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The Decision and the earth Heidegger's post-foundational aesthetics

Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between “earth” and “decision” in Heidegger’s philosophy and their role in the development of a post-foundational aesthetics. It begins with an analysis of resoluteness and situatedness in Being and Time, traces the reinterpretation of decision after the Kehre, and finally turns to Heidegger’s aesthetics, arguing that earth acts as a force of resistance, ensuring that every decision and grounding of meaning remains finite, situated, and revisable.

Keywords

Heidegger; Earth; Decision

Received: 16/03/2025

Approved: 12/05/2025

Editing by: Alessandro Agostini

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1. Introduction

This paper pursues two interrelated objectives. First, it examines the conceptual relationship between “earth” and “decision” in Heidegger’s philosophy of art. Second, it explores how the category of decision can offer a productive interpretive key to Heidegger’s effort to develop a post-metaphysical aesthetics. I argue that the distinctive operativity of earth within the work of art is essential for Heidegger’s overcoming of the foundationalist framework of metaphysical aesthetics and for reconceiving art as the continuous emergence of ever-new – and never final – shared horizons of meaning.

This approach yields several important theoretical gains. First, it brings to light the centrality of the lexicon of *decision* in *The Origin of the Work of Art* – an aspect that has received relatively little attention in the secondary literature. Second, it offers a new interpretive entry point into one of the most important yet elusive concepts in Heidegger’s philosophical and aesthetic vocabulary: that of *earth*. Third, a post-foundational approach makes it possible to read Heidegger’s notion of *earth* beyond its more conservative or nationalist interpretations. Instead, *earth* can be understood as a conceptual force that opens Heidegger’s aesthetics to a post-metaphysical, post-modern, contingent, and pluralistic framework – one that recent literature has increasingly sought within Heidegger’s thought, yet without emphasizing the pivotal role that *earth* can play in this direction.

Before delving into the main discussion, it is useful to outline some interpretative and methodological premises to better clarify my objective and approach in this paper.

From an interpretative point of view, I will engage with recent discussions on Heidegger’s aesthetics. Broadly speaking, this paper aligns with the “paradigm shift” introduced by Thomas Sheehan in *Making Sense of Heidegger* (2015), particularly regarding Heidegger’s central question – the question of Being. Like Sheehan, I interpret the problem of Being as the problem of the structures through which we make sense of the world, ourselves, and things. However, I place greater emphasis than Sheehan on the idea that these structures are not merely cognitive but also experiential. In this regard, the notion of “earth”, with its material and situated character, plays a key role. The work of art, by instigating the strife between earth and world, establishes a structure of experiential-existential intelligibility that I call a “horizon of meaning”, understood primarily as a horizon of meaningful experience.

Another important reference for this paper is Iain Thomson's (2011) "postmodern" reading of Heidegger's aesthetics. Here, "postmodern" is understood in its literal sense – as that which follows modernity and critically engages with it. Since, for Heidegger, the guiding principle of modern metaphysics is the principle of reason – according to which something can truly be only if it is founded in an indubitable foundation – a postmodern perspective necessarily entails a post-foundational approach. Rethinking Heidegger's aesthetics from this standpoint means conceiving the event of art not as *the* absolute grounding of truth, not even as *the* truth of Being. Rather, it entails recognizing that art, each time anew, brings forth *a* historically situated truth, establishing the contingent horizon of meaning within which a historical people dwell. More than Thomson, however, I will argue that *earth* plays a pivotal role in a postmodern interpretation of Heidegger's aesthetics. Indeed, as ineliminable opacity resistant to the world's decision, *earth* sustains the possibility of instituting ever-new horizons of meaning and experience – thus ensuring that the artwork can ground a historical world without collapsing into a closed, totalizing foundation¹.

Regarding the interpretation of the notion of earth, my primary references will be the phenomenological interpretations of Welsch (1991) and Sallis (2008). I will argue that only a phenomenological approach can adequately account for the distinctive way earth operates within the work of art – exerting its force precisely by withdrawing and resisting the world's decisional activity. This resistance, however, is not a negation of meaning but rather the condition that prevents its closure, allowing the artwork to remain an open site for the emergence of plural and situated horizons of sense.

Finally, from a methodological point of view, I argue for a continuity between the so-called "first" Heidegger, up to *Being and Time*, and the Heidegger after the *Kehre*. This continuity, however, does not imply identity. While there are significant differences between his early writings, the unpublished treatises of the 1930s, and the essay *The Origin of the Work*

¹ To avoid confusion, it is important to reiterate from the outset that the "grounding" at stake here should not be understood in the metaphysical sense of securing an ultimate or indubitable foundation. Rather, it refers to a contingent, historically situated act through which the truth of Being emerges and becomes momentarily effective – without thereby exhausting its potential or foreclosing future possibilities. To underscore this distinction, throughout the paper I will use "founding" or "foundation" to refer to the metaphysical securing of Being, while I will use "ground" and "grounding" to designate Heidegger's post-metaphysical, historically contingent thought.

of Art, I contend that Heidegger's guiding question remains fundamentally unchanged. His inquiry into Being as a structure of meaning continues to shape his philosophical trajectory, even as his later thought places greater emphasis on historicity, community, language, and art.

This continuity is not meant as a linear or developmental claim about Heidegger's intellectual evolution, but rather as a conceptual coherence that can be reconstructed across distinct moments of his thinking. It is especially relevant to the theme of decision, which Heidegger had already explored in *Being and Time* and which returns – with modifications – in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. Tracing both the elements of continuity and innovation, I argue, is crucial to understanding why Heidegger now links decision to the interplay of earth and world as the setting-itself-into-work of the truth of Being. This methodological orientation will also help clarify how the aesthetic function of the artwork – as a site where the truth of Being comes to happen – rests on a structure of decision that remains operative throughout Heidegger's thought.

With these interpretative and methodological premises established, this paper will proceed as follows. The first part offers an analysis of the theme of decision in *Being and Time*, focusing on the concept of resoluteness – its distinction from mere choice, and its relation to the projective and situated structure of *Dasein's* existence. The second part examines how the lexicon of resoluteness is transformed after the *Kehre*, tracing the emergence of the notion of “decision” in Heidegger's unpublished treatises of the 1930s, particularly in *Contributions to Philosophy*. Rather than attempting a comprehensive reconstruction of Heidegger's development, the goal is to identify a conceptual thread that runs through these phases. The third and most important section analyzes the notion of decision in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, with special attention to how Heidegger links world and earth to the dynamics of decision. Finally, the conclusion draws together the results of the analysis to clarify in what sense Heidegger's aesthetics may be understood as post-foundational – grounded in a dynamic of decision that resists finality while enabling historical intelligibility through art.

2. *Resoluteness and situatedness in Being and Time*

As mentioned, the first part of this paper focuses on *Being and Time*, which serves as the *locus classicus* for Heidegger's analysis of decision. Beginning with *Being and Time* is particularly relevant, as it demonstrates

how Heidegger establishes a direct link between decision and the interplay of *Dasein's* projective structure and existential situatedness. This conceptual connection will later prove crucial for understanding how Heidegger links decision to the dynamic between earth and world in *The Origin of the Work of Art*.

At this stage, Heidegger designates fundamental decision with the term “resoluteness” and elaborates on it primarily in Division II, Chapter 2 of *Being and Time*, titled “The Attestation of Da-sein of an Authentic Potentiality-for-Being and Resoluteness” (Heidegger 1996: 247)².

Heidegger approaches the problem of resoluteness with the aim of finding the “phenomenal demonstration” of the “authentic potentiality-of-being of Da-sein”. This demonstration is crucial because, for Heidegger, *Dasein* is, for the most part, not authentically itself but instead conforms to the anonymous influence of “the they [*das Man*]”. As a result, *Dasein* exists in a state of “lostness in the they [*Verlorenheit in das Man*]” (Heidegger 1996: 247).

This state of lostness has a direct impact on the theme of decision. Heidegger writes: “With the lostness in the they, the nearest, factual potentiality-of being of Da-sein has always already been decided upon – tasks, rules, standards, the urgency and scope of being-in-the-world, concerned and taking care of things” (Heidegger 1996: 247-8). Furthermore, Heidegger continues, “the they even conceals the way it has silently disburdened Da-sein of the explicit *choice* of these possibilities” (Heidegger 1996: 248). Not only does *Dasein* not decide, but it is not even aware that the most significant aspects of its being-in-the-world are not decided by any defined individual but rather by an abstract set of norms and standards that present themselves as eternal, natural, and unchangeable.

In response to *Dasein's* everyday, inauthentic mode of being and its lack of genuine decision-making, Heidegger seeks an attestation of an “authentic potentiality-of-being”. For Heidegger, this attestation involves a fundamental reclaiming of the very possibility of choice:

When Da-sein thus brings itself back from the they, the they-self is modified in an existentiell manner so that it becomes *authentic* being-one's-self. This must be

² Although themes related to resoluteness can be traced back to Heidegger's earliest courses and letters (see Crowe 2021: 641-2), he introduced the term *Entschlossenheit* in 1924 as a translation of the Aristotelian concept *prohairesis*. For Heidegger's relationship to Aristotle, see, of course, Volpi (2010) and the recent issue of “Logoi” (X, 24-5) dedicated to the 1924 lecture course. More specifically on the notion of resoluteness, in addition to the already cited Crowe (2021), see also Blattner (2013).

accomplished by *making up for not choosing*. But making up for not choosing signifies *choosing to make this choice* – deciding for a potentiality-of-being, and making this decision from one's own self. In choosing to make this choice, *Da-sein makes possible*, first and foremost, its authentic potentiality-of-being. (Heidegger 1996: 248)

Resoluteness is thus essential for *Dasein* to attain authenticity. By committing to choose, *Dasein* takes ownership of its decisions and engages existentially with the possibilities it projects. Resoluteness, therefore, is not primarily defined by the specific content of the choice but by (a) the *manner* in which the choice is made and (b) the *scope* it encompasses. The key existential distinction between resoluteness and mere choice lies in the fact that resoluteness involves (a) a *first-person* commitment to choosing, and (b) *Dasein's* engagement with its entire *potentiality-of-being*.

Heidegger provides a comprehensive definition of resoluteness in §60, describing it as “the reticent projecting oneself upon one's ownmost being-guilty which is ready for Angst” (Heidegger 1996: 273). This definition is particularly relevant to this paper, as it clearly illustrates how resoluteness articulates the interplay of (1) existential projection and (2) situated embeddedness in *Dasein's* authentic existence – thus anticipating the later dynamic between world and earth that underlies Heidegger's aesthetics.

(1) Let us begin with the projective character of resoluteness, which helps us highlight two key aspects.

(1a) First, it clarifies that resoluteness is never an abstract or theoretical deliberation among equivalent possibilities. Rather, it is a form of existential disclosure – an opening through which possibilities for meaningful experience are projected and made available to *Dasein*.

(1b) The second aspect concerns the *breadth* of this projection: resoluteness is not about selecting one particular object or course of action, but about embracing an entire potentiality-of-being. In doing so, *Dasein* gains access to a world – that is, to the totality of meaningful relations disclosed through its existential projection. Moreover, since *Dasein's* being-in-the-world is always already a matter of care and practical engagement with innerworldly beings, the projective dimension of resoluteness, in opening up a world, simultaneously bestows meaning upon the things within it. Resoluteness is thus not confined to *Dasein's* self-projection but extends to the meaningful articulation of the world in which *Dasein* dwells.

(2) Complementary to the projectuality of resoluteness is its situatedness. Heidegger explicitly states: “As authentic being a self, resoluteness does not detach Da-sein from its world, nor does it isolate it as a free floating ego” (Heidegger 1996: 274). Resoluteness does not occur in a vacuum; rather, it is always already embedded within an existing being-in-the-world, for the most part shaped by the abstract norms and structures of “the they”. This implies that “resolution is precisely the disclosive projection and determination of the actual *factical* possibility” (Heidegger 1996: 275, my italics). *Dasein* is neither an omnipotent God nor an agent operating in a void. On the contrary, the potentialities-of-being through which *Dasein* enacts its resoluteness do not form an infinite array of abstract possibilities but are concretely determined by the specific situation in which *Dasein* always already finds itself. These are indeed possibilities, open to freedom, yet they are simultaneously factual and situated – contingent upon the existential conditions that frame *Dasein*’s being. The projection enacted by *Dasein* in resoluteness is thus a situated and thrown counter-movement, one through which *Dasein* comes to grasp its own situatedness and, at the same time, makes the situation its own.

Heidegger further captures this paradoxical interplay between situatedness and freedom in resoluteness through the notion of *guilt*. As he elaborates extensively in § 59, guilt is not to be understood in an ontic or moral sense but as the very mode of being of *Dasein* – its inherent *having-to-be*, which constitutes its fundamental ontological trait. As Crowe explains, “At the deepest level, *Dasein* is guilty in that it is subject to the claim or requirement of being *Dasein*” (Crowe 2021: 643). In other words, *Dasein*’s existence is not determined by an inescapable destiny but is instead defined by its *freedom* – and, consequently, its *responsibility* – to project a horizon of meaning *for itself*. Although always already thrown into a definite situation, *Dasein* remains continually called to *be*, to enact its own *potentiality-of-being*. Its being is not a given datum but a performative act through which it succeeds, time and again, in existing authentically. It is in this sense that Heidegger, in his previously cited definition of resoluteness, describes it as “the reticent projecting oneself *upon one’s ownmost being-guilty* which is ready for *Angst*” (Heidegger 1996: 273, my italics). In this way, guilt grounds the necessity of decision not in any external norm, but in *Dasein*’s own being – an ontological structure that calls for constant, situated acts of self-appropriation.

The final aspect of Heidegger’s definition that remains to be analyzed concerns *Angst*. Resoluteness is “ready for *Angst*” because *Angst*, by disrupting the everyday complacency of “the they”, individualizes *Dasein* and

enables it to grasp its own having-to-be. Consequently, the fundamental mood of resoluteness – revealed through Angst – is precisely “the uncanniness of its [*Dasein*’s] individuation” (Heidegger 1996: 272)³. The uncanniness of resoluteness implies that no singular choice of a given potentiality-of-being exempts *Dasein* from the ongoing responsibility of having-to-be *its own* potentiality-of-being. One cannot delegate this decision to another – doing so would mean falling into inauthenticity. Similarly, there is no external support or guarantee to ground the decision – neither in others nor in any secure, certain, or absolutely stable foundation. In resoluteness, *Dasein* assumes responsibility for its having-to-be, recognizing both the necessity of projecting a horizon of meaning for itself and the inherent risk this entails. Moreover, since both resoluteness and *Dasein*’s very mode of being are performative acts, they must be continuously re-affirmed and reenacted⁴.

Before turning to Heidegger’s thought after the *Kehre*, one final aspect of resoluteness remains to be briefly analyzed – one that is directly tied to the relationship between projectuality and situatedness discussed so far. This concerns the dynamic interplay between *definiteness* and *indefiniteness*. Heidegger writes: “The indefiniteness that characterizes every factually projected potentiality-of-being of *Dasein* *belongs* necessarily to resoluteness. Resoluteness is certain of itself only in a resolution. But the *existentiell indefiniteness* of resoluteness never makes itself definite except in a resolution; it nevertheless has its *existential definiteness*” (Heidegger 1996: 275).

The tension between definiteness and indefiniteness directly reflects that between projectuality (definiteness) and situatedness (indefiniteness). The project opened in resoluteness is indefinitely grounded, as there is no foundation upon which to determine what *Dasein* should factually do. There is no guiding principle for “choosing” among the concrete potentialities-of-being that present themselves within the situation. Nevertheless, what is existentially defined is the very necessity of choosing, even in the absence of a guiding framework or foundation. If *Dasein* is to be what it is called to be, it cannot evade undertaking a *thrown project*, instituting a horizon of meaning, and opening a world – even though its

³ On Heidegger’s notion of uncanniness, see Withy (2015).

⁴ This structure of plurality without finality – of decision as something that must be assumed again and again – will reappear, transformed, in Heidegger’s later thinking on art, where the earth, through its self-withdrawing character, compels the work of art to ground the truth of Being ever anew, never as a settled foundation but as a finite and contingent opening.

situation is never guaranteed but remains radically uncanny and precarious, embedded as it is in *Dasein's* radical existential freedom.

The indefiniteness and radical *uncanniness* of decision directly impact the central theme of *Being and Time*: the anticipation of *being-toward-death*. Heidegger asks, "What is death supposed to have in common with the 'concrete situation' of acting?" (Heidegger 1996: 279). His response, developed in §§ 61-62, is that *anticipatory* resoluteness is the most authentic possibility of resoluteness itself – the only way in which resoluteness attains "the *certainty authentically belonging to it*" (Heidegger 1996: 280). This certainty, however, is not opposed to indefiniteness. On the contrary, precisely because *Dasein* is guilty of its having-to-be, and is, in Heidegger's words, "the null ground of a nullity" (Heidegger 1996: 282), only then can it bring itself into its most extreme and unique possibility: the ability to anticipate death as the finitude of every project of meaning⁵.

Paraphrasing Heidegger in clearer terms: the indefiniteness of resoluteness reveals that no decision through which *Dasein* projects a meaningful world is ever final. Every choice remains *groundless* – certain only of ultimately encountering its end. *Dasein* is truly itself in its highest calling when, in anticipating the death of every project of meaning and fully aware of their groundlessness and indefiniteness, it nonetheless achieves resoluteness. In doing so, *Dasein* decides upon a potentiality-for-being, opening a world as a thrown and finite project through which it gives meaning to itself, to its interactions with others, and to things.

To conclude this first part, we may briefly summarize the argument and outline its relevance for the subsequent discussion. The conception of resoluteness Heidegger presents in *Being and Time* – finite, performative, and without ultimate foundation – already points toward a post-foundational mode of thinking. What resoluteness reveals is that the grounding of meaning is always enacted without recourse to any absolute or secure basis, and must be reaffirmed again and again from within a situated horizon. Heidegger will radicalize this insight in his later work,

⁵ For Heidegger's account of death, see the recent Thomson (2024), especially Part 1. Thomson (2024: 8-9) distinguishes between two main interpretative schools regarding Heidegger's use of the term "death". The first takes a more literal approach, understanding death as referring to biological demise. The second, more "metaphorical" interpretation argues that death has little to do with its ordinary meaning and instead signifies the global collapse of significance (Blattner), the breakdown of an understanding of being akin to a scientific paradigm shift (Haugeland), or the dissolution of a historical world (White). It goes without saying that my position aligns with this second school of thought, as I interpret death as pointing to the radical finitude of any project of meaning.

where *decision* becomes not only an existential structure at the level of individual *Dasein* but a way of thinking Being beyond metaphysical foundations. This trajectory will ultimately find its most concrete expression in the notion of *earth*, which – by resisting the closure of meaning – ensures that the truth of Being is grounded each time anew – contingently, finitely, and without final closure.

3. *The de-cision after the “turn”*

As is well known, *Being and Time* remains unfinished, and Heidegger’s project of grasping the sense of Being through fundamental ontology comes to a halt precisely at the point where the analysis was meant to transition from the existential and temporal analytic of *Dasein* to the question of fundamental ontology as to the meaning of Being in general (§ 83).

Along with this shift away from fundamental ontology, the use of the term resoluteness also fades after *Being and Time*. As Crowe (2021: 646-57) argues, the term does not disappear entirely, but its presence after *Being and Time* is mostly confined to the years leading up to 1930, when Heidegger’s analyses remain in continuity with the 1927 work or when he explicitly references it⁶.

This terminological fading, however, does not signal a break with the insights of *Being and Time*, but rather their transformation. The notion of *Entscheidung* (decision), which comes to the fore in Heidegger’s later thinking, carries forward the performative and non-foundational structure of resoluteness, while rearticulating it within a new onto-historical context.

The unpublished manuscripts of the 1930s and 1940s – what Vallega-Neu (2018) insightfully calls “Heidegger’s poietic writings” – offer the most compelling testimony to this transformation. Among these, *Contributions to Philosophy* stands out not only as Heidegger’s most ambitious

⁶ There are, of course, exceptions, like Heidegger’s Nietzsche lecture courses in 1936 and 1939, and the winter semester course on Parmenides (1942-1943). The most significant exception, however, is Heidegger’s use of resoluteness in a political context, particularly in reference to the supposed “revolution” of National Socialism – as evidenced by the presence of resoluteness at key points in his infamous 1933 address, *The Self-Assertion of the German University*. For reasons of brevity, and because it falls outside the central scope of this paper – despite its undeniable significance – this political dimension of resoluteness will not be further examined here.

attempt at thinking the history of Being, but also as a key theoretical reference for this paper. This is especially true of §§ 43-49, which contain a concentrated and thematically focused reflection on decision. These passages are crucial not only for understanding how the existential structure of resoluteness is reconfigured after the *Kehre*, but also because they provide a coherent and continuous theoretical framework that complements *The Origin of the Work of Art*. In this sense, *Contributions* marks a pivotal juncture in Heidegger's thinking, where the post-foundational operativity of decision prepares the ground for an equally post-foundational account of art⁷.

Before examining the content of §§ 43-49, it is helpful to consider the position they occupy within the broader architecture of *Contributions to Philosophy*. Although the work resists systematic exposition, its internal articulation – divided into eight “junctures” – is far from arbitrary. These paragraphs appear at the end of the first juncture, titled “Prospect,” which serves as an introduction, preparation, and attunement to the fundamental mood of the text. As the closing moment of this opening section, §§ 43-49 act as a conceptual hinge: they mark the transition from the preparatory framing of the question to the beginning of the more original path of thinking that the work seeks to pursue. It is here that *Contributions* poses its central problem – the possibility of rethinking Being at the end of metaphysics.

Moreover, these paragraphs follow directly after § 42, titled “From ‘Being and Time’ to the ‘Event’” (Heidegger 2012: 67). They therefore serve another pivotal function: they are positioned to articulate the transition from Heidegger's earlier project of fundamental ontology to the thinking of the event (*Ereignis*), and thus to signal the decisive shift that characterizes his thought after the *Kehre*. In this context, the reflection on decision developed in §§ 43-49 assumes a particularly strategic role, as it both draws on the existential analytic of *Being and Time* and reconfigures it within the onto-historical orientation of *Contributions*.

Heidegger ventures what may be described as a “definition” of decision in § 43:

What is here called de-cision then proceeds to the innermost center of the essence of being itself and thus has nothing in common with what we understand as making a choice or the like. Instead, de-cision [*Ent-scheidung*] refers to the sundering itself, which separates [*scheidet*] and in separating lets come into play for the first time the ap-propriation of precisely this sundered open realm as the

⁷ For more on the theme of decision in the *Contributions*, see also Vallega-Neu (2003).

clearing for the self-concealing and still undecided, for both the belonging to beyng of the human being as the one who grounds the truth of beyng and the assignment of beyng to the time of the last god. (Heidegger 2012: 70)

The passage is undoubtedly complex, yet it also provides an excellent synthesis of what Heidegger seeks to convey. In what follows, I will attempt to clarify the stakes of this passage and its significance for a post-foundational account of decision.

First, as in *Being and Time*, Heidegger makes it clear that decision is not merely a choice between indifferent alternatives. Instead, decision is fundamentally linked – etymologically as well – to an act of *cutting*, a *severing*⁸. This severing, however, is not a simple act of separation; rather, it simultaneously *divides* and *joins* two elements, which can only fully appear in their mutual belonging and distinction through this act of differentiation. The two elements that are “cut” in decision *ap-pro-priate* one another, Heidegger says, as each enters into its own *proper* domain, becoming itself precisely in the separated yet interconnected confrontation that defines decision.

Because decision is this act of *cutting*, of *differentiating*, Heidegger states that it proceeds to the innermost center of the essence of Being. Indeed, it is Being itself that stands forth in its difference and yet its “simultaneity” with beings. Decision, in its act of severing, thus opens the *clearing* (*Lichtung*), the open space in which Being emerges distinct from beings without being detached from them⁹.

From the foregoing analysis, two important corollaries follow.

(1) The first concerns the fact that, for Heidegger, there is only one essential decision – the one that gives its title to § 47: “The Essence of the Decision: Being or Nonbeing” (Heidegger 2012: 80). The essential decision concerns Being and Nonbeing precisely because it hinges on the possibility of recognizing how Being *cuts* and *stands forth* in its difference and simultaneity with beings. In other words, the decision is whether one

⁸ “De-cisions – in German: *Ent-scheidungen* – are occurrences that contain a break or cut, as the root meaning of *-cision* (which resonates, for example, in the English word *incision*) suggests. This cut articulates both a passing away and an arrival, a closure and an opening, in their unbridgeable difference. To be in decision means to be in this unbridgeable difference, exposed to it, and called to take a stance in it. To be in decision also means that the decision concerns the being of whatever is in decision; it concerns possibilities of being” (Vallega-Neu 2003: 248).

⁹ It is evident that Heidegger is here reformulating the problem of the ontological difference – central in *Being and Time* – through the notion of the simultaneity of Being and beings. For a discussion of these topics, see Vallega-Neu 2018: 35-8.

remains confined to the plane of beings or whether it is possible to question and experience Being *as such*.

(2) The second corollary concerns the *reflexivity* of decision, which represents an important point of continuity with *Being and Time*. Here too, decision is first and foremost a *deciding to decide* – a performative act through which the differentiation between Being and beings is severed open. The alternative to this decision, for Heidegger, is not simply another, opposite decision, but rather remaining in “in-decision,” that is, within the metaphysical indifference that flattens the distinction between Being and beings.

For Heidegger, it is only from this singular, essential, and reflexive decision that a series of further decisions derive – each marking a possible transition from metaphysical modes of thought to a post-foundational thinking of Being. Heidegger enumerates several of these in § 44: whether humans remain subjects or enact their *Dasein*; whether they stay confined to the level of beings or come into relation with Being; whether truth persists as mere correctness or is transformed into the grounding of the event of Being; whether art remains an *Erlebnis* or becomes the setting-itself-into-work of truth; whether history is reduced to historiography or opens to the history of Being; whether nature is exhausted as standing-reserve or can be experienced as *earth*; whether the absence of the divine is seen as secularization or as a new possibility for decision.

Two of these decisions are particularly relevant for the concerns of this paper: the one that asks whether art can become the setting-into-work of truth, and the one that rethinks nature in terms of earth rather than as standing-reserve – both indicate how, after the *Kehre*, aesthetics and materiality become sites where the post-foundational logic of decision unfolds.

Finally, Heidegger reiterates what is at stake across all these determinations: “whether humans still venture a decision at all, or whether they give themselves over to the decisionlessness [...] of our era” (Heidegger 2012: 73). This radical question recasts, in explicitly ontological-historical terms, the problematic of *das Man* from *Being and Time*.

How, then, can human beings engage with decision? In *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger makes it clear that decision is not, in the first instance, something human in the sense that it can be *mastered* by human beings. Yet, at the same time, decision cannot take place without human action and participation.

Just as in *Being and Time* *Dasein* is not simply identical with the human being, but names its highest potentiality-for-being – a potentiality fulfilled

only when the human being moves beyond subjectivity and becomes authentically itself in the performative act of anticipatory resoluteness – so in *Contributions*, decision does not concern the human being as merely one being among others. Rather, it is a possibility that opens only insofar as humans respond to their highest, most essential and most *authentic* task.¹⁰ This task, as clarified by the definition of decision from which we began, is “the belonging to being of the human being as the one who *grounds* the truth of being” (my italics). It is through this grounding – never final, never secured – that decision becomes the site of a post-foundational opening of meaning.

It is worth emphasizing that, just as in *Being and Time* resoluteness was a performative act through which *Dasein* could (or could fail to) continually be authentically itself, so too in *Contributions*, this task is neither something given once and for all nor something that can ever be definitively completed. On the contrary, it remains an ongoing *having-to-be* – a possibility that is actualized only in the very act of being enacted.

This *having-to-be* expresses the human condition as radical freedom: a freedom without foundations, without ultimate fulfillment, but marked instead by the ever-renewed challenge of becoming oneself. Conversely, this freedom becomes actual only in the performative moment in which the human being appropriates its ownmost task and enacts the kind of being it is called to be. It is in this context that Heidegger, in § 49, defines decision as “the necessary form in which freedom is carried out” (Heidegger 2012: 81).

At this point, we must clarify how this carrying out of decision unfolds, and what it means for human beings to ground the truth of Being.

Here, “grounding” must not be understood in the sense of modern metaphysics, where to found meant to secure, stabilize, and eternally guarantee the being of entities – a gesture opposed to decision and freedom. In Heidegger’s post-metaphysical sense, by contrast, grounding is primarily a matter of “creating” and “sheltering”. Decision is *creative* because it must create the *space-time* [*Zeit-Raum*] of the site where the truth of the event of Being can take place. At the same time, it is *sheltering* because it ensures that this emergence of truth is not merely fleeting, but

¹⁰ The similarity between *Being and Time* and *Contributions to Philosophy* on this point is reinforced by Heidegger’s numerous references to his 1927 work, as well as by linguistic parallels – such as the *throw* (*Zuwurf*) of Being in *Contributions* and the *thrown project* (*geworfenes Entwurf*) in *Being and Time*. Moreover, in both *Contributions* and *Being and Time*, Heidegger refers to that which awakens human beings to their highest task and the possibility of authentic existence as a *call* (*Zuruf*).

– though never eternal – can *endure*. For this endurance to occur, Heidegger insists, the truth of Being must be *sheltered* and *fixed* in a being: a concrete form through which Being becomes historically meaningful for a people.

To clarify: human beings are authentically themselves only insofar as they take part in decision – that is, in the performative and historical act through which Being is severed from beings, allowing it to stand forth. In this cut, Being and beings appear as irreducible yet never separate, emerging together in their simultaneity. Being is not prior to beings, nor are the two hierarchically ordered. Rather, Being is the horizon of meaning through which human beings relate to beings meaningfully; it does not exist apart from beings, living in some metaphysical beyond.

The happening of the truth of Being is instead the opening of a *world* – the institution of a horizon of meaning for both beings and human existence. For this reason, when human beings ground the truth of Being, they must do so *in a being*, for only in this way is the simultaneity of Being and beings ensured. Through this being, human beings experience their shared belonging to a horizon of practical intelligibility, allowing a world of meaning to emerge and endure.

Concrete examples help clarify this structure. In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger identifies several eminent ways in which the truth of Being happens – among them, the work of art, the founding of a state, and proximity to the divine. In all these cases, a historical people *decides* and *grounds* the truth of Being *in a being*: for instance, in a god, as supreme being; in a constitution, as the foundation of political existence; or in a work of art, as the setting-into-work of truth. These beings function as beacons and anchors through which a people establishes and remains bound to a shared horizon of meaning – one that endures historically as long as these beings continue to hold existential-experiential significance.

In this way, the truth of Being is *grounded* in a being. And yet, Being, though simultaneous with beings, remains irreducible to them. This means that no established horizon of meaning can ever exhaust the event of Being. Decision – precisely because it *severs* and *joins* Being and beings – must account for this tension. It must *ground* the truth of Being historically, in a concrete being, while preserving the inexhaustible richness of Being over any given, concrete horizon of meaning.

Just as in *Being and Time* resoluteness required a commitment without certainty, so too in *Contributions* decision entails grounding Being without securing it. As resoluteness was a thrown, precarious, and contingent projection, decision now becomes the act through which the truth

of Being is grounded – always with the awareness that such grounding is never definitive. What Heidegger calls the “abysmal grounding” (*abgründige Grund*) names this paradox precisely: a foundation that is unfounded, one that is necessary yet never final – finite, contingent, and plural. Such finitude and plurality are not obstacles but *conditions* of the event: they are what allow Being to emerge, again and again, through singular and situated forms, without ever being fully exhausted in them.

Within this dynamic between finitude and superabundance, Heidegger situates what he calls the “fracturing” (*Zerklüftung*) of Being (see McDaniels: 2017). This fracturing signals that Being does not unfold as a single, overarching historical truth; rather, it *shatters* into a multiplicity of events, each unique (*einzig*) and singular (*einmalig*). It means that the event of Being is not an underlying, superhistorical essence but consists entirely in its happening – *again and again* (*jemeinig*) – through different historical configurations¹¹.

Before turning to *The Origin of the Work of Art*, one final question arises: what ensures that decision remains open to further possibilities? In other words, if decision is meant to ground the truth of Being, what prevents this *grounding* from hardening into a final, absolute *foundation* – obscuring its own contingency and plurality?

Heidegger’s answer in *Contributions* lies in the fundamental mood (*Grundstimmung*) that accompanies decision. As Vallega-Neu explains: “As in *Being and Time*, in *Contributions* there is a fundamental attunement (*Grundstimmung*) that unsettles thinking from everydayness and exposes it more originarily to the experience of be-ing as decision. This fundamental attunement Heidegger tentatively calls reservedness (*Verhaltenheit*)” (Vallega-Neu 2003: 251).

Reservedness signifies that Being never fully discloses itself, but always withdraws – resisting total transparency and eluding capture within any single horizon of meaning. Decision, as the act that severs and sustains the distinction between Being and beings, must remain faithful to this withholding. It does so by performing reservedness itself: grounding the truth of Being while remaining attuned to the fact that such grounding is always post-foundational, contingent, and plural.

¹¹ Amoroso insightfully notes the relation between the *Jemeiligkeit* of Being and the *Jemeinigkeit* of death. See Amoroso 1993: 202, which helps us see, once more, the continuity and the difference between *Contributions* and *Being and Time*.

4. *The decision and the earth: the “work” of art*

This final part of the paper is devoted to *The Origin of the Work of Art*. My aim is to examine the relationship between the notions of *earth* and *decision*, and to clarify their significance for the development of a post-foundational aesthetics.

This task is by no means simple. As several interpreters have noted – including Figal (2010: 200-6) and Welsch (1991: 78-81) – the concept of *earth* is among the most elusive in Heidegger’s already complex lexicon, and Heidegger’s own attempts at clarification often fall short of full transparency.

To shed light on this difficult notion, I suggest that a productive way to approach the meaning of *earth* in *The Origin of the Work of Art* is twofold: first, by reading the essay in continuity – though not in identity – with both *Being and Time* and *Contributions to Philosophy*¹²; and second, by asking how *earth* operates within the dynamics of the *decision* enacted by the artwork.

As is well known, Heidegger explicitly introduces the notion of “earth” in the second part of *The Origin of the Work of Art*, titled “The Work and Truth” – although significant traces can already be found in the first part, particularly in his description of Van Gogh’s painting. The notion of *earth* is introduced alongside its complementary and agonistic counterpart, “world”. The two terms articulate a fundamental ontological tension, one that Heidegger frames – significantly – through the language of *decision*. This vocabulary, far from incidental, plays a key role in linking the artwork to the historical grounding of truth.

Here is Heidegger’s definition of world:

World is not a mere collection of the things [...] present at hand. Neither is world a merely imaginary framework added by our representation to the sum of things that are present. World worlds, and is more fully in being than all those tangible and perceptible things in the midst of which we take ourselves to be at home [...] World is that always-nonobjectual to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse, keep us transported into Being. Wherever the essential *decisions* of our history are made, wherever we take them over or abandon them, [...] there the world worlds. (Heidegger 2002: 23, my italics)

¹² The first to argue for this continuity was von Herrmann 1994, whose work remains an essential point of reference.

This definition is reiterated shortly thereafter: “The world is the self-opening openness of the broad paths of simple and essential *decisions* in the destiny of a historical people” (Heidegger 2002: 26, my italics). These passages make clear that world, for Heidegger, is inseparable from a structure of historical decision: it names the collective opening of meaning through which a people establish the horizon within which it lives, acts, and interprets its historical existence.

Agonistically complementary to *world* stands *earth*. As Heidegger stresses, earth is “far removed from the idea of a mass of matter and from the merely astronomical idea of a planet.” Instead, earth is that which shelters the emergence of beings while resisting full disclosure: “Earth is that in which the arising of everything that arises is brought back – as, indeed, the very thing that it is – and sheltered. In the things that arise the earth presences as the protecting one” (Heidegger 2002: 21). Heidegger offers his most comprehensive “definition” of earth in the following passage:

That into which the work sets itself back, and thereby allows to come forth, is what we called “the earth”. Earth is the coming-forth-concealing [*Heworkommend-Berge*nde]. Earth is that which cannot be forced, that which is effortless and untiring. On and in the earth, historical man finds his dwelling in the world. In setting up a world, the work sets forth the earth. “Setting forth [*Herstellen*]” is to be thought, here, in the strict sense of the word. The work moves the earth into the open of a world and holds it there. The work lets the earth be an earth. (Heidegger 2002: 24)

These two definitions make it immediately clear that, for Heidegger, earth and world are not objects, but rather operative notions with constitutive roles in the opening of experiential meanings (see Espinet 2011). Heidegger’s fundamental move – which also justifies the title of the essay – is to consider art as *work*, as *operation*: a dynamic field within which different forces are at work, whose configuration opens the experiential truth revealed by the artwork for a historical people. This is why Heidegger famously states that “Art is the setting-itself-to-work of truth” (Heidegger 2002: 19).

In this sense, world operates within the artwork as the force that projects a constellation of operative and experiential meanings through which a people both envisions and decides the most significant and essential aspects of its existence – “birth and death, blessing and curse” – as well as the more everyday occurrences of meaning and practical engagement. In the case of Van Gogh’s painting, this is exemplified by the

daily life of the peasant woman and the *reliability* (*Zuverlässigkeit*) of the world in which she is immersed.

World, then, is not merely a background or context: it is the force through which meaning is historically decided and distributed. Like the world-opening resoluteness in *Being and Time*, world in the artwork grants each being its measure and each experience its weight, its meaning, and its truth. Yet this truth, as in *Being and Time*, is not a matter of mere correctness, but the unfolding of a project of meaning that takes place on an experiential level.

To further clarify this point, a few concrete examples may help. Heidegger himself evokes the world of the Greek temple; Schürmann reformulates the concept by referring to the Inca capital shaped like a puma (Schürmann 1987: 26-9). A particularly fitting example, I would suggest, is that of the medieval cathedral. Indeed, the cathedral functions as both a spatial and temporal anchor: it stands at the center of the city, where roads from various neighborhoods and the surrounding countryside converge; it is the site of key life rituals (baptism, marriage, funerals etc.) and the rhythmic marker of daily activity (the ringing of its bells). Around it unfolds the city's religious, political, and economic life – from markets and ceremonies to communal gatherings and public celebrations. In short, the entire range of ways in which beings are disclosed to us – as objects of perception, use, desire, evaluation, agreement or opposition, and understanding – is shaped and directed by the opening of a world of meaning as instituted by the cathedral.

This was the operativity of the world. *Earth*, by contrast, functions differently. It operates within the artwork primarily as *that which withdraws*. Yet this withdrawal does not imply passivity, as if earth were an inert background in the work of art. Heidegger specifies that earth is a *coming-forth-concealing*. Earth is indeed *at work* in the work of art, and it is operative precisely in its own, specific mode of appearance – as that which, in appearing, simultaneously withdraws.

Heidegger goes as far as to say that *only* the work of art lets earth be earth, that is, respects its phenomenological specificity, which lies precisely in its dynamic of revealing and concealing. But what does it mean to say that earth withdraws? And in what way does the artwork respect this peculiar character of earth?

The withdrawing character of the earth becomes apparent when we consider its role in the *strife* with the world. While the world is the force within the work of art that tends to illuminate, to make manifest, and to *decide* upon everything, earth is the counter-force that resists the world's

activity – demonstrating that no project and no *decision* about meaning can ever be definitive or claim to exhaust the potentialities of sense. In Heidegger's words:

The world is the self-opening openness of the broad paths of simple and essential decisions in the destiny of a historical people. The earth is the unforced coming forth of the continually self-closing, and in that way, self-sheltering. World and earth are essentially different and yet never separated from one another. World is grounded on earth, and earth rises up through world. [...] In its resting upon earth the world strives to surmount it. As the self-opening it will tolerate nothing closed. As the sheltering and concealing, however, earth tends always to draw the world into itself and to keep it there. The opposition of world and earth is strife. (Heidegger 2002: 26)

A few pages later, Heidegger makes explicit how this dynamic of strife (*Streit*) is intimately connected to the theme of decision:

World, rather, is the clearing of the paths of the essential directives with which every *decision* complies. Every *decision*, however, is grounded in something that cannot be *mastered*, something concealed, something disconcerting. Otherwise it would never be a *decision*. Earth is not simply the closed but that which rises up as self-closing. World and earth are essentially in conflict, intrinsically belligerent. Only as such do they enter the strife of clearing and concealing. (Heidegger 2002: 31, my italics)

World is tied to decision in that it seeks to decide upon the crucial cross-roads of a people's experience. More than that, in its meaning-making activity, world tends to illuminate everything once and for all, striving to become so pervasive and transparent that it obscures its own origin in an act of decision. Just as with "the they" in *Being and Time*, this tendency of world toward absolute transparency risks causing a forgetting of the very possibility of decision itself. Yet it is precisely against this risk that earth stands. Earth, appearing as that which "rises up as self-closing," reminds us that every decision – if it is truly a decision – must be groundless, without certainty, and without guarantees. At the same time, it must avoid the pretense of resolving or securing everything once and for all. Just as in *Being and Time* and in *Contributions*, here too decision is a *groundless* decision, one that can never serve as a final or ultimate foundation¹³.

¹³ It is not unwarranted to interpret this struggle between the decisiveness of *world* and resistance of *earth* as a reworking of the previously discussed relation between *definiteness* and *indefiniteness* in *Being and Time*. Here too, the fundamental issue lies in the necessity

The question that now arises is *how* earth concretely functions to safeguard decision. *How*, within the work of art, does earth perform this role? There are two interrelated ways in which earth is operative within the work of art: (1) as qualified materiality and as (2) situated attunement.

(1) Let us begin with the first. Earth operates within the artwork first of all as its material component. Just as earth and world are not mere objects, earth is also not a passive, inert matter to be simply shaped at the discretion of the artist. The major innovation of Heidegger's philosophy of art – as argued by both Welsch and, above all, Sallis – is that for the first time the material component is no longer seen as a mere substrate for the external, meaningful content. Heidegger criticizes this conception as “allegorical” and characteristic of metaphysical aesthetics. Instead, earth is understood as an autonomous and indispensable element for the happening of truth in art.

With respect to the theme of decision, the material dimension of the artwork becomes crucial insofar as the matter of the work is always specific, situated, and irreplaceable – any attempt to substitute it alters, if not destroys, the meaning of the work itself. A color cannot be replaced in a painting without changing its overall balance; a poem cannot be translated without affecting its world of meaning¹⁴.

In the artwork, then, earth is never merely “matter in general,” but always a singular, unrepeatable materiality that has been *decided-for*. At the same time, this singularity opens onto further possible decisions – each equally unique and irreplaceable. No specific material can ever claim to be *the* definitive material of the work of art, but only *a* material – *this* particular, singular material through which *this* specific work of art comes into being.

This has important consequences for Heidegger's attempt to develop a non-metaphysical and post-foundational aesthetics. Indeed, since the

of factually deciding to open a *world* as a horizon of experiential meaning, while at the same time remaining fully aware that this decision is always already grounded in an infinite and inexhaustible abyss – an abyss that eludes any claim to certainty or final guarantee. The crucial difference, however, is that while in *Being and Time* this decision concerned the individual *Dasein*, here the decision assumes a historical and intersubjective scope.

¹⁴ This holds true even for more recent and seemingly less “material” art forms. A performance is not the same when enacted in different spaces, times, or in front of different audiences: the way light falls on the performer, the historical moment, the public's sensitivity, and the performative variability all shape the meaning of the work. The same applies to land art and body art, where the material and situational presence of the landscape or the body is not an accessory but constitutive of the event of the work.

work of art is the *setting-itself-into-work* of truth, this implies that earth – as qualified, plural, and finite materiality – resists any totalizing decisional projection of meaning. It serves, we might say, as a *principium individuationis*: because the material is always distinct and specific, the world-disclosure and the decision that take place through it can never claim universality or absoluteness, but remain contingent and finite. Each *earth*, in its specificity, refers beyond itself to other, further, innumerable possibilities of earth's self-disclosure. The process of meaning-making that unfolds within it must therefore always contain an implicit reference to something other – something undecided, unopened, unconquered, undefeated, and inexhaustible. In Heidegger's words: "As a world opens itself up, it puts up for decision, by a historical humanity, the question of victory or defeat, blessing and curse, lordship and slavery. The dawning world brings to the fore that which is still undecided and without measure and decisiveness" (Heidegger 2002: 39). This – Heidegger suggests – is *earth*.

(2) The second way in which *earth* is operative within the artwork concerns its role as *situated attunement*. At first glance, *The Origin of the Work of Art* seems to set aside the theme of attunement that was so central in *Being and Time*. While it is true that Heidegger does not explicitly mention the concept in this later essay, recent scholarship – particularly Schölles (2011) – has rightly pointed out that affectivity continues to play an important and systematic role in his analysis. As Welsch argues, it is in this function that "in the text on the work of art, the 'earth' to some extent takes the place of the thrownness of *Being and Time*" (Welsch 1991: 50). Heidegger himself seems to affirm this parallel when he writes: "The truly poeticizing *projection* is the opening up of that in which human existence [*Dasein*], as historical, is already *thrown*. This is the earth" (Heidegger 2002: 47, my italics). He is even more explicit in *Contributions to Philosophy*, where he defines earth as "the self-seclusion in the face of every projection" (Heidegger 2012: 379).

Thus, earth functions above all as a corrective and determinative factor in the individuation of the world's decisional projection. It *situates* and *grounds* that projection as a *thrown project* and as a *factual decision*. This situatedness, moreover – just as in *Being and Time* – is opened not primarily through understanding but through *moods*. As already mentioned, after the *Kehre*, one of the decisive moods for thinking the history of Being is reservedness. While it would be mistaken to simply identify earth with Being, it is clear that the reservedness of Being from beings is analogous to the way earth withdraws from the projection and decision of the world. This withdrawal manifests as mood, insofar as earth *refuses* to be fully

grasped or appropriated. It resists any attempt to open or access it in a way that would reduce it to a fixed, singular horizon of disclosure, like instrumental use, and scientific investigation (Heidegger 2002: 24-5).

Similarly, when an artist sets out to create a work of art, the decision regarding the material to be used cannot be a choice among indifferent alternatives, nor the imposition of a predetermined project of meaning. Artists cannot simply do whatever they wish with the material, as if they were its masters. They cannot begin by saying, "I want to make a blue painting", or "I want to use this specific rhyme". On the contrary, their practice must respond to and respect the affordances and resistances of the material itself. Every artistic gesture must acknowledge that material is never a neutral substrate, but an interlocutor that exceeds all intentional manipulation. No treatment can exhaust its meaningful potential, for matter continually withdraws – opening onto ever new possibilities: words not yet spoken, forms not yet shaped, sounds not yet heard.

To summarize: earth opposes the drive of *world* toward total transparency, confronting it with opacity, reserve, and irreducibility.

This operativity of *earth* reveals two key points of continuity with *Contributions to Philosophy*. First, the reservedness of *earth*, along with its simultaneous emergence within the artwork, mirrors the problem of simultaneity between *Being* and *beings* in *Contributions*. Just as *Being* does not exist "in itself" but only in its happening as truth – grounded in a being, though never reducible to it – so too *earth* does not exist "in general", but only in its operation within the artwork. Through this operation, earth participates in the setting-itself-to-work of the truth of *Being* in a being, while at the same time manifesting its irreducibility to any single project or decision.

Second, the strife between earth and world, which binds them together despite their agonistic and irreducible difference, is analogous to the de-cision in *Contributions*, which functions as a hinge between Being and beings. This decision does not unify them but opens their difference, allowing Being to stand out. Similarly, earth holds open the difference between the decision that projects a world of meaning and the inexhaustible potential for ever further decisions.

Before moving on to the conclusion, one final question remains: how can human beings engage with this decision? What is their role?

As in *Being and Time*, here too decision is not something over which human beings have *mastery*. Decision is not an act of mere arbitrariness. The working of the work of art is not the product of human will, as Heidegger makes clear in his critique of the subjectivism of the artist

(Heidegger 2002: 39). And yet, the truth of Being cannot come to pass without human beings, for only human beings – unlike plants and animals – are capable of projecting and inhabiting a world (Heidegger 2002: 23). Thus, human beings are neither masters of Being nor simply subject to an inescapable destiny, as are animals. Rather, they are called to *participate* in the working of the work of art as those who set into a figure the configuration of the forces at work in the artwork, thereby giving stability and communicability to the truth of Being as it happens.

This distinctive role of human beings can also be read as a reformulation of the concept of *authenticity* from *Being and Time* and of humanity's task in relation to de-cision in *Contributions*. Here as well, the grounding of the truth of Being ap-propriates human beings, representing their most singular and proper task – one that pertains uniquely to them. Once again, human beings are called to make a decision to ground the truth of Being, all the while remaining aware – an awareness embodied in the operation of earth – that this decision rests upon what is undecided and undecidable, always pointing toward new possibilities.

5. Conclusion. Heidegger's post-foundational aesthetics

This paper set out with two declared objectives: first, to examine the relationship between decision and earth in Heidegger's thought; second, to explore the significance of this relationship for a post-foundational aesthetics.

With regard to the first objective, the path we have traced – from *Being and Time*, through the *Contributions to Philosophy*, and culminating in *The Origin of the Work of Art* – has made it possible to identify strong lines of continuity in Heidegger's thinking on decision. It must be emphasized, one final time, that this continuity is not to be confused with identity. Heidegger continually revises and reworks his conceptual vocabulary, yet the core of his questioning remains consistent. Across these stages of his thought, certain key elements concerning decision persist: the interplay between projectuality and situatedness; the scope and gravity of decision; the intermediary agency of human beings, who are neither masters nor passive recipients of decision; the problem of freedom; the performative nature of decision; and, finally, the fact that decision is always groundless – without certainties or guarantees – and yet must be undertaken, again and again.

Within this trajectory, the notion of earth plays a crucial role. It represents that which is undecided and undecidable, whose contribution is indispensable for any genuine decision to take place in the grounding of the truth of Being. Earth is what situates decision; it anchors it and gives it weight. It is the counterforce that ensures the decision of world does not become so transparent that it forgets its origin as decision. Furthermore, earth grounds and sustains human agency and freedom by determining and individuating them within a finite set of factual possibilities. At the same time, it continually recalls the inexhaustibility and the groundlessness of every decision, calling toward ever new possibilities.

This leads us to the central question: how does the notion of *earth*, in its relation to *decision*, contribute to Heidegger's development of a post-foundational aesthetics?

As the previous sections have shown, the concept of earth – in its resistance to the world's drive toward total transparency – serves a pivotal function. By withdrawing, earth calls for the enactment of finite, situated groundings of the truth of Being that remain *originating* (*ursprünglich*): ever-new, irreducible to any definitive form, and continually open to renewal.

This capacity for origination is what lies at the heart of *The Origin of the Work of Art*. As several commentators (and critics) have noted – from Adorno to Shapiro to Figal – Heidegger is not concerned with art *as such*, understood as a cultural institution or historiographical object. He distances himself from both art criticism and historicist reconstruction. What interests him is art as a privileged site for grounding the truth of Being: art as the setting-itself-into-work of truth. As Harries aptly writes, “As much as *The Origin of the Work of Art* is an inquiry into art, it is also an inquiry into the meaning of *Ursprung*, of origin, of originality” (Harries 2009: 63).

Earth, in its dynamic of withdrawal and refusal, is essential to this understanding of origin. It enables a grounding that is not foundationalist, but remains finite, plural, and open-ended. In this way, earth does not seal the artwork, but keeps it originating: it ensures that the truth set into work remains a living, historical, and inexhaustible event – one that continues to generate new horizons of meaning.

It is precisely in this distinction – between the foundationalism of metaphysics and the grounding of the truth of *Being* – that the possibility of a genuinely post-foundational thinking and aesthetics emerges for Heidegger. Such a project is not a simple reversal of metaphysical

assumptions: it does not counter the demand for absolute foundations with the denial of any need for grounding.

On the contrary, for Heidegger, the grounding of the truth of Being *remains necessary*. Without it, truth would dissipate into ephemerality – reduced to little more than a fleeting “firework” (Cimino-Espinet-Keiling 2011: 134). If the truth of Being is to serve as the horizon of existential and experiential meaning for a people, it must be able to endure. It must remain in force – binding, effective, and communicable. Grounding in a being gives truth this staying power, enabling it to become intersubjectively shared and historically operative (Cimino-Espinet-Keiling 2011: 136).

Nevertheless, this grounding must not become definitive, absolute, or immune to revision – as it does within the logic of modern metaphysical foundationalism. Such a foundation would not respect the cutting nature of de-cision, which allows Being to stand out from beings; it would instead reduce the openness of Being to the closure of a single, pre-decided being. Instead, to remain truly grounding, the truth of Being must preserve its irreducibility, its historical plurality, and its capacity to exceed any given horizon. As Thomson puts it, Being is “the inexhaustible ontological source from which all historical intelligibility originates” (Thomson 2011: 70) – a source that must be grounded only insofar as it is never exhausted, as becomes possible in the operative withdrawal of earth.

In this role, earth not only illuminates the post-foundational character of Heidegger’s aesthetics, but also prompts a reconsideration of some of his central philosophical and aesthetic categories from a pluralistic perspective.

Heidegger’s thought, to be sure, contains an internal oscillation. At times, the truths of Being appear as vast, monolithic disclosures that define the course of entire historical epochs. Elsewhere, however, Heidegger’s own analysis suggests that the strife between earth and world need not be understood as a metaphysical *gigantomachia*. It can instead be read as a conflict that opens smaller, more situated, and ultimately more plural historical worlds – such as the one that takes shape around Van Gogh’s painting (Thomson 2011: 93-4 n.).

This points to the possibility of rethinking the event of the truth of Being not as a singular, once-and-for-all foundation, but as an ongoing performative grounding – one that opens up successive or even coexisting historical worlds, each finite and plural, yet irreducibly singular. As several scholars have argued (Vallega-Neu 2018, McDaniels 2017, Keiling 2013, Thomson 2011), the event of Being can be understood as a *singulare*

tantum: something that is radically plural in its diverse historical occurrences, and yet each time unique and singular.

From this perspective, earth, with its radical situatedness and its ever-unique material dimension, stands as a powerful reminder of the nature of that grounding. In its relation to decision, earth shows that the grounding of the truth of Being is both necessary and yet must be continually renewed, resting always on an abysmal, groundless foundation.

In this sense, earth opens an aesthetic and ontological perspective that is unmistakably post-foundational: one in which human beings are called to decide, time and again, for horizons of meaning that are consciously groundless and radically finite – and yet remain necessary for dwelling meaningfully together upon the earth.

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