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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on Martin Heidegger's discussion in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' of an observation of Albrecht Dürer's: "... art lies hidden within nature; he who can wrest it from her, has it".

Taking Dürer's insight and his use of the word "wrest" as a starting point, Heidegger analyses the meaning of the act of drawing. In taking issue with Dürer's account, he focuses on the German word *Riß*, which can mean, rift, tear, cleft or breach, but also, in seemingly paradoxical terms, sketch, design or outline. Heidegger identifies and teases out a deep-seated dynamic within the word *Riß* that reflects a profound complexity within the act of drawing.

The paper also examines Heidegger's opposition to the 'truth as correspondence' model or mainstream Western epistemology. Finally it asserts that Heidegger's treatment of the *Riß* provides the basis for a reassertion within art and design at HE level, of the epistemological significance of drawing.

**Key words:** Heidegger, drawing, epistemology, rift, design, *techne*.

### **Heidegger's Rift: The Epistemological Significance of Drawing**

For the Greeks art, too, is a knowing, a realization of truth, a revelation of what is itself, of what is, as up to then it had not been known. Only as form-giver does the human being learn the greatness of Being.

Martin Heidegger (in Harries, 2009. p. 140)

### **Introduction**

This paper focuses on a section of Martin Heidegger's essay "The Origin of the Work of Art". Heidegger's intention in this section is not to discuss drawing *per se*, drawing is presented rather as an archetypal artistic practice that facilitates his discussion of the nature of art making in general and its relationship to knowledge. The passage casts considerable light on the action of drawing and is of considerable relevance for research in the fields of fine art and design because of the light it sheds on the epistemological significance of the practice of drawing.

In analysing the dynamics of art-making Heidegger provides a powerful argument in support of the truth-claims of art relative to those more universally accepted paradigms of scientific and propositional truth. His insights provide much food for thought for our disciplines, with regard to research in art and design, particularly with regard to practice-based research at postgraduate level (this aspect will be revisited in the conclusion). They are also of relevance as a rebuff to the exclusivity of the broader Academy's assertion of scientific propositional-conceptual truth as the gold standard for the measurement of knowledge. Heidegger's argument lends a counterweight to attitudes to knowledge that have seen the disparagement of the truth claims of practice which in turn have led to the imposition of methods derived from the natural and social sciences onto research in our fields.

In the section of text in question, Heidegger considers, indeed plays with, the German word *Riß*, which has two senses or meanings, which include sketch, design and outline, but in a way that hints at a paradox, it also means: rift, tear, cleft or breach.

In his discussion Heidegger appears initially to defer to the authority of Dürer, but in progressing his argument he begins to take issue with the master draftsman. Through a series of reflections that pivot on the ambiguity of the *Riß* and its conflicting connotation, he forges a theory regarding the structure and significance of the "work" that comprises the art-making event. The contradictions inherent in the word *Riß* provide an entrée from where he traces the relationship between the act of drawing as a form of *techne*, an assisted bringing forth, and *poiesis* the overarching category of "bringing forth" which encompasses both *techne* and *physis* – something we along with Dürer would term nature, but what the Greeks understood as the "self-unfolding emergence" of things in general (Clark, 2002, p.32). We will revisit these categories later.

### The "rift-design"

The key passage, containing this reference to Dürer referred to above is worthy of quotation at some length:

Someone who was bound to know what he was talking about, Albrecht Dürer, did after all make the well-known remark: "For in truth, art lies hidden within nature; he who can wrest it from her, has it." "Wrest" [*Reissen*] here means to draw out the rift [*Riss*] and to draw the design [*Riss*] with the drawing-pen [*Reissfeder*] on the drawing-board [*Reissbrett*]. But we at once raise the counterquestion: how can the rift-design be drawn out if it is not brought into the Open by the creative sketch as a rift, which is to say, brought out beforehand as a conflict of measure and unmeasure? True, there lies hidden in nature a rift-design, a measure and a boundary and, tied to it, a capacity for bringing forth – that is, art. But it is equally certain that this art hidden in nature becomes manifest only through the work, because it lies originally in the work (my emphasis).

(Heidegger in Farrell Krell, 1993, p. 195)

Heidegger's method of analysis typically hangs on a play with words, specifically with the intriguing range of meanings of the *Riß*. He asserts its virtue as a two-sided coin – the "rift-design". Apart from those outlined by Heidegger above many other compound German words relating to the processes of design and drawing contain the word *Riß* as a root or element, including floorplan (*Grundriss*), elevation (*Aufriss*), and outline (*Umriss*) in the sense of drawing but also, significantly, writing. Heidegger identifies and teases out a deep-seated dynamic within the word *Riß* that reflects a profound complexity within the act of drawing.

At first glance this elucidation of the *Riß* cum "rift-design" seems counterintuitive in the sense that what appears an archetypical creative and thereby essentially positive action – drawing or designing – is associated with the destructive even violent connotations which adhere to terms like rift, tear, cleft or breach. In the original German these contrasts are exploited to an extent that to a degree eludes translation. In untangling this conundrum Heidegger uncovers and explores what he sees as the primordial meaning of the act of drawing.

## Measure and unmeasure

Through his "counterquestion" Heidegger challenges what he sees as Dürer's ontologically shallow account that "art lies hidden within nature". While he concedes that Dürer may be on to something, he sees this account as rooted in a jaded metaphysics. In pondering the duality of the "rift-design" Heidegger suggests that art, like truth, is to be found not in 'nature' as such, but in a more primal source. The "truth" which the drawing as artwork embodies, is part and parcel of, a primal "strife" emanating from the antagonism between "measure and unmeasure" which relates to the terms "world" and "earth" respectively.

For Heidegger drawing is a breaking, a breaking of new ground, but at the same time it is also a measuring. When we set down a line on the unblemished ground we sense this. An essential point for Heidegger however, and one that has implications for the place of drawing in the academic order of things, is that drawing is a measuring of the unmeasured, indeed the ultimately immeasurable.

This process of knowing is in marked contrast with science, which Heidegger characterises as "the anticipation of the essence of things... [whereby] the basic blueprint of the structure of every thing and its relation to every other thing is sketched in advance" (Heidegger in Farrell Krell, 1993. p. 292). The act of drawing is a different order. It represents a measurement in the service of the comprehension of the essentially unfathomable process, which of its nature, cannot pretend to be exhaustive. Scientific knowledge by contrast is founded in "formal logic", which has elsewhere been described as providing a "schema of the calculability of the world" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1997, p. 7).

## World and earth

When Heidegger uses the term 'world' he does so to signify the sum total of the experiences and relationships encountered in *Dasein* or being-in-the-world, as Young explains, 'world' is "what, to us, is intelligible. ... the horizon of all our horizons [...] the 'thrownness' in which one finds oneself 'already' as one becomes an adult..."(Young, 2002, p. 8). There is an important point here regarding the nature of truth and its relationship to 'world' and 'earth'. Truth here can never be absolute, measurement can only occur within the encompassing horizon of what is intelligible or knowable for us as *Dasein*.

'Earth' from which 'world' stands out, comprises much that is unknowable. Farrell Krell suggests the dynamic of the relationship of 'world' to 'earth' in the context of the work of art:

... the work [of art] erects a *world* which in turn opens a space for man and things; but this distinctive openness rests on something more stable and enduring than any world, i.e., the all-sheltering *earth*.  
(Farrell Krell, 1993, p. 141)

If 'world', as Young (Young, 2002, p. 9) puts it, is "the intelligible in truth that which is 'lit up'" for us, then earth represents "the dark penumbra of unintelligibility" the "originating region" out of which, to borrow Heidegger's phrase, the "world worlds" (Figal, 2009, p 266). Earth has connotations of matrix or womb, both nourishing and sheltering as well as "dark" and unfathomable. Earth is, moreover, inherent in all becoming or happening. This is best understood in terms of a dynamic, because "earth" also represents "...a withdrawing into concealment" (in Robertson, 1984, p. 245). A drawing or any other work of art is never in Heidegger's view completely extricated from the

'earth' into the 'world' but shimmers in the breach. It is this that lends uncanny depth to powerful works of art – the sense that they always contain something more that they may yet yield up. It explains why a great drawing, for instance, rewards repeated revisiting. This breach or rift is the site and occasion of "truth" in both art and language, where truth literally happens.

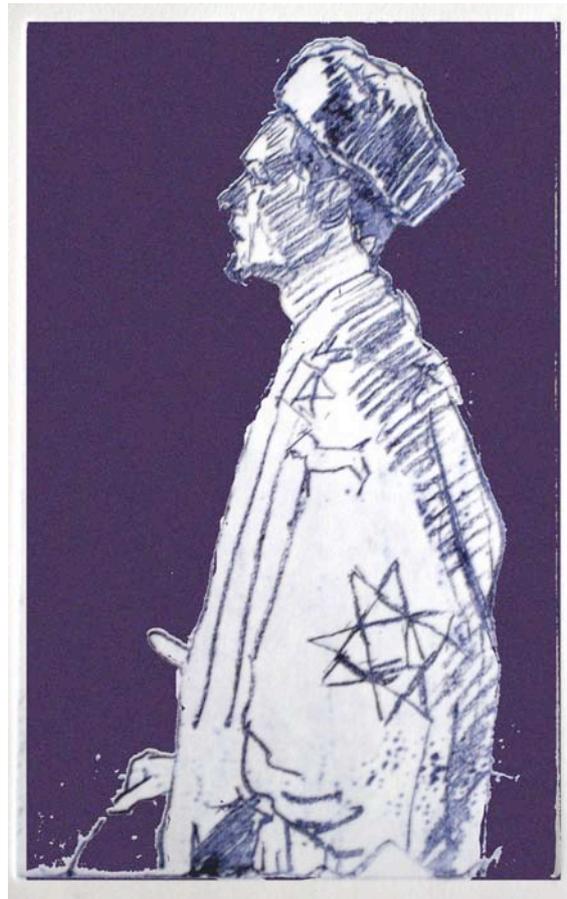
### **Drawing as strife**

A point of particular interest is Heidegger's highlighting of the "conflict" at the heart of the act of drawing. The rift-design itself embodies a kind of necessary violence in bringing the drawing as artwork "into the Open". This conflict – between "world" and "earth" represents a "battle" (Cited: Harries, 2009, p. 120). It is a battle familiar to everyone who has ever strived to set down the 'right' mark or line. The poet Samuel Beckett bears witness to this strife in his poem, describing artist Avigdor Arikha's process of drawing:

Siege laid again to the impregnable without. Eye and hand fevering  
after the unself. By the hand it unceasingly changes the eye  
unceasingly changed. Back and forth the gaze beating against  
unseeable and unmakeable. Truce for a space and the marks of what it  
is to be and be in face of. Those deep marks to show.

(Samuel Beckett in Thomson, 1994, p. 62)

This notion of a struggle to open up a space resounds with the experience of practitioners, testifying to the depth of Heidegger's insight.



Tom McGuirk, *Moonstruck*, etching and aquatint, 30 x 20cm. 1994.

## The rift-design enigma

Another noteworthy aspect of the *rift-design* concept relates to the twin connotations within the English word "drawing": the passive noun – 'drawing' as artwork/object – and the active sense of drawing-as-verb, in terms of work/process. In his wordplay Heidegger focuses on a similar complexity of the term "work of art" in the essay's title. He playfully differentiates and by turns, conflates these meanings. In doing so, he highlights how in a holistic sense these passive and active senses are conjoined within words like 'work' and 'drawing'. This is particularly significant point because conventional metaphysics forgets the active sense. Heidegger's motive is to first illuminate and then undermine this bias, which he critiques in Dürer's account that, "he who can *wrest* it [art] from her [nature], *has* it". This account betrays an attitude of dominion, indeed domination toward truth, nature and art. Heidegger typically counters with the suggestion of a more active engaged attitude characterised by care and circumspection.

It is important to note in this context that Heidegger forcefully asserts drawing and other forms of art making as *techne* – a kind of knowledge. He points out that from the earliest Greek period, *techne* was associated with *episteme*: "both words are names for knowing in the widest sense" (Heidegger, 1977, p. 13). He says of both terms that:

They mean to be entirely at home in something, to understand it and be expert in it. Such knowledge provides an opening up. As an opening up it is a revealing. (Heidegger, 1977, p. 13)

Art, and for that matter truth, are not then as Dürer supposes a pre-existing passive entities hidden in nature that the artist simply seeks out and *grasps*. That view represents the "knowledge-as-dominion" attitude to truth characterised and critiqued by John Dewey in a memorable analogy whereby knowledge is compared with a commodity "in a warehouse", the idea that: "truth exists ready-made somewhere" (Dewey, 2010, p. 225).

Writing in 1876 Konrad Fiedler (1978), presents a precursor to such understandings in maintaining that:

... art has nothing to do with forms that are found ready-made prior to its activity and independent of it. Rather, the beginning and the end of artistic activity reside in the creation of forms which only thereby attain existence. What art creates is no second world alongside the other world which has an existence without art; what art creates is the world, made by and for the artistic consciousness. (Fiedler, 1978, p. 48)

In Heidegger's view, the truth inherent in the artwork becomes manifest only *through* the "work" in a sense that foregrounds "work" (doing and making) – understood in terms of *techne* as a bringing forth which integrates the artwork-as-object within a *process* of revealing that constitutes the "work of art". Heidegger's intention is to shift the emphasis away from the metaphysics of dominion, which envisages both art and knowledge as passive objects or motifs to be "wrested" from nature, *grasped* and "had", fixed in the case of art as an equally passive and inert object as art-piece. On the contrary Heidegger insists in this section of the text, that "it ... is certain that this art hidden in nature becomes manifest only through the work, because it lies originally in the work" (Heidegger in Farrell Krell, 1993, p. 195). Both the passive and active senses of the term "work" are implied here, a poetic means of emphasising that the "work of art" as artwork embodies doing, making and knowing, which in a holistic sense constitute

the *work* of art.

In *Being and Time*, (originally published 1928) Heidegger has already objected to the notion of knowledge as dominion, conquest or possession, favouring instead an emphasis on action, participation, application, and care. He insists "the kind of care that manipulates things and puts them to use... has its own kind of knowledge" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 95). He employs an interesting metaphor to criticise this dominant attitude in conventional Western epistemology:

...the perceiving of what is known is not a process of returning with one's booty to the 'cabinet' of consciousness after one has gone out and grasped it. (Heidegger, 1962, p. 89).

The objective distance of Cartesian method is limiting, he tells us, because there is a "deficiency" in knowledge when it is at a remove from things – when it "holds back" from "producing and manipulating and the like" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 88). Heidegger's complex, holistic understanding is that drawing as a paradigmatic *techne*, integrates, these active, practical and care-full dimensions within the "work" of "uncovering" truth that generates knowledge.

### ***Techne, physis and poiesis***

Heidegger suggests that Dürer intuited, but could not understand, the nature of the strife involved in drawing. Dürer's miscomprehension is, as we have seen, grounded in an imperious metaphysics. To counter this, Heidegger presents an alternative schema based on a Greek model. In this schema – referred to earlier – drawing as *techne* (aided bringing forth) is merely a subcategory of the broader overarching category of *poiesis* (bringing forth). This can be difficult for us to comprehend, in that it runs against the grain of Western metaphysics. What Dürer calls 'nature' cannot, for Heidegger, be the source of art and truth, because nature or *physis* as the Greeks understood it (unaided bringing forth) is merely a subcategory of the ultimate category *poiesis* (bringing forth). Heidegger objects to the commonplace assumption, shared by Dürer, that nature is, or can be, the bedrock of knowledge. This – the still dominant epistemological paradigm – sees everything as finding its cause in nature so that in searching for the truth of art, Dürer the artist-scientist, naturally looks there. Heidegger asserts that nature (unaided bringing forth) is however merely an instance or manifestation of the primal ontological category of *poiesis*. Why is this significant? Because Heidegger's schema alters the epistemological, as well as the ontological, order that supports this dominant paradigm. The knowledge-as-dominion paradigm evident in Dürer's account is characterised by stasis (the stance also critiqued by Dewey).

Heidegger suggests that truth and art belong intrinsically to far more *dynamic processes* of coming into presence of and bringing forth. Art is "the *happening* of truth", an aided bringing forth – part of the greater dynamic of *poiesis*. In this view, nature and art are on a par. Both are forms of *poiesis*, a bringing forth of beings. If science looks to nature for its validation, then the processes and practices of art have no less a claim on truth. George Steiner characterises Heidegger's understanding of the early Greek concept of these relationships thus:

... [as a] "coming into radiant being" ... *Physis* proclaimed the same process of creation that generates a work of art. It is in the best sense *poiesis* – a making, a bringing forth. The blossom breaking from the bud and unfolding into its proper being ... is, at once, the realization of

*physis* and of *poiesis*, of organic drive – Dylan Thomas's "green fuse" [...] Originally, *techne* had its pivotal place in this complex of meanings and perceptions. It also sprang from an understanding of the primacy of natural forms and from the cardinal Greek insight that all "shaping," all construction of artifacts, is a focused knowing. (Steiner, 1987, p. 137)

Steiner's is an eloquent account of Heidegger's rehabilitation of *techne* and the truth claims of art.

Heidegger sets of such truth – revealed in the more primordial *process*, the uncovering of truth that the Greeks called *aletheia* – on an equal, if not higher footing than scientific truth whose veracity rests on mere correctness or correspondence.

### **Aletheia**

The Greek word *aletheia*, un-concealment, is a compound comprising the privative alpha "a" and "*lethe*", meaning 'concealment'. The concept of concealment is thus inherent within the term. As Heidegger puts it "truth is un-truth, insofar as there belongs to it the reservoir of the not-yet-revealed, the un-uncovered, in the sense of concealment" (Heidegger, 1977, p. 185). Therefore our attitude to truth must take account of this dark concealed region. *Aletheia* cannot be simplistically "equated with truth", it is rather the "Opening" which "first grants the possibility of truth", (Farrell Krell, 1993, p. 446). *Aletheia* then represents something primordial, the ground or necessary condition for truth as correspondence or truth as correctness. Scientific truth, so fetishized in our era, is in this view secondary.

Heidegger questions the 'truth as correspondence' paradigm that he associates with Science. The imperious attitude regarding art, truth, nature and knowledge, inherited from Roman culture, presents nature as *the* sovereign source of *all* truth – nature – which ironically we in turn subdue. Truth, in Heidegger's view is not however a matter of mere correctness or adequacy in terms of agreement with phenomena encountered in nature:

Truth means today and has long meant the conformity of knowledge with the matter. [...] How can the matter show itself if it cannot itself stand forth out of concealment, if it does not itself stand in the unconcealed? A proposition is true by conforming to the unconcealed, to what is true. Propositional truth is always, and always exclusively, this correctness. The critical concepts of truth which, since Descartes, start out from truth as certainty, are merely variations of the definition of truth as correctness. The essence of truth which is familiar to us – correctness in representation – stands and falls with truth as unconcealment of beings.

(In Farrell Krell, 1993, p. 176-177)

Heidegger again turns on its head the ontological and epistemological doctrine that tends to privilege scientific knowledge over knowledge gained through the experience of art.

### **Conclusion**

Heidegger by his "counterquestion" dismantles Dürer's conventional metaphysical account. His alternative structural schema rejects the established epistemological order – copper-fastened in Descartes. That order elevates *physis*

as nature – viewed as the ultimate source of knowledge – over *techne*, and either replaces *poiesis* with God (as Descartes does), or disregards *poiesis* altogether, as we find in more recent metaphysics.

So why is this so significant for our understanding of drawing? Its significance lies in Heidegger's rehabilitation of the truth claims of *techne* specifically in the context of drawing, which provides a counterweight to the disparagement of practice (including the practices of drawing) that we witness in attempts to impose upon research in art and design paradigms of knowledge either borrowed from the natural and social sciences, or which valorise propositional truth in the form of theory over and above practice. If we adopt such a stance, then according to Heidegger (1962, pp. 88-89), we adopt a "viewpoint in advance from the entity which it encounters" a viewpoint represented by the objective distance of the Cartesian method. Moreover we thereby accept a detached way of being in the world whereby we are merely, "tarrying alongside", concerned with mere representation or how things look". Heidegger contrasts this with the kind of knowing which truly belongs to *Dasein* or "being-in-the world", a situated and engaged knowing (Heidegger 1962, pp. 88-89).

Heidegger's core concept, *Dasein*, implies just such a stance. As Feenberg explains, "human beings, called "*Dasein*" by Heidegger can only be understood as always already involved in a world ... The things of the world are revealed to *Dasein* as they are encountered in use... (Feenberg, 2005, p. 2). Just as with Dewey knowledge for Heidegger entails and implies action and application, in Dewey's words, knowledge should be "of avail" (Dewey, 2010, p. 227)

The tension outlined above between fundamentally different ways of regarding knowledge, is also evident within the discourses that attend the emergence of the PhD degree in the fields of art and design. These discourses expose anxieties about what *research*, as well as *new knowledge* might mean in this context. These anxieties elicit questions regarding the relationship of practices, like the practice of drawing, to knowledge.

Such anxieties are in turn reflected in official policy, as evidenced, for example, in Fiona Candlin's (2000) critique of the UKCGE report (Frayling et al. 1997): *Practice-Based Doctorates in the Creative and Performing Arts and Design*, specifically its stance regarding practice-based PhDs. She characterizes the report as placing "academic research in opposition to practice generally and artwork specifically, maintain[ing] the stereotype of art as *anti-intellectual* and forget[ting] the degree to which theory is itself a practice". Moreover it in this way it "privileges theory over artwork since it is the theoretical component of the doctorate that gives the work PhD standing". This has the effect of "outlaw[ing] those candidates whose doctoral research is practice only" and of making "the place of art practice an ambivalent one within doctoral study" (Cadlin, 2000, pp. 97-99).

Heidegger's account as outlined above is of pertinence here in that it counters the dualism at the heart of such disputes in a number of ways. By framing *techne* as a mode of knowing, Heidegger's stance vindicates the truth claims of art-practises like drawing. In positing and asserting truth as *aletheia* (un-concealment) it effectively challenges the hegemony, within the broader academy, of the truth-as-correspondence paradigm that privileges both propositional truth (in terms of theory) as well as scientific truth, over and above truth as revealed by such modes of knowing.

By contesting Dürer's account, Heidegger negates the traditionalist metaphysical knowledge-as-dominion model, that militates against a recognition that practice – embodied for example in drawing – is an integral part of the “becoming and happening of truth” (Heidegger in Farrell Krell, 1993, p. 196) that constitutes the ‘work’ of art.

Fiedler, extending his argument in the 1876 text (cited above), writes the following:

And so it is that art does not deal with some materials which somehow have already become the mental possession of man; that which has already undergone some mental process is lost to art. Because art itself is a process by which the mental possessions of man are immediately enriched (Fiedler, 1978, p. 48).

This recognition of the truth-establishing, knowledge-giving potential of art is reflected in Heidegger's understanding.

Drawing is not, as Dürer would have it, a *wresting* of truth in the form of art from recalcitrant nature. Though truth emerges from the strife of drawing, it is no pre-existing “readymade” entity to be wrested and grasped. The truth that drawing uncovers is of another order – it is not seized but revealed, because in the act of setting down a line, a breach is made by which a world is, in Heideggerian terms, both opened and set forth.

## **Coda**

Recently Irit Rogoff (2010, online) has asserted the need for radical re-evaluation of status of “artistic knowledge” within academia. In her call we hear an echo of both Heidegger and Dewey's epistemological stance – outlined above – in terms of recognition that knowledge is innately concerned with application, her insight has, as she puts it:

...a great deal to do with what I ... learned from my experiences in the art world, which were largely a set of permissions around knowledge and a recognition of its performative faculties – that knowledge *does* rather than *is*”.

Rogoff suggests furthermore that because of this, “artistic knowledge” has the potential to remain “unframed” from mainstream “knowledge conventions” and the attendant “commodification of knowledge” within the university. Rogoff's perceptions strike a Heideggerian note in proposing an epistemology that rejects the ‘knowledge-as-dominion’ paradigm, which Heidegger too diagnoses as symptomatic of a broader drive toward an overarching “enframing”.

This is a reprise of Heidegger's call (Heidegger, 1977 pp. 30-35) for resistance to “Enframing”. At the heart of this resistance Heidegger envisages the “saving power” of precisely the kind of art – the kind of *techne* – that drawing, as outlined above represents.

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