrender” to fascination Heidegger’s “submission” to the “displacement” of art, and consider again the difference between artist and thinker in terms of the creation and preservation of the work respectively. Having

acknowledged the increasing solitude of the work as the “thrust” of its creation increasingly cuts all ties with the world, Heidegger then continues by proposing that the preservation of the work similarly requires a break with the human. It is thus the preserver who must “submit” to the “Open” solitude of the work, just as the writer, in Blanchot’s account, “surrenders” to it. This is how Heidegger describes it:

The more purely the work is itself transported into the openness of beings—an openness opened by itself—the more simply does it transport us into this openness and thus at the same time transport us out of the realm of the ordinary. To submit to this displacement means: to transform our accustomed ties to the world and to [...] this letting the work be a work we call the preserving of the work [...] what is created cannot itself come into being without those who preserve it. (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 66)

It is perhaps worth remarking on the difference between *surrender* and *submission*. The act of surrender suggests a prior struggle, a resistance to an overpowering force that ultimately demands sacrifice and renunciation. But surrender goes beyond mere capitulation, it also describes the act of giving up what one has and the handing over of what is held most dear. Blanchot’s language is forceful, for him the milieu of fascination is one of threat, of robbery, effacement and neutralisation. It is not just the passing over from the first to the third person—from the “I” to the “they”—but the passing away of everything the “I” would cling to as the guarantor of identity, of authorship, and of self-recognition. The “sinking” of the artist into the neutrality of art’s essential solitude is not just the transformation but the obliteration of the “I”.

Where Heidegger’s standing-within the happening of the work is proposed as a post-aesthetics more essential than the subjective experience of a beautiful objectivity, the peculiarity of Blanchot’s writing suggests something resembling a post-aesthetic aesthetics

where the experience of the artist's and the artwork's dissolution itself becomes the object of contemplation and reflection. If the thinker witnesses the withdrawal of art into the solitude of truth's happening and, as Heidegger requests, *follows* this withdrawal (noting the essential element of submission and obedience associated with the German word *folgen*), then, perhaps, the role of the artist is to bear witness to this witnessing, and to embrace the "risk" Blanchot associates with this experience. Speaking of Mallarmé, he writes:

This risk affects his normal relationship to the world, his habitual use of language; it destroys all ideal certainties, deprives the poet of the physical assurance of living. It exposes him finally to death —the death of truth, the death of his person. (Blanchot, 1983, pp. 108-109)

Blanchot here describes Mallarmé as being *drawn* by poetry into the hazardous affirmation of the impersonal where ordinary relations with the world are suspended, but this is more than just a "displacement", it is also, to say again, the *aesthetic experience* of a displacement that transforms not just the thinker's perspective on art but also the artist's relationship with the artwork which, in spite of everything, will always remain. Blanchot speaks of the existential and aesthetic predicament of the artist, the individual artist, the subject. But not the solitary subject, rather the subject of solitude. Comparing this, the "surrender" of the artist to art with all of the intensity that accompanies it, to the "submission" of the thinker to the displacement of art, while instructive in pointing up some of the differences between the philosopher and the artist might also prove a useful way of locating the peculiar betweenness of Blanchot's work, situated somewhere between surrender and submission: a discussion "to come".

Unlike surrender, which suggests resistance and struggle to the point of defeat (the exile of the artist from the work does not come easily, it is not just a question of "letting-be", it's not that simple)

submission would seem to represent a more willing acceptance of, if not a position of weakness, then at least the incontrovertible force of the law. And so, for Heidegger, to submit (to follow/to be obedient) to the displacement of art is by no means a passive response to the overpowering anonymity of the work as it breaks with the human, but, is rather an act of will that must “refuse” the ordinary world in order to stand within and affirm truth’s self-opening/closing space: this is for him the essence of preservation. In this view not only must the act of preservation renounce the human-all-too-human pleasures of subjectivist aesthetics, but it must also initiate a decisive break with the knowledge economy of mere “aestheticizing connoisseurship”(Heidegger, 1971a, p. 68). In the place of knowledge is proposed instead a will-full knowingness —“a knowing that remains a willing, a willing that remains a knowing” (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 67)— that is not free to impose its own criteria on what does and does not count as truth but is, rather, *in “compliance with the unconcealedness of Being”*. (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 67). Willing and complying here are not opposed but can be grasped as the dual aspect of submission itself, where on the one hand “standing-within is brought under law” (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 67) while at the same time affirmed as the true course of art’s preservation.

As with the artist, the preserver also needs to learn the necessity of saying “no”, they both need to renounce what they most desire: the intoxicating pleasures of the aesthetic, the ordinary attachments of the “they” to the things of the world. To the extent that such renunciation is viewed negatively as a giving-up on one’s own desires, the emphasis will fall upon compliance and surrender, but Heidegger’s proposal that submission to the “sway” of Being should be *willed* suggests a model of renunciation driven by the “yes” rather than the “no”. Thus the “no” allows the leaping-away from that which is repulsed but also affirmed, as is that which is leapt into. This doubling of renunciation and the entwining of “yes” and “no” is evident in the following passage from *Contributions to Philosophy*:

When *knowing as preserving* the truth of what holds true (preserving the essential sway of the truth of Da-sein) distinguishes future man [...] and lifts him into the guardianship of being, then the highest knowing is that which is strong enough to be the origin of a *renunciation*. We take renunciation, of course, as weakness and evasion, as suspension of the will; thus experienced, renunciation is giving-away and giving-up [...] But there is a renunciation that not only holds fast but also even gains by fighting and enduring, that renunciation that emerges as the preparedness for the *refusal*, for holding fast to this estranging that in such a way sways as *being-itself*. (Heidegger, 1999, pp. 43-44)

As regards art, the refusal described here is the refusal to be seduced by the pleasures of the art object or intrigued by the foibles of the artist; it is the “no” necessary to clear a path for the affirmation of art. What is particularly noteworthy however is the manner in which Heidegger conceives of the creative act as one of *fixing* the work, while the preservation of art is, in fact, the *unfixing* of art and, thus, the preservation of a *movement* rather than the preservation of aesthetic objects as with connoisseurship.

Art is the fixing in place of a self-establishing truth in the figure. This happens in creation as the bringing forth of the unconcealedness of what is. Setting-into-work, however, also means: the bringing of work-being into movement and happening. This happens as preservation. (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 71)

With this in mind, the different *experiences* of surrender and submission (following/obeying) might be considered with a view to better locating the particular work of Blanchot, a work that so often seems to speak with the voice of both the creator *and* the preserver, both embedded within the particularity of the work and

yet constantly expelled (through the detours of thinking) into the interminable errancy of the work's movement and "happening".

As suggested, the act of surrender is not only one of giving-up but also of giving-away. In this sense, the artist's surrender to the essential solitude of art is not simply a giving-up on the aesthetic project and the pleasures that accompany it; the affirmation of an affirmative anonymity does not result in a cessation of creative work. It is not the creative act that is handed over to the anonymous being of art but rather the artwork that has already been created by the artist. Thus, the experience of solitude, as Blanchot describes it, is actually closer to alienation than it is to the much less proprietorial and inherently more positive act of estrangement required of the Heideggerian preserver, whose renunciation of the "ordinary" world of works is only saying "no" to that which was *already* strange: the creative act and the createdness of the artwork. In fact the creator is both alienated *and* estranged because the "yes" of renunciation can only enter into this movement of art and the truth of Being by saying "no" to that which the creator created in the first place. It is a lot harder to say "no" to that which one has already said "yes" to than it is to renounce the work of others. If the job of the creator is "the fixing in place of a self-establishing truth in the figure", it is not simply a matter of handing this figure over once fixed to the preserver to be unfixed, not least because what binds the creator to the creation and makes it so difficult to surrender to the extra-aesthetic is precisely the awareness that the final "yes" never truly fixes the work anyway. And this is not because the truth of the work is self-established *outside* of the artwork as the Heideggerian preserver would have us think but, rather, that (as far as the artist is concerned at least) the inherent *untruth* of the artwork renders all "yes" and "no" decisions forever open to revision. In this regard, the difficulty of surrendering the work does not relate to an aesthetic attachment to the beautiful fixity of the figure; but, rather, to a fascination with the "no's"

secreted within it that, as an infinite potentialising force,³ forever overflow the contingency of any one aesthetic foreclosure. This is why artworks are so hard to finish, and why the artist is forever drawn back to evaluate and re-evaluate every moment of affirmation. And, yes, we are talking about the artist again, with a persistence necessitated by the issues here, and as an intended response to the clamour of Heideggerian (and other) philosophers that would outlaw such talk in the name of Being.

The creator's renunciation of the artwork, then, is never singular but plural: it is not simply a "no" to this or that work, but to all of the potential works, erased but still live and radically unfixed within the apparent fixity of the final (but not really so final) "yes". All of this means that while artists, as Blanchot repeatedly indicates, are capable of affirming the solitary alterity of art and, in so doing, effacing and erasing their own singularity within the artwork, the *experience* of this relinquishment leaves its mark on all subsequent work. To be cast aside by the anonymity of the work while remaining under the *obligation* to make work is something the preserver of art (whether philosopher or not) does not have to face in the way that the artist does. What is unusual (unique) about Blanchot is that his account of the obligation to make work in the face of a "worklessness" that constantly renders the figure of the artist redundant (erased/smothered)⁴ managed to open up a space of writing that significantly overlapped with the philosophical discourse under consideration here —just as did Heidegger's in the other direction. Of course, what actual artists and philosophers *do* with this intermingling of thought is another question. What have they done?

Staying with this intermingling, Heidegger believes that the creator and the preserver "naturally belong together," (Heidegger,

³ "Yves Barel shows how rejection 'potentializes' by reproducing the rejected as a possibility and by incorporating it into the recursive network of the system" (Luhmann, 2000, p. 33).

⁴ Samuel Beckett is another very rare exception.

1971a, p.71) that they both “originate” in their “own nature”, (Heidegger, 1971a, p.71), and it is certainly true that, as he says, “the preservers of a work belong to its createdness with an essentiality equal to that of its creators”. But what this leaves out of account is that, for the artist, it is not just a question of *belonging-to* art and its preservation but also the *belonging-of* the artwork to the artist: the issue of ownership. Although, if Heidegger is to be believed, they “naturally belong together”, the crucial *difference* between the creator and the preserver is, then, between what might be called respectively the positive pleasure of owning and the neutral reserve of “enowning” (*Ereignis*). The translators of *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* offer an excellent introduction to this allusive and elusive word:

We found a good approximation to *Ereignis* in the word *Enowning* [...] insofar as this prefix [*en*] conveys the sense of “enabling,” “bringing into condition of” or “welling up of.” Thus in conjunction with *owning*, this prefix is capable of getting across a sense of an “owning” that is “not an owning of something.” We can think this owning as an un-possessing owning, because the prefix *en-* has this unique capability. In this sense owning does not have an appropriable content [...]. This movement is the “going all the way into and through” *without possessing* [...] the always ongoing movement “in” and “through” without coming to rest in a “property” or “possession.” (Heidegger, 1999, p. xx)

Heidegger himself speaks of “a thinking-saying which is enowned by enowning and belongs to be-ing”, (Heidegger, 1999, p. 3) and it is this idea of *belonging-to* be-ing that underpins the conjoining of creator and preserver as both belonging-to the “createdness” of the artwork. But again, the *experience* of belonging-to art for the creator is very different to the experience of the preserver. Putting aside the *belonging-of* the artwork to the artist as considered above, we might return to the discussion of the artist’s “primordial choice” or “decision” to affirm art rather than the many alterna-

tive modes of being or indeed modes of aesthetic practice. This might be framed by a recognition of the fact that the fascinating alterity of art actually leaves little room for choice as it draws the artist into the space of withdrawal where the “dissembling” of Being is staged. The significance of this is that belonging-to art for the creator has, in fact, got everything to do with possession, the possession of the artist by art —Plato’s “divine frenzy”— a possession that, in all of its obsessive intensity, is pre-aesthetic and, one might even say, the necessary condition for the artwork to emerge. In other words, the artist belongs-to art *before* the artwork belongs to the artist, and, thus, before any subsequent renunciation of the artwork associated with the affirmation of enowning. What the creator experiences, then, is again something double: both the willing-knowing *submission* to the (pre-aesthetic) possession of art *and* the more painful and resistant *surrender* to the (post-aesthetic) possessive-less-ness of enowning. The artist is possessed, wrests this possession away from art through the possessiveness of the creative act and the production of works, only to be dispossessed again by the fascination with the essential solitude of the work and the affirmation of that. And, in addition, having been dispossessed, having witnessed the effacement of the self and the returning affirmation of anonymity and nothingness, the artist is still obliged to continue making work that itself must now find a means of articulating the witnessing of this witnessing—a post-aesthetic aesthetics.

By contrast, the experience of the preserver is relatively straightforward, although not without its own areas of difficulty. Chief among these is the experience of estrangement associated with the renunciation of the “ordinary realm” of the “they”. As Heidegger himself acknowledges in *Being and Time* the experience and subsequent preservation of art as cultural heritage and tradition is associated ontically with the “they” of which we are all a part (including him). “We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* take pleasure; we read, see and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 164). Holding out for an

authentic gathering of the past into the present, (the early) Heidegger casts himself in the role of the subject who decisively breaks with the ruinous inauthenticity of the “they”, and must thus suffer the tragedy of this estrangement. In his later philosophy however Heidegger’s account of preservation and the transmission of art as heritage rids itself of the existential dialectics of inauthenticity and authenticity which, while removing the negativity associated with the “they” and its purported reduction of culture to forgery and fakery, does not on that account bring him any closer to the “ordinary”. On the contrary, as his thoughts on preservation develop Heidegger increasingly breaks not only with the superficiality of the social but also with the “lived experience” of the human, something he never tires of repeating in *Contributions to Philosophy*, where the increasing solitude of the artwork, and the consequent solitude it “draws” the preserver into, can be identified as one iteration of the epochal (modern) co-presence of the “machinic” and the “lived”. What is of interest here is the manner in which Heidegger conjoins art with the “machination” that he identifies as an essential aspect of the withdrawing (or “abandonment”) of Being from beings. The common and conjoining term here is *technē* which is used to describe the createdness/knowingness of art but also (and this is the real significance of art for Heidegger) the originary “makeability” of Being that is prior to human creativity, indeed, that which makes the latter possible.

The name [machination] should immediately point to *making*, which we of course recognize as human comportment. However, this comportment itself is only possible on the basis of an interpretation of beings which brings their makeability to the fore. (Heidegger, 1999, p. 88)

The withdrawing of Being that “draws” the thinker should, then, be understood as a withdrawal from the human. The making Heidegger describes is a “self-making” that “makes itself by itself” (Heidegger, 1999, p. 88), a machination that has been

present —albeit concealed— since the inceptual thinking of the Greeks, but which is increasingly brought to the fore in the modern epoch though a representational thinking bound up with objecthood and objectivity; that is to say, the relationship of “man” to a world made palatable as “lived experience”. What Heidegger is attempting to grasp here is the idea that the apparent opposition between the machinic and the human (as that which *lives*) is inessential. In truth they both have a common source in Being, but one increasingly concealed by modern human cultures dominated by various liveable versions of the machinic. And it is the technical, the mathematical, the systematic, and so on, that reduces the ontological question to the ontic level of explanation, explication and clarification, where everything is capable of being revealed to the eye and/or mind; including, it should be added, the machination of art too, which as a “lived experience” is explained away as “solitude”. But this is not, as should be obvious, the more essential solitude conceived by Heidegger and Blanchot. In short, the introduction of Being’s machinality into *life* destroys the essential solitude in the name of an existential and aesthetic “loneliness” that can be explained and consumed within the parameters of a psychological and anthropological typology that makes everything “public and accessible to everyone” (Heidegger, 1999, p.77).

The epoch of total lack of questioning does not tolerate anything worthy of questioning and destroys any and all solitude. Therefore, precisely this epoch must spread the word that “creative” men are “lonely”, and that therefore everyone is apprised and is promptly informed in “picture” and “sound” of the loneliness of these lonesome men and their deeds. Here mindfulness touches upon what is uncanny in this epoch, knowing full well that mindfulness is far removed from any kind of popular “critique of the times” and “psychology”. For what counts is the awareness that [...] this epoch of total lack of questioning can be withstood only through an *epoch of simple solitude*, in which preparedness for the truth of be-ing itself is prepared. (Heidegger, 1999, p. 77)

The estrangement of the preserver of art—the thinker—is not, then, a social or psychological category; it has nothing whatsoever to do with the romanticization of the “loner” incapable or unwilling to mix with the “they”, but is, rather, an ontological category that attempts to grasp, not the “lived experience” of the alienated subject, but something that describes a certain *withdrawal* from life and the familiar dialectics of alienation. But, it should be emphasised, such a withdrawal can by no means be understood as a submission to the machinic (popular within certain strains of postmodernism) that, as already described, itself actually *depends upon* the “lived experience” of the human as its mode or manner of social and psychological machination—hence its modish attraction. On the contrary, the estrangement Heidegger is thinking of is one that situates the thinker *between* the apparent (but pregiven) choices of “man” or “machine”, between, that is to say, the inessential “yes” and “no’s” of humanists and anti-humanists alike.

The significance and originality of Heidegger’s thinking on solitude can be usefully highlighted here by drawing attention to the above concatenation of solitude and the task of *questioning*, a move that had a major influence on one of his most illustrious students: Hannah Arendt. But before briefly outlining their thinking on the subject of the question/answer, it is important to grasp the direction of Heidegger’s thinking. As we saw at the outset, Heidegger’s primary ambition as a thinker is to think “from out of” philosophy rather than merely “about it” or “about” other things (science, art [...] etc.). This re-situating of the philosophical task is promoted by a mode of questioning that is intended to break with the familiar forms of philosophical dispute where question and answer are, in a sense, already agreed upon prior to any apparent disagreement. As Heidegger repeatedly emphasizes real questioning is not just a matter of questioning the other (think of the academic world) but of putting *oneself* into question.

We are speaking *from out of it* [philosophy] only when we move in advance within a *metaphysical questioning*. Yet precisely this

has not happened. We merely said *about* this questioning that it is comprehensive, i.e., a questioning that in each case comprehends being as a whole within every question and takes the questioner himself into the question as well, put him into question. (Heidegger, 1995, pp. 56-57)

In order to do this however it is essential to move away from the all-too-familiar dissonance of endless philosophical strife into an *attunement* not with the other (in any sociological sense) or with oneself (in any psychological sense) but with the being-there of the question itself. Unfortunately it will be necessary to curtail this discussion here to get straight to the main point of relevance: questioning (real questioning) requires attunement, and it is attunement that (in typical Heideggerian counter-intuitive fashion) produces and is the product of *solitude*. As he observes, it is precisely our attunement that renders us as individuals “*inaccessible*” (Heidegger, 1995, p. 66): both to ourselves and to others. As Heidegger insists (in a riposte to any psychoanalysts who might be reading) attunement is neither conscious or unconscious but must be left to “awaken” in a manner that concerns neither the interiority or the exteriority of the subject.

[...] attunement imposes itself on everything. It is *not* at all “inside” in some interiority, only to appear in the flash of an eye: but for this reason it is *not at all outside either*. (Heidegger, 1995, p. 66)

So, in much abbreviated form, this is how questioning and solitude are drawn together by Heidegger, just as Blanchot will do something similar with affirmation and solitude.

On the face of it Hannah Arendt posits a comparable distinction between loneliness and solitude. But it is the fundamental *difference* of her account that might help clarify the radically new space Heidegger is working to open up and become attuned to. In *The Life of the Mind* Arendt writes the following:

Thinking, existentially speaking, is a solitary but not a lonely business; solitude is that human condition in which I keep myself company. Loneliness comes about when I am alone without being able to split up into the two-in-one, without being able to keep myself company [...]. Nothing perhaps indicates more strongly that man exists *essentially* in the plural than that his solitude actualizes his merely being conscious of himself [...] into a duality during the thinking activity. It is this *duality* of myself with myself that makes thinking a true activity, in which I am both the one who asks and who answers. Thinking can become dialectical and critical because it goes through this questioning and answering process. (Arendt, 1978, p.185)

The importance of this passage is that solitude is posited as a philosophical rather than a merely social category entangled in the vagaries of intersubjectivity. However, the fact remains that, for all of her familiarity with and admiration for Heidegger's thought, Arendt's conception of solitude continues to be inescapably metaphysical in its rooting of the plurality of inner dialogue in the Kantian account of aesthetic judgement and the radically non-Heideggerian *dialectics* of question and answer. Strangely then, Arendt's conception of solitude is both aesthetic and dialectical, the very things that Heidegger is so committed to *overcoming*.

Taking each of these —the aesthetic and the dialectical— in turn, compare the following remarks from Arendt's *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, which draws heavily on Kant's concept of aesthetic judgement, with what Heidegger has to say in his own *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*.

Critical thinking, while still a solitary business, does not cut itself off from "all others". To be sure, it still goes on in isolation, but by the force of imagination it makes the others present and thus moves in a space that is potentially public, open to all sides; in other words it adopts the position of Kant's world citizen. To think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains one's imagination to go visiting. (Arendt, 1981, p. 45)

The solitude Arendt is describing here is one that avoids loneliness through the introduction of a dialogical structure that provides a home (or a place to “visit” at least) for the inherently nomadic movement of the imagination. By following Kant in his deployment of the imagination as an intermediary between sense and understanding, and also casting this in the (similarly Kantian) terms of singularity and universality (private/public), she manages to forge a philosophical link between self and other that, while imaginary, is still capable of informing the “lived-experience” of human existence.

In his *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* Heidegger famously accuses Kant of shying away from the radical implications of his own conception of the imagination in such a way that human understanding is protected from its uncanny, unknown and inhuman root: indeed, the root of solitude.

This original, essential constitution of humankind, “rooted” in the transcendental power of the imagination, is the “unknown” into which Kant must have looked if he spoke of the “unknown root to us”, for the unknown is not that of which we simply know nothing. Rather, it is what pushes against us as something disquieting in what is known. (Heidegger, 1990, p. 110)

Contra Arendt, Heidegger is keen to emphasise the fact that, for him, the imagination is “without strings” and demonstrates a “peculiar non-connectedness to being” (Heidegger, 1990, p. 89) rendering it essentially “homeless”. Where she holds fast to the “critical” dimension of Kant’s thought, the thinking about thinking that requires the bifurcation of the self, thus allowing the reflective subject to “keep itself company”; and where she draws upon what she understands as his dialogical concept of aesthetic judgement, “the two-in-one of the soundless dialogue,” (Arendt, 1978, p. 193). Heidegger conceives of thinking as a radically solitary activity, something much less comforting, much less homely. This is how he presents it in the essay “Building Dwelling Thinking”:

What if man's homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the real plight of dwelling as the plight? Yet as soon as man gives thought to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer. Rightly considered and kept well in mind, it is the sole summons that calls mortals into their dwelling. (Heidegger, 1971b, p. 161).

Unlike Arendt's critical thinker who goes "visiting", thus taking up residence with an imagined other, Heidegger's dweller-thinker is always already in residence, already within (and ideally attuned to) the homelessness that is thinking itself. To learn to dwell within the homeless solitude of essential thought is not to be called by the dialogical other but, as we have seen before, is to be "drawn" or "called" into the *withdrawing* of Being—the abandonment of dialogue—a movement that can only be preserved by entering into its very uncanniness. Heidegger insists upon the *proximity* of the alien—the un-homeliness of the homely, the unfamiliarity of the familiar—so that, as he says, we feel disquiet as the unknown "pushes up against us". So, again we see here a distinction between loneliness and solitude, but one that has nothing to do with the absence or presence of dialogue. For Heidegger it is the homeless who, in their "misery", are lonely; while those who willingly dwell within the homelessness of imagining and thinking—who *affirm* it—are solitary.

In light of the above discussion, it might be useful, as a way of linking some of these thoughts together, to re-affirm this affirmation of solitude by means of a preliminary reversal of the question/answer binary. Where Heidegger positions solitude within the in-betweeness of the question, Blanchot (and here again he speaks as an artist) suggests that it is the affirmative nature of *answering* (prior to the question) that produces solitude. If this makes sense then Rudi Visker's confident assumption that "it is far better to have some unanswered questions than to have plenty of unquestioned answers" (Visker, 1999, p. 263) might itself prove to be an unquestioned answer.

To begin with, a passage from Blanchot's *The Infinite Conversation*: he is discussing the thought of Simone Weil:

[...] for her the answer always comes first, preceding every question and even every possibility of questioning: there is an answer, then another and then again another answer. These answers often do not coincide, and even profoundly contradict one another [...]; but she leaves them as they are, without seeming to renounce any of them, much less bring them into agreement. Affirming is often for Simone Weil a way of questioning or a way of testing [...]. The kind of invisible effort by which she seeks to efface herself in favour of certitude is all that remains in her of a will as she advances from affirmation to affirmation [...]. No one has doubted less than she did. (Blanchot, 1993, p. 108)

This is not a simple reversal of questioning and answering, it is, rather, a challenge to, if not an out and out subversion of, dialectical logic and the very dynamics of doubt. What is difficult to grasp here is the sense in which an answer can be prised free from a prior question and be allowed to stand on its own, in its own space where certitude rather than certainty is the key driver. The when? how? what? why? of questioning always opens out onto an interpersonal space where the desire for certainty inevitably draws the questioner into the dialogical orbit of the answerer, even if this is an interior dialogue as described by Arendt. The space opened by what we might call the affirmative logic of the answer is different to both the singularity of "loneliness" and the "two in one" of "solitude". Clearly, Blanchot's fascination with Simone Weil can partly be explained by the essential solitude her thought both articulates and affirms. And in particular it is the manner in which she affirms affirmation, with a certitude that both precedes and remains immune to the dialectical probing of the question and the questioner, that effaces the self and reduces the call and response to the "blank and monotone voice" (Blanchot, 1993, p. 108) that will "never yield inasmuch as impersonal truth is incapable of making concessions" (Blanchot, 1993, p.109). But above

all, certitude, and particularly the solitude that accompanies it, is not simply affirmed but is itself the very product of affirmation: pure affirmation *creates solitude*.

To *choose* loneliness is to take occupation of a pre-given space, one that seems to have cleared out the “they” but which hasn’t really, not least because it is a space specifically created *by* the “they” for the sole purpose of humanising solitude and consuming it as a lifestyle. Solitude, on the other hand, is not a choice but a de-cision, a cutting away from the either/or of loneliness or gregariousness, and with it a cutting away from the “I” that would choose this or that. Solitude is not a quality or characteristic of the individual “I” but an inescapable attribute of the artwork. But, and this is the essential point, as the creator (Blanchot) and the preserver (Heidegger and Blanchot) of the artwork, the impact of the work’s solitude on the artist demands a complete and constant re-thinking and re-doing of thinking and doing —as a *lived* moment— that can only be substantially experienced at the ontic level of “the they” and the subsequent psycho-dramas of the “lonely” ones. Naturally, these dramas need to be radically transformed in the light of the ontological predicament identified by the post aesthetic aesthetics being imagined here, but dramas they remain —without that it is hard to imagine how artworks could actually be produced. But, of course, that is not a philosophical issue; it is an artistic and aesthetic one. Artists are artists not because they ask and answer aesthetic questions but because they affirm the artwork, this affirmation is the answer that precedes all questioning. The affirmation of the work does not say that it is good or bad, right or wrong, happy or sad; it simply says “here it is”, or in Blanchot’s words: “What it says is exclusively this: that it is —and nothing more” (Blanchot, 1983, p. 22). As with Simone Weil, and to this extent she is an artist above all else, the affirmation of the work is the affirmation of a force that effaces the self or, as Blanchot describes it, a silence that “has its source in the effacement toward which the writer is drawn” (Blanchot, 1983, p. 27). Blanchot also considers the de-cisive force of art and,

once again, understands decision as an attribute of the artwork not of the artist. It is here that we begin to see more clearly the concatenation of decision, affirmation and solitude, not as stages in an aesthetic process but as the very source or being of art; for the artwork is, as Blanchot affirms, speaking of the predicament of the writer: “The very decision which dismisses him, cuts him off, makes of him a survivor, without work” (Blanchot, 1983, p. 24).

So to be clear, the artist does not decide to affirm the work which, in turn, dismisses that artist back into the solitude of worklessness: that is far too linear (and rather pointless). To begin with, the decision to affirm is already the affirmation of decision and, to repeat, decision is itself already the cutting away not only from the “they” but also from the “loner” who would avoid, but nevertheless belongs to the “they”. Solitude is not to be alone, it is to be without work, where worklessness (central to Blanchot’s thought) has nothing to do with lack of employment—the artist is well employed—but with the lack of a work. It is precisely not denial but, rather, the affirmation of the work that cuts it adrift from the artist.

But why would one *want* to affirm such solitude? Why would the artist *want* to end up a “survivor without work”? Perhaps the answer is implicit in the terminology; the survival of the artist is utterly dependent on the ability to escape the dubious totality of the work once the inevitable process of reification sets in. Where the “yes” and “no” of the creative process refers to the working of the work, the final affirmation affirms the work as “work” and thus dismisses the creator and welcomes the preserver. The greatest danger to the artist is the desire to hang onto the work and hold it within the fixity of the creative process, rather than allowing it to enter into the unfixity of preservation. Such a desire is dangerous because the collapsing of the artist and the artwork into one another sets up the familiar intentional and/or expressivist chiasmus that is responsible not only for obscuring what Heidegger would call the essence or origin of art, but also of trapping all thinking about art within the realms of the aesthe-

tic and the romantic/modernist metaphysics of loneliness⁵. The affirmation of art's inhuman incessancy releases the work into the movement of unconcealment/concealment that draws the (following/obedient) thinker behind it, but also releases the artist into the worklessness necessary to start work again. Only through the affirmation of this, the essential solitude, can the artist survive. But who is the survivor, what is survival? This raises again the question of the possibility and the nature of a post-Heideggerian art form; not one that ignores his thought but one that properly engages with it, *and survives*. This has been described throughout as a post-aesthetic aesthetics, not a return to one or other variant of humanist metaphysics, but rather the acknowledgement that, after witnessing such thinking, the artist cannot simply carry on in the same old way.

So, what changes? What can change? One thing is certain, the same *new* ways are as irrelevant to this discussion as the same *old* ones. This is not about old and new, then and now, which is why the widespread accusation (often by artists) that Heidegger is only concerned with the artistic masterpieces of the past are so wide of the mark. The "other beginning" of inceptual thinking does not require a "leap" backwards but a leap "*out of*", with the emphasis now very much placed upon the "outing" of thought and a trajectory that seeks the "Outside": the space between. As both Heidegger and Blanchot recognise in their different ways, this is the space that has *always* been occupied by the artist. A post-Heideggerian, post-aesthetic aesthetic does not create a new space, it *names* the space that the essential solitude of art creates, only to dismiss the artist (and the preserver) into it. What is new is the name, or the attempt to name, this space and the consequent re-consideration and re-figuration of all art work, past, present, future. Such work could not be thought without the philosopher, but it could not be made, thought and then remade without the artist.

⁵ Arnold Schoenberg and Adorno on Schoenberg being cases in point.

REFERENCES

- Arendt, H. (1978). *The Life of Mind, Willing/Thinking*, San Diego: Harcourt.
- Arendt, H. (1981). *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Blanchot, M. (1978). *Death Sentence*, L. Davis (Trans.) New York: Station Hill Press.
- Blanchot, M. (1983). *The Space of Literature*, A. Stock (Trans.) Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Blanchot, M. (1993). *The Infinite Conversation*, S. Hanson (Trans.) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time*, J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Trans.) (Oxford: Blackwell.
- Heidegger, M. (1971a). The Origin of the Work of Art, A. Hofstadter (Trans.). In *Poetry, Language, Truth*, New York: Harper Row.
- Heidegger, M. (1971b). Building Dwelling Building, A. Hofstadter (Trans.). In *Poetry, Language, Truth*, New York: Harper Row.
- Heidegger, M. (1971c). "...Poetically Man Dwells...", A. Hofstadter (Trans.). In *Poetry, Language, Truth*. New York: Harper Row.
- Heidegger, M. (1990). *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, R. Toft (Trans.) Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1995). *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World Finitude Solitude*, W. McNeill and N. Walker (Trans.) Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1999). *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, P. Emad and K. Maly (Trans.) Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Heidegger, M. (2006). *Mindfulness*, P. Emad and T. Kalary (Trans.) London: Continuum.
- Luhmann, N. (2000). *Art as a Social System*, E. Knodt (Trans.) Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Visker, R. (1999). *Truth and Singularity* Dordrecht: Kluwer.

SUN TZU dijo:

“Si eres hábil en el manejo del ejército,
lleva a tus hombres de la mano,
como si se tratase de una sola persona.
De ese modo no retrocederán”.

