Distance in Dwelling

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Introduction
(1) It is a common observation about many ancient large scale 'art' works that they are best seen from the sky. The same is often true of the earth art that blossomed in the 60s - work such as Walter De Maria's Desert Cross, Isamu Noguchi's Sculpture to be seen from Mars [unrealised!], and Dennis Oppenheim's Cancelled Crop. Is this the same sky that the ancients saw? And how are we to understand the significance and status of this apparently privileged perspective? There are a number of immediate options. Von Daniken proposed a literal realism (Chariots of the Gods) to explain ancient art-works - that human beings are aliens from outer space, for whom a heavenly perspective would have seemed normal. Or again, we might propose a theological interpretation - that they are attempts at communication with the gods. Finally it might be supposed that we need to invoke the power of human imagination. These works were designed to be seen from an imagined viewpoint in the sky. Arguably, the first two options, the realistic and the theological, are both best understood in terms of imagination.

(2) But what place does imagination have in our understanding of our earthly habitation? The 60s also saw the proliferation of the first satellite images of the earth as a whole, the blue planet. These were extraordinary pictures even for those who had seen globes rotating in geography class. We were seeing pictures of the earth on which we were standing looking at those pictures. In this specular experience was a certain unavoidable objectification, from a perspective that as philosophers we had long been taught to suspect - Merleau-Ponty's 'pensee du survol', or god's-eye view. And those who would tend to identify objectification with alienation and worse would only have their worries deepened if we were to plot the historical interweaving of aerial photography with military reconnaissance, targeting and bombing. Instead of the gods, we now have AWACs directing war from the sky. Is that not always the deep meaning of specular objectification, confirmed for example, by Sartre's account of the Look, by the story of Medusa and other petrifications?

(3) And yet coinciding with the 60s satellite photographs of the blue planet was the sense of the green planet, the earth scarred by deforestation visible from space, a planet not just objectified by being represented as a body, but also understood to be a fragile interconnected whole, perhaps even an organism, a Gaia in trouble.

(4) It is a common view that the Copernican revolution symbolized dramatically man's displacement from the center by science. No longer do we dwell on earth, rather our very privilege as humans is on the line. (See Nietzsche, for example: "Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star on which clever beasts invented knowing.") Husserl's essay on the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature [1934], offers a strong revisionary interpretation of this transformation in our consciousness, one in which 'the original ark, earth' together with our bodies as 'animate organisms' are seen to be the lived basis of all subsequent sense of movement, and hence of the spatial extendedness that that movement projects. Before the empty extension of physical space is the dwelling of
an animal organism (man) on earth.

(5) There is something compelling about this argument - linking our fundamental sense of space not to vision or to calculation, but to the ground of our sensori-motor, proprioceptive organism, the centered spatiality of ourselves as active beings. Our bodies and the earth are centers, homes, and grounds before being objectified as bodies. But the examples of Celtic and Indian art and earth works creates a problem for any formulation that would tie objectification to the modern science of Galileo and Copernicus, as Husserl implies. Human dwelling on earth has always involved a relationship with 'the heavens', and it is clear even from the Greeks discussions of the gods that the capacity imaginatively to take a perspective on the earth is as original as dwelling itself.

(6) There is a long history of the constitution of the earth as earth, a history mediated by global exploration, mapping the terra incognita, discovering that the earth was spherical (not flat), and so on. And throughout history, men have looked down at the earth from the tops of mountains, they have painted landscapes from the slopes, they have commanded battles from the heights, seen the land from far out at sea, and watched the flights of birds. And before astronomy, men have looked up at the sky, seen the sun, moon and stars, and must have felt the uncanniness of our being at home on the earth.

(7) All this suggests that distance has always been part of dwelling, that the capacity to live with and incorporate imagined external vantage points is primitive, and that we need to add a historical perspective to this constitutive distantiation. It does not begin with science; rather science occupies and interpretes this 'space' in a particular way. Contemporary earth art is intimately involved in exploring these questions.

Introduction A

What do philosophers teach us about dwelling? From the warm and fuzzy way in which dwellings usually operates in our philosophical and political discourse, you would think it was clear. But perhaps it is in the very familiarity of dwelling that it keeps its secrets from us. The tenor of much of Derrida's critical response to Heidegger revolves around the sense that in the last analysis he is committed to a certain kind of resolution of the effects of difference, a kind of recuperation of loss, and of distance. It would be a caricature of Derrida to say that he makes Heidegger into a latter day Parmenidean, but even that is a position he has brushed with. What is intriguing, however, and obviously frustrating for anyone trying to get a critical handle of him, is precisely the depth and variety of the ways in which Heidegger could be said to allow for, acknowledge, and even preserve the effects of distance. I do not want to say that Heidegger is responsible for what is going on in earth art, but I do think he gives us a glimpse of what we could call the play of distance in dwelling that is their concern. And, to be clear, it is just this aspect of a conversation that opens and holds open this dimension that interests me, both in Heidegger and in earth art, and, it goes without saying, between earth art, land art, art in nature and environmental art.

Heidegger opens this conversation
1. In the most fundamental move from Cartesian subjectivity to Being-in-the-world, Being-in-the-world builds relationality in to his account of manís being, setting the scene, in the process for a different dimension of distance to arise, between, on the one hand, being alongside things in the world, and living in the light of the ontological difference, in which it is clear that that ontic neutralization is a misunderstanding.

2. He discusses, under the expression Entfernung, Daseinís pervasive de-distancing, bringing the distant close, reducing distance through familiarization. This appears both a constitutive feature of human existence, and as a danger.

3. The same doubleness arises in his various discussions of the withdrawal of Being, which figures both as loss of a vital dimension of signification, and also as a way in which, once we recognize it as such, Being is preserved, precisely because ëmaking it explicití transforms it into a being. So the whole dimension of withdrawal is a dimension of necessary and yet problematic distance.

4. Heideggerís various accounts of time all insist on this operation of distance. For example, the original account of ecstatic temporality in Being and Time is an account of the spacing introduced into our experience by the ecstatic ëliterally standing outside ë dimension of temporality. Again, distanitation is constitutive of any presence.

5. Heidegger, like Hegel before him, links our ontological distance from the world of things, with freedom. See the Essence of Truth.

6. The whole thematic of being-towards-death which is not so much opposed to life as an intimate distance with in it, just as the imbrication of the value of home with that of strangeness and the uncanny. At one point Heidegger even says that we are not properly at home in the world without a dose of the uncanny, the Unheimlich, the not-at-home.

In each of these ways, and the more I enumerate them, the more obvious is it to me that they are generated from a fundamental principle, Heidegger does not domesticate distance, or overcome distance, but attempts to preserve its power.

Introduction B

I have a number of slides of earth art, land art etc from the 60s onwards to show you. It will be my claim that the space of our dwelling on earth is the central question that they explore. I shall approach this thought via some remarks on Heideggerís discussion of what it means to dwell in Building Dwelling Thinking in which I believe he gives us a rich way of coming to think of distance in dwelling. This issue, of course, is one that is for many people central to their judgement of Heidegger. If the way he understands dwelling is another one of those flights from difference, an atavistic embrace of the desire for closure, Heideggerís significance as a thinker diminishes. But what is most intriguing about Heidegger is precisely the depth and variety of ways in which Heidegger acknowledges, preserves and articulates the effects of distance. I am thinking here of the constitutive relationality built into being-in-the-world, of his discussions of Entfernung or de-distancing, the ambivalence of the withdrawal of Being, the standing-outside-of-ourselves in his account of ecstatic temporality, his connection of freedom with our distance from the ontic, and the whole thematization of being-towards-death, strangeness and the uncanny.
But it is on his account of the Fourfold that I would like to focus, because this account seems to me to most naturally provide a certain opening for our consideration of earth art.

I will draw here on the account of the Gevierte that Heidegger offers us in Building Dwelling Thinking which focuses precisely on the question of dwelling with which we began.

By questioning what it is for man to dwell, Heidegger is setting out on a path of context re-expansion. Through etymological reflection, he suggests, for instance that Nachbar (neighbor, from neahgebur) means one who dwells near. And that even the bin of ich bin / I am, derive from bauen to dwell. In other words, Heidegger is using the resources of German to rescue us from the deflated undwelling of mere subjective existence. The language we breathe already knows we dwell with others. Heidegger is here linking the question of dwelling with that of community. And to the extent that dwelling has to do with a way of being on earth, it is also something that in all our constructing activity we can lose sight of. Dwelling he understands as an end itself, something disguised by every association with means-ends activity. And after a little more etymology, in the course of which Heidegger draws in freedom, and safeguarding, Heidegger concludes:

To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving. It pervades dwelling in its whole range. That range reveals itself to us as soon as we reflect that human being consists in dwelling and, indeed, dwelling in the sense of the stay of mortals on the earth.

Now Heidegger has not so much offered an argument here as found a way of laying out, articulating, a vision. As I see it, the two central ideas here are those of preservation and the various synonyms for a certain space that is the object of this preservation — range, sphere, preserve. Heidegger is attempting to re-inflate, re-expand a space that has collapsed, as one might try to re-erect a tent that had blown flat in the night. His idea is that it is within a nexus of significant separation, one in which different dimensions are distinguished sufficiently clearly for them to hold open such a space, that our dwelling can not only become clear, but can, as it were, flourish.

It is at this point that he introduces the thought of the fourfold.

But ṣon the earthi already means ṣunder the skyi. Both of these also mean ṣremaining before the divinitiesi and include a ṣbelonging to menis being with one anotheri. By a primal oneness the four ṣearth and sky, divinities and mortalsi belong together in one.

What does Heidegger mean by earth? Not just soil, dirt, and flint. Rather:

Earth is the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal. [Ō] The sky is the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the wandering glitter of the stars, the yearís seasons and their changes, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night Ō and blue depth of the ether.
He calls the divinities “beckoning messengers of the godhead,” and men are the mortals.

Only man dies, and indeed continually, as long as he remains on earth, under the sky, before the divinities.

Without doubt there is a strong claim here. The claim is that not only is human being essentially relational (not e.g. monadic), but that these relations take the form of a primary fourfold dimensionality. But what is the force or status of this dimensionality? Heidegger is not just speaking of “external” spatiality when he speaks of the relation between earth and sky. Indeed most of the language he uses is inextricably temporal: blossoming, fruiting, spreading, rising up, and then changing, wandering, and references to various cosmic rhythms. He will speak of a gathering of the fourfold, and that this point it can be tempting to think that in this gathering, there are things excluded and included. That this is the first step to the renewal and consolidation of identity. What Heidegger is in fact getting at is best thought of as a kind of dimensional responsibility, a bearing or preserving of a matrix of constitutive relations, which are both singly and collectively fragile.

There are two very precious things Heidegger now says. He will explain how dwelling means saving the earth, and how it means “bringing the presencing of the fourfold into things.” BDT 150-1

Mortals dwell in that they save the earth ų taking the word in the old sense still known to Lessing. Saving does not only snatch something from a danger. To save really means to set something free into its own presencing. To save the earth is more than to exploit it or to wear it out. Saving the earth does not master the earth and does not subjugate it; which is merely one step from spoliation.150

The distance that Heidegger marks in dwelling could said to be that of respect. And it is interesting to compare the position he is elaborating with that of earth art. Heidegger is not just saying that to save the earth we need to become environmentalists. To save the earth for him goes a step further back, to preserving the power of physis, the earth as a creative end-in-itself. The attempt at mastery of the earth, and its subsequent spoiling and destruction, the dwelling which would save the earth from losing, as he says, its own freedom and capacity to presence. Many earth artists were deeply affected by the technological destruction of the earth, and yet they did not, typically, just become environmental activists. They became artists too. Perhaps they too could say that saving the earth means preserving the very idea of an earth that is not just an object for exploitation. That there are a myriad ways of doing this explains how we can talk in the same breath of Heizer and Goldsworthy.

The second precious thing (for our purposes) Heidegger says here has to do with the relation between the fourfold and the thing.
In saving the earth, in receiving the sky, in awaiting the divinities, in initiating mortals, dwelling occurs as the fourfold preservation of the fourfold. Dwelling preserves the fourfold by bringing the presencing of the fourfold into things. But things themselves secure the fourfold only when they themselves as things are let be in their presencing. How is this done? In this way, that mortals nurse and nurture the things that grow, and specially construct the things that do not grow.

I want to use this as an archway, or a bridge, to considering earth art. Because Heidegger here is pointing to a task that takes us beyond philosophy.

But before I do this, and comment on some specific pieces of earth art, I would like just to focus for a moment on the question of the social and historical space which earth art might be said to have entered in the late 60s. I suggest three lines of approach here:

A. The legacy of Hegelís pronouncement of the end of art.  
B. The popular dissemination of the first satellite pictures of the earth.  
C. Michael Friedís denunciation of that art which would abandon its own proper frame as merely theatrical.

A. In his Lectures on Aesthetics, Hegel famously wrote that art is and remains for us, on the side of its highest destiny, a thing of the pastí. That ever did this mean? Hegel wrote that Art no longer counts for us as the highest manner in which truth obtains existence for us. í and that whatever art may be able to do for itself, íits form has ceased to be the highest need of the spirití. (all quotes from OWA in PLT 80)

I understand Hegel to be saying something like this ñ that Plato was right in his attitude to Homerís importance for Greece, and as Socrates was now more important for the polis than Homer, so philosophy (not to mention religion) was now in the position to realize the highest aspirations of spirit, and grasp the truth as a whole. For Hegel, the truth lay in the whole, and to grasp the whole we need to break with the sensuousness of art, which limits its capacity to promote freedom. In the Epilogue to his ìOrigin of the Work of Artî, Heidegger asks whether we can be content with Hegelís pronouncement as a final judgment. And his answer is that the question may have to be re-opened if we understand truth differently from Hegel.

I take it that artís highest destiny with respect to truth and spirit would have to get cashed out in the guiding of a community. And the problem of art for Hegel reappears as the absence of the gods for Heidegger, with the difference that we can at least perhaps wait for the gods. And just as Heidegger will suggest that a different sense of truth as the happening of unconcealedness can in effect relaunch the significance of art, we might also ask whether the capacity of art to constitute a community might not depend on how we thought of community.

It is my sense that the situation to which earth art is a response is one with the following features:
1. Globalization, that is, the awareness that the multiplicity of human communities
operates within a single ëspaceí without there being any unifying principle, has become a precarious ingredient of the consciousness of every concrete human community.

2. We no longer have any hope in the prospect of grasping the human project as a whole.

3. There is a strong and pervasive sense that our pre-eminence at the top of the great chain of being is no longer unambiguous.

4. We find ourselves faced not just with the destruction of our horizon of possibility, hope, destiny, but also with the destruction of our sustaining relationship with the earth.

5. We experience our relation to the cosmos as an uncanny displacement.

These may seem very dramatic claims. But actually they are actually fairly prosaic claims about a dramatic change, one that we are still floundering trying to understand. These claims, separately and together, suggest a crisis in our capacity to represent the truth, a crisis in the very idea of community, a crisis in the idea of the whole. Wouldnt this suggest that the situation ëremainsí, as Hegel put it, one in which art is over, as far as its highest destiny is concerned? Or if anything, that things had got even worse?

B. The second ëphenomenoní I would like to mention here is the proliferation of satellite pictures of the earth in the 60s. Their impact was, I believe, far greater than that of any meteor! There are many ways one could give voice to the topological shift.

If men inhabit the earth and the gods the heavens, then we have become gods. Every airplane passenger looks down on the earth. These satellite pictures gave us, in our armchairs, a godís eye view of at least one face of the whole planet. At the same time, something happened to representation. We are wedded to the thought that the real precedes representation, that representation is a secondary, supplemental phenomenon. We distance ourselves, with Merleau-Ponty, from the pensÈe de survol. But these pictures of the earth could not be defended against so easily. They authenticated a perspective utterly alien to our daily lives. And yet this occurred through a human tool, through photography. It is as if the relation between men and gods were becoming infinitely more complex than Homer had ever imagined, or Plato had ever feared. Finally, while the famous shot was that of a blue planet, the most powerful impression left on many people were the swathes of brown where there should have been green. For the first time, through this seemingly alienating representation, people had a glimpse of their world as a whole. And it seemed to be dying. Through representation, a mechanical eye in the sky, the aggregated effects of human lack of foresight became apparent. Secondary vision challenges the certainties of our daily practices in no uncertain terms. (It is ironic that one of the two main effects of the hole in the ozone layer is cataracts!)

C. For item three I would like to take Michael Fried attack in a famous paper ìArt and Objecthoodî in 1967, on what he called ëthe literalist espousal of objecthoodí, and his defense of modernism. (I do not propose to go into the specifics of Friedís attacks on
Judd and Morris.) Following Greenberg, Fried charges these literalists with theatricality, and even naturalism and anthropomorphism. What makes these works decadent, reflecting a corrupt sensibility, is that instead of allowing the art work to operate within its own medium and frame, and instead of respecting the aesthetic distance between observer and object, and instead of allowing for the suspension of duration, these people turn aesthetic distance into an opportunity for theatre. And theatre, for Fried, is the greatest threat to the success, even the survival of the arts, because it destroys the aesthetic distance necessary for contemplation.

Now although Fried is largely concerned with minimalism, or as he calls it, literalism, I think something of what he says is importantly true of earth art in general. But rather than seeing this theatricality as a defect or limitation or a sign of decadence, I think we can see it, instead as a distinctive virtue. For us to do this, however, we have to see the possibilities of art within a wider context than the frame or the gallery. Fried sees this move as ideological, by which I take it he means that it is a response to social and political and perhaps cosmic questions that may not themselves be essentially aesthetic. But instead of seeing the abandonment of aesthetic distance as a retrograde step, we might come to see it as opening up the possibility of a mobilization and multiple inhabiting of a more original distance, distance in dwelling. If that is so, we may come to think of Friedís aesthetic distance as a particular domestication of the function of distance in art.

I would like to suggest a way of understanding the kind of conversations that are going on in and as earth art, in which the distance in dwelling that I have attributed to Heidegger, together with some further non-Heideggerean reflections about representation, allows us to think about what art can still do in a way that responds to Hegelís diagnosis of the end of art. Before doing that however, I need to show you something of what I am talking about.

Note: these distinctions are important, but not rigid. I happen to think it useful to distinguish between
a. Earth Art: art that has certain monumental character, that involves moving substantial quantities of rock or earth, and that, in this sense at least is continuous with the earthworks of tribal people and earlier civilizations. Michael Heizerís work is exemplary here.
b. Land Art: art that does not so much move or displace the earth as mark, wrap, map or reconceptualize it in some way or other. Here the work of Richard Long is exemplary.
c. Art in Nature: art that delicately rearranges found objects in nature in aesthetically exquisite ways. Here Andy Goldsworthy is pre-eminent.
d. Environmental Art: art concerned with the artistic reclamation and transformation of industrial sites, wasteland, inner city sites etc. Here the work of Peter Latz is a good example.

These distinctions are not, even in these terms, exhaustive. And I distinguish two more categories that particularly speak to our cosmic consciousness ñ Skyworks, and works
Between Earth and Sky. These tend to cut through the distinction between Earth and Land Art by emphasizing the orientation of such works, and the scale of the site which they take themselves to be occupying.

And with this minor twist in our scheme of classification, I want to take the opportunity of saying that this classification is very much an initial practical one, rather than the outcome of philosophical reflection. This is not just because that work has not been completed, but because, in my view at least, so many of these works operate in dimensions of meaning that precisely and explicitly and repeatedly break with assigned categories of significance. Indeed that might be said to be what is distinctive about them. I will try to show this in more detail shortly, but in the meantime, take the question of time. Someone might say that it is important, instead, to categorize these works in terms of their mobilization of time or of space. In time, Walter De Mariaís Lightning Field, only remotely accessible, is available to most of us in the form of a photograph of a particular bolt of lightning. That is, an instantaneous event. Should we not, then, classify this work along with Nancy Holtís Sun Tunnels, in which the precise time of day is reflected in the light patterns on the inside of her concrete pipes? And Smithsonís Partially Buried Woodshed. And the temporariness of so many of Andy Goldsworthyís constructions.

Not to mention those made of ice, which seem to be melting before our eyes. But of course, each one of these could be said to take not just time but space as the central parameter. I offer this little excursion just to show that the more rudimentary classifications may actually have the advantage in not prejudging the significance of the works they give us a handle on. That significance, as I see it, is right across the board, multi-dimensional, a consequence, perhaps of these works having left behind them, the traditional delimitations of the frame and the gallery.

Now I will show you some slides, starting off with the two final categories I have mentioned. You should have a copy of the running order on a printed sheet.

SLIDESHOW

On another occasion, I would like to spend far longer talking about what these various artists have said about what they doing. On this occasion, I will offer a more general interpretive frame, and suggest why I think this work is of special interest to philosophy.

Heidegger understands dwelling in terms of preservation, even ësaving the earthí, but not directly promoting environmentalism. What I understand to be the significance of the fourfold is this: that we can, and in some sense, we need to both see ourselves and live in a certain dimensional responsibility, by which I mean keeping open, allowing ourselves to be affected, by fundamental dimensions or horizons. The sky is not the lid on the box, but a complex meld of stars by which we measure, and a limitless blue, perhaps a symbol of non-closure.. The gods are precisely those who can never arrive, but who hold open
even unthinkable possibility. And the fate of the earth is tied up with the resonance
available within these other strands of the fourfold. Much of the earth art that we have
seen is out there, public, unframed, demanding a certain participatory response. Often it
does not just reject the frame, or the gallery, but precisely problematize, dramatize the
very question of frame (limits, borders etc). See Smithsonís site/non-site, or Holtís
tunnels that frame views, or Druryís cairns which call on the landscape to function as a
frame. The movement towards performativity in philosophy, starting with Socrates, and
then in Hegel, through Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, each time insisting that
the truth could only come through a certain experience of engagement, and that
detachment is a specialized and limited form of truth ñ this insight, which can prescribe
what we do and do not do quite as rigorously as any other ñ is being enacted in other
ways in earth art.

How does this respond to Hegelís diagnosis of the end of art? I would take my cue from a
remark by Derrida near the beginning of his famous 1967 essay on Levinas, iViolence
and Metaphysicsí, in which he said that the only community possible for us at least is the
community of the question (of community). What I want to suggest is that earth-art,
unlike the empty temple that once opened a world for a people but now does not, (and
even more unlike the Nashville Parthenon, which, without its Acropolis, and without
history, serves as a powerful monument to a worldlessness blind to its own deficiency) ñ
earth-art, in various ways, bears witness to the community of the question, and the
question of community. The more monumental works gather to themselves a presence in
the landscape that opens up our relation to the sky, not as a fact, but as an occasion for
awe and wonder. Many of them bear witness to the very question that haunts their
construction ñ what are we doing when we mark or plough or gouge the earth. And even
the most delicately romantic pieces remind us of other possibilities, a different dwelling.
If there is no great art today, what we do have are works that ask after the possibilities of
greatness, or of great disasters.

Does not art itself think?

I worry when I talk about Earth Art that my enthusiasm consists in showing how this or
that work exemplifies a theme already developed in philosophy ñ time, space,
representation, and our relation to the cosmos. This is not so, but correcting this
misapprehension gives me an opportunity to raise the question: Does not art itself think?

The fact that certain themes have been developed in philosophy does not make them
somehow the exclusive property of philosophy, as if philosophy could somehow lay
claim to êt imei, defending it against what physics, music, literature, or history might say.
Let alone what an active mortal being might spontaneously think about time. Perhaps
more pertinently still, it would not be hard to argue that philosophy has not always dealt
with these issues in the most subtle and responsive way. Has not philosophy often
cultivated a style and a method of dealing with these issues which constitutively
embodies restrictive decisions about the scope of many of the very concerns of art ñ
including just the ones we mentioned ñ space, time, representation ñ as well as
sensibility. If a full airing of these concerns was a requirement for êthinkingi about them,
then we might find ourselves echoing Heidegger when he wonders whether philosophy itself can think. What I am obviously drawing on here is the idea that the value of something like presence, restitution of identity, the regulation of both change, sensibility and representation, naturally, if not inevitably, inform much of what philosophy is about, and that the tendency to closure they represent actually inhibits the exploration of the deeper dimensions of these very issues.

If something like this is true, or plausible, it would recast our worry about the ways in which we are treating art. First, the question Does Art Think? would no longer have the tacit form — we know philosophy thinks, but does art? The question of whether philosophy, construed in this or that way, thinks, is also at stake. But second, there is the suspicion that art might not only make a real contribution to thinking, but that our thinking about art, and indeed, artists thinking in and about art, might be relevant to the ongoing struggle for the soul of philosophy. To take a small example. If we follow those philosophers who think of color as a secondary quality, we endorse their view of things as defined simply by such primary qualities as extension and solidity. But there are other philosophers who would contest this treatment of color and of the reductive ontological assumptions that underlie it. The yellow of Van Goghís bedroom chair, or the red of Andy Goldsworthyís rowan berries, or the blue of Daliís sky is not a refutation. But it may precisely help us think through what is at stake when we take color seriously. And the ëweí here is not just we philosophers, but we sensuous beings. On this account, then, art is not just an exemplification of a philosophical claim, but an active participant in what we might call the recovery of thinking. If this is right, the philosopher, in thinking about art, or in trying to think with art, is actually being offered an opportunity to let go of something of the frame of philosophy. Does art think?

In my view, the work of art occupies or projects a whole set of decisions, choices, and questions which both in the process of creation and interpretation, not to mention visceral response, engage our participation. It is in this participation that art thinks. It is not obviously linear or propositional, and it does not reach conclusions. But the same can be said for the best human conversations. What it does, perhaps, is to give urgency and specificity to the pursuit of certain questions, and their interlacing with other questions. (Such as: the relation between inside and outside, the framed and the unframed, what we can focus on/ what envelops us, art as commodity/art as free from that economy.) In the case of monumental earth art this urgency comes through the fact that the work occupies substantial space, a space which is not essentially an aesthetic space. (Unlike the gallery.) This calls attention both to it, and to its site. In a famous poem, Wallace Stevens describes the jar on the hill in Tennessee as transforming its surroundings.

There is no one formula as to how earth/land art does this. But we might wonder whether there is something like a reversal of the way in which a gallery and a frame bestows an aesthetic aura on a painting. It is not just that earth art bestows aesthetic value on its natural surroundings, though that often clearly happens. A more complex formulation would be that earth art could be said to dramatize the space of possibility within which the precarious fate of nature will be played out. It does this by mimicking natural creativity, by deploying natural materials, by evoking and implicating natural forces. Nature, then, is not just the setting. Rather, nature is the stage of the question. And
by implication, of course, human dwelling in and with nature.

Conclusion

A different paper would have made more of the differences between, say, earth art, land art, environmental art etc. There are such differences in sensibility, for example, between Michael Heizer's use of bulldozers aggressively to carve channels in the desert, and Andy Goldsworthy's floating of red berries in a pool. I have tried, however, to argue that beyond these radical divergences, and beyond the fact that all this work is out-of-doors, out-of-the gallery, and uses naturally available materials on site, there is a meditation on dwelling on earth, and on opening up again the multiple dimensions of that dwelling -- under the sky, underground, lit by the sun, subject to seasons, fragile, transient etc. -- and that this art of disclosure, re-erecting the canopy of the earth if you like, is set against the background of the earth itself as a vulnerable site. If we feel this as dwellers on the surface, it is no accident that we make things intended to be seen from on high, as if to call out to some beyond: help, rescue us, we are going down.

Suggest that this offers a way of understanding what great art is today. (Ie unframed). As a bearing and witnessing inviting participation of the problem of community, dwelling, etc. Do this in various ways. But say something about the movement of pathos that occurs in taking art out into the real. (Cf. landscape painting). Even though it may be a breakthrough event that closes up behind itself again.

BDT in PLT 149
See *The Thing*.
Compare Lacan's account of the mirror-stage, in which a child attains to its first sense of self as a whole, as an alienated representation.
See also the Andy Goldsworthy movie, Rivers and Tides, devoted to the exploration of time and natural process.

Anecdote of the Jar, Wallace Stevens
I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.
The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.
It took dominion every where.
The jar was gray and bare.
It did not give of bird or bush,
Like nothing else in Tennessee.