

Knowing Art Philosophically and the Challenge to Preserve Poetry

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Undergraduate Thesis

Introduction

“Poets who have sung despair in the midst of prosperity, and of hope amid darkest gloom, have been the true metaphysicians of nature. The glory of the moment and its tragedy will surely pass”

-John Dewey¹

Western philosophy under the influence of Aristotle struggles to contend with the precariousness of reality. This conception of reality devalues uncertainty and stabilizes truth and being, therefore limiting truth to matters of correctness and requiring being to assume fixed form. Dewey, however, is troubled by the assertion of reality as stable and turns to poets who are not deceived by this philosophical illusion. Poets recognize that experience is not definite, stable, or eternal and that we instead find ourselves within a reality that is changing, contingent, and temporal.

Dewey believes poets grasp reality well because they are well-attuned to the quality of experience. Quality is tacit; quality is direct experience that is felt rather than known and thus does not submit to articulation easily, if at all. We experience interactions due to their unique quality. Dewey shares that “Quality enables us to keep thinking about one problem without our having constantly to stop to ask ourselves what it is after all that we are thinking about...The problem is had or experienced before it can be stated or set forth; but it is had as an immediate quality of the whole situation.”² Recognizing quality indicates one’s attentiveness to the happening of an experience, to a reality that is incongruous, not guaranteed, and frankly messy.

¹ John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1929), 116/7.

² John Dewey, “Qualitative Thought,” in *The Essential Dewey*, edited by Larry Hickman and Thomas Alexander (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995), 198.

Therefore, poets, perceptive to “despair in the midst of prosperity, and of hope amid darkest gloom,” apprehend quality and thus can convey the complexity of experience well.³

Poets are receptive to the precariousness of being and truth as well. By challenging Western metaphysics, Dewey offers a poetical way of experiencing that concentrates upon the fluctuation of reality, where truth and being are met profoundly and qualitatively. I am very much concerned with the poetical way of experiencing that Dewey speaks of, especially as it relates to the expression of truth. While Dewey and Heidegger constructed different theories of truth and art, I believe one of the ways in which they overlap is through their esteem for poetry: poets, attuned to the depth of experience, attend to being and their poetry captures the event of truth.

I aim to pursue poetry as a work of art through this thesis. Dewey helped inspire my engagement with poetry, however, I did not incorporate his aesthetics into this thesis. I will address a poem as a Heideggerian artwork, as can be abstracted from Heidegger’s essay “The Origin of the Work of Art,” and hope to disclose a historical truth through such engagement. Because of the truth power of poems, I have decided to engage a poem written by May Ayim from 1990; the poem bears the title “blues in schwarz weiss.” Ayim, an Afro-German poet and social activist, articulated her experiences of racism in Germany frequently through poetry. I involve myself with “blues in schwarz weiss” to reach the truth within, to hear the historical utterance about a moment bound in time. Treating Ayim’s poem as a Heideggerian work of art will allow me to feel the poem’s power of truth and to provide yet another artwork that substantiates Heidegger’s theory of art while also finding the limits of the theory. Through

³ Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 116/7.

allowing the theory to guide us and the poem to affect us, I believe we will be able to better relate to artworks and to the art within them.

Heidegger, Germany, and His Theory of Art

Martin Heidegger, born in 1889 and died in 1976, contributed to German culture through his social and philosophical pursuits. Holding various titles throughout his long life, among them professor of philosophy, father, and Nazi, Heidegger proves to be a complex figure for and within German society. Many academics are troubled by the reconciliation, if any, between his long membership in the Nazi Party (from April of 1933 until 1945) and his philosophy.⁴ While the compatibility of the two is not the primary focus of this thesis, the potential overlap between his political and philosophical commitments is not a concern to be tossed aside.

Rather, this thesis homes in on the Heideggerian function of artworks, of how the works *work*. Heidegger's 1936 essay "The Origin of the Work of Art," as indicated by the title, inquires into the origin of the artwork. Right away, Heidegger attempts to settle his inquiry: "As the artist is the origin of the work in a necessarily different way from the way the work is the origin of the artist, so it is in yet another way, quite certainly, that art is the origin of both artist and work."⁵ While Heidegger recognizes the origin of the artwork as art, his explanation also relays how such an origin finds itself fundamentally bound up with art as the origin of the artist as well.

Heidegger continues to pursue the primacy of art through investigating the existence of works of art. Works of art *are*, but aesthetics tends to misinterpret the being of artworks.

⁴ "As is commonly known, [Heidegger] joined the Nazi party and served for almost a year as rector of the University of Freiburg (1933-34), expressing public support for the leadership and policies of Hitler and implementing them in the university. In contrast with most modern philosophers, whose curricula vitae are almost entirely academic, Heidegger's life entered into the public record and therefore calls for both narrative and reflection" (Sokolowski, 54).

⁵ Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.

Heidegger rejects popular aesthetic theories, such as theories that use the Aristotelian form-matter distinction, and thus leaves a gap within art theory, a hole which his essay then goes on to fill. Heidegger's theory of art, contrary to his indictment of the Aristotelian framework of aesthetics, does not assault being.⁶ For the sake of art, Heidegger believes one must allow an entity to "rise to its resting-within-itself" rather than force one's way into an entity's being.⁷ This coming forth of an entity into its being happens in artworks. By allowing an entity to become manifest within its being, the artwork "opens up, in its own way, the being of beings. This opening up,...[this unconcealing] the truth of beings, happens in the work."⁸ Art helps beings and truth to disclose themselves through the work of art, allowing the work of art to be.

To explain these points, albeit in an obscure and vague way, Heidegger ties in C.F. Meyer's poem "The Roman Fountain."⁹ Of the poem, he claims: "This, however, is neither a poetic depiction of an actual fountain nor the reproduction of the general essence of a Roman fountain. Yet truth is set into the work."¹⁰ Truth is set into the poem not by writing beautifully about a literal fountain nor likening an artistic representation to a particular Roman fountain that, at one point in time, existed. Instead, truth is set to work in the work because the poem opens up the being of multiple entities that are joined together as the Roman fountain. The poem shows how entities, here the jetting and bubbling water, the marble dishes, and their interactive movement, cohere together as they rely upon one another to complete the event that is the Roman fountain. Truth within the poem, full of tension, defies typical and shallow expectations

⁶ "But for that reason, no less than the other interpretations of the thingness of the thing we have discussed, it [the matter-form structure] represents an assault on the thing-being of the thing" (Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 11).

⁷ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 14.

⁸ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 19.

⁹ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 17.

¹⁰ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 17.

of how to describe the Roman fountain and rather comes upon the audience with a cunning that makes the familiar unfamiliar, which redresses what a fountain is as something not of this world. One becomes caught in the tension of truth, stuck feeling as though that which should be as familiar as a fountain, is, in fact, most unusual. As is illustrated by “The Roman Fountain,” poems bring us beyond our everyday expectations, a departure to the other-worldly which the work’s truth and tension enact.

Heidegger continues to commit himself to inquiring into what art is by exploring truth insofar as truth is that which sets itself to work in the artwork. In order for an artwork to open up truth properly, Heidegger clarifies that a work must be accessible in a certain way. He notes that: “Precisely in great art (which is all we are concerned with here) the artist remains something inconsequential in comparison with the work – almost like a passageway which, in the creative process destroys itself for the sake of the coming forth of the work.”¹¹ Heidegger regulates his theory of art by narrowing his ideas to apply only to ‘great’ (*großen*) art, a term which he does not elucidate further but which clearly relates to the depersonalizing of the artist through the creation of the artwork.¹² Great art, in short, happens when the work is independent of its artist and thus makes its truth available to others beyond its creator. Art that does not depersonalize or dissolve its relation to the artist must therefore not be ‘great.’ Additionally, a work’s inability to completely disassociate from the artist would, according to Heidegger, make the work unsuitable for the working of truth and thus the work could not come forth as truthfully accessible. By recognizing the elitist overtones of Heidegger’s theory of art, I will be in a better position later on to comment upon how such inclination effects engaging with Ayim’s work of art.

¹¹ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 19.

¹² Heidegger, “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” 26.

Following his subtle distinction of only certain art as ‘great,’ Heidegger then delves into the spatiality of artworks. He frames spatiality in this way: “The works themselves are located and hang in collections and exhibitions. But are they themselves, in this context, are they the works they are, or are they, rather, objects of the art business? The works are made available for the public and private enjoyment of art.”¹³ As with greatness, the manner in which the work is accessible alters the being of the artwork. Heidegger’s question hints at the object being of works made available through commodification, one of the many demeaning acts of the modern art industry. Offering the Aegina sculptures in Munich and Sophocles’ *Antigone* in its finest critical edition as examples of relocated and thus publicly accessible works, Heidegger determines that these works are “torn out of their own essential space” and that “their relocation in a collection has withdrawn them from the world.”¹⁴ Displacing the work from its original space and condition diminishes the world within the work. Reduced to object being and consequently possessing diminished worlds indicates how the works suffer: “Their former self-sufficiency has deserted them.”¹⁵ The displacement of the worlds from out of the works results in the works no longer being independent and self-supporting, characteristics that ultimately indicate the disintegration of an artwork. Heidegger argues for maintaining works by stating that “[An artwork] belongs uniquely within the region it itself opens up. For the work-being of the work presences in and only in such opening up.”¹⁶ Thus, to do right by artworks and the art within them is to not displace artworks, for example by commodifying them, but rather to allow them to exist within their original place, an open space that the work clears for itself and within which it can most properly be in its work being as an artwork.

¹³ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 19.

¹⁴ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 20.

¹⁵ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 20.

¹⁶ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 20.

Heidegger illustrates his formulations on art through another example, a temple at Paestum. He explains:

It is the temple work that first structures and simultaneously gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire for the human being the shape of its destiny. The all-governing expanse of these open relations is the world of this historical people. From and within this expanse the people first returns to itself for the completion of its vocation.¹⁷

The temple serves humans, precisely, ancient Greeks, by shaping their destiny, a tangle of decisions and events that directs their trajectory within the world. The people are called to continue the work of the temple, to further shape their destiny. He continues: “Standing there, the temple work opens up a world while, at the same time, setting this world back onto the earth which itself first comes forth as homeland [*heimatliche Grund*]...Standing there, the temple first gives to things their look, and to men their outlook on themselves.”¹⁸ His repetition of “standing there” signifies the work’s self-sufficiency, or its assumption of its original place. In such security, the temple opens a world while setting this world back onto the earth, onto the homeland of the people. To put this idea into other words: The world, the series of possibilities navigated by a people, arises from and returns to the earth, a foundation for the people which they recognize as their homeland. The temple then invites other entities, like humans and animals, into the arrangement of its essential place, the original space that the temple itself opens up. In other words, in light of the Paestum temple as an artwork, things are given their shape and man’s destiny takes its shape.

¹⁷ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 21.

¹⁸ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 21.

Through his account of the Paestum temple, two essential traits of the work being of artwork distinguish themselves: the work sets up a world and sets forth earth.¹⁹ “*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... Wherever the essential decisions of our history are made, wherever we take them over or abandon them, wherever they go unrecognized or are brought once more into question, the world worlds... As a work, the work holds open the open of a world.”²⁰ Just as the work itself is open, so is the world and the openness of the work supports the open of the world – this is how the work sets up a world. Within the open of the world, the people are exposed to countless possibilities to pursue, determinations that ultimately comprise their destiny.

Earth, on the other hand, does not open itself as the artwork and the world do. Heidegger describes: “Earth is the coming-forth-concealing [*Hervorkommend-Bergende*]... On and in earth, historical man finds his dwelling in the world... If we try to make it [earth] comprehensible by analyzing it into numbers or oscillations it is gone. It shows itself only when it remains undisclosed and unexplained.”²¹ World exposes itself, whereas earth conceals itself. Earth in an artwork, however, does not hide away to conceal itself but rather steps forth quite assuredly in its fundamental concealment. Also, historical humans, who can make up a historical people, dwell upon and within the earth, viewing earth as their homeland. Lastly, to set forth earth means to “bring it into the open as the self-secluding.”²² Earth is known through its unintelligibility, not through invasive examination that threatens such self-seclusion and unintelligibility. By setting up a world and setting forth earth, a work rightfully assumes its work being.

¹⁹ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 22-24.

²⁰ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 23.

²¹ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 25.

²² Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 25.

Heidegger further characterizes world and earth through their differential relationality. He highlights that “world and earth are essentially different and yet never separated from one another. World is grounded on earth, and earth rises up through world.”²³ The difference between world and earth overcomes an indifference of one to the other, and instead recognizes their co-dependence. World and earth are co-dependent because “the opposition of world and earth is strife” and “the more intransigently the strife outdoes itself on its own part, the more uncompromisingly do the opponents admit themselves into the intimacy of their simple belonging to one another.”²⁴ Thus, the world and earth conflict and deepen their intimate commitment to one another through such strife. “By setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work accomplishes this strife.”²⁵ Therefore, by the artwork setting up a world and setting forth earth, the work can attain the strife of the two, of world and earth.

The strife of world and earth matters to artworks because that is how truth sets itself to work. Heidegger confirms so when he writes that “the essence of truth is in itself the *ur-strife* [*Urstreit*] in which is won that open center within which beings stand, and from out of which they withdraw into themselves.”²⁶ As the primal strife that is the conflict of world and earth, truth is. Heidegger also notes that “truth happens only by establishing itself in the strife and space it itself opens up...Clearing of the openness and establishment in the open belong together. They are the same thing, an essence of the happening of truth. This happening is, in many different ways, historical.”²⁷ Thus, truth happens historically and as the strife.

²³ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 26.

²⁴ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 27.

²⁵ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 27.

²⁶ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 31.

²⁷ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 36/7.

Attending to truth in an artwork, however, entails a special sort of activity. Heidegger explains: “To submit to this displacement means: to transform all familiar relations to world and to earth, and henceforth to restrain all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to dwell within the truth this is happening in the work.”²⁸ I spoke earlier of how displacing the artwork harms its work being and reduces the artwork to object being. The sense of displacement spoken of here differs from such uprooting and rather is an activity of the work: The artwork displaces. The artwork thrusts away and challenges all that is familiar. Discharging the familiar allows for the possibility of dwelling within truth. Heidegger elaborates further: “The restraint of this dwelling allows what is created to become, for the first time, the work that it is. This allowing the work to be a work is what we call its preservation.”²⁹ Preservation occurs through agents called preservers and through such care, a work enters for the first time into existence proper. Preservation enables a preserver to dwell within the truth that happens in an artwork. Overall, truth works as the strife in the artwork and brings preservers to settle into a place other than their familiar home, so as to allow the preservers to know the truth power of the work of art.

Nearing the end of his essay, Heidegger reaches a pivotal conclusion: “Thus art is: the creative preservation of the truth in the work. *Art is, then, a becoming and a happening of truth.*”³⁰ Art is the creating and preserving of truth, a process which is undeniably historical and accordingly is the historical happening of truth. Thus, the knowing and preserving of truth is part of the effort that allows truth to be. He goes on to support what we discussed prior about the work displacing: “Truth will never be gathered from what is present and ordinary.”³¹ Artworks

²⁸ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 40.

²⁹ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 40.

³⁰ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 44.

³¹ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 44.

thrust preservers away from what is proximal and everyday toward the unfamiliarity of truth. Art, therefore, happens as this shifting of truth is made and known.

Heidegger makes his claims about truth and art more dynamic by declaring that “*All art...is, in essence, poetry.*”³² Thus, poetry as art thrusts one away from the proximal and everyday toward the unfamiliarity of truth. In an attempt to better apprehend poetry, Heidegger comments: “The linguistic work, poetry in the narrower sense, has a privileged position among art as a whole.”³³ Therefore, Heidegger explicitly privileges poetry in his theory of art but, nonetheless, recognizes the profoundness of all sorts of poetry, of all sorts of art beyond the linguistic, poetic artwork. Poetry’s central role in his theory of art brings us back to experiencing poetically, as was discussed in the introduction. Poetic experience, which is had through making and knowing poetry, allows truth to emerge and be met. Hence, art as poetry carefully engages with truth.

Temporality underpins the interaction between art and its preservers, an interaction which shifts the preservers beyond their everyday. Heidegger explains: “In the work, rather, truth is cast toward the coming preservers, that is to say, a historical humanity. What is cast forth, however, is never an arbitrary demand.”³⁴ Heidegger specifies that truth’s call to preservers rings partially. By this, I mean that Heidegger challenges the traditional, European philosophical conception of truth that claims truth’s objectivity and impartiality. Truth beckons to its preservers, to an audience through an artwork, making manifest a crucial shift that is the success of art. Revisiting his initial ideas about the origin, Heidegger declares that “The origin of the artwork – of, that is, creators and preservers, which is to say, the historical existence of a people – is art.”³⁵ While he

³² Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 44.

³³ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 45.

³⁴ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 47.

³⁵ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 49.

began the essay by noting art as the origin of the artwork and the artist, he further details art as the origin of the artwork, of creators (or artists that make the artwork) and preservers (or individuals that receive the truthful calling of the artwork). Therefore, artworks as well as their makers and knowers originate in art, bound to one another by history and truth.

But why does Heidegger insist upon an inquiry into art? At the end of the essay, he tells us that we have explored the essential nature of art “in order to be able to ask properly whether or not, in our historical existence, art is an origin, whether, and under what conditions, it can and must become one... Only such knowledge prepares, for art, the space, for creators, the path, and for preservers the location.”³⁶ To allow art to be an origin means that people recognize art for its potential to guide them toward truthful revelation. If art is not an origin, then the relation between art and people falters. Therefore, Heidegger inquires into art in order to ensure we treat artworks properly and to confront us with the necessity of undertaking art as an origin.

Yet, he somberly asks: “Are we, in our existence, historically at the origin? Do we know [*Wissen wir*], that is, do we attend to the essence of the origin? Or do we in our relationship to art rely only upon cultivated cognitions [*Kenntnisse*] of the past?”³⁷ Deviating from the Cambridge edition allows me to better grasp Heidegger’s desire to understand art: the original German shares a contrasting sense of knowing that the English version, and English generally, do not sustain, the difference between *wissen* as in “Wissen wir” and *kennen* as in “Kenntnisse.” Both verbs and word forms refer to ‘knowing,’ yet harbor different connotations. *Wissen* can usher in

³⁶ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 49.

³⁷ Translation modified. In the original German, the series of questions reads as follows: “Sind wir in unserem Dasein geschichtlich am Ursprung? Wissen wir, d.h. achten wir das Wesen des Ursprunges? Oder berufen wir uns in unserem Verhalten zur Kunst nur noch auf gebildete Kenntnisse des Vergangenen?” (Heidegger, *Holzwege*, 66). The translators unfortunately only pose the first and last question, writing: “Are we, in our existence, historically at the origin? Or do we, rather, in our relationship with art, appeal, merely, to a cultured knowledge of the past?” (Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 50). The omission of the varied use of “wissen” and “kennen” here misses the complexities of knowing offered in the original German, a distinction that is fundamental to Heidegger’s sense of properly knowing [*wissen*] art as the origin.

a scientific and objective knowledge, whereas *kennen* achieves a closeness, a familiarity with that which is known. Because Heidegger believes great art thrust us beyond the ordinary and into the unfamiliar where truth dwells, maintaining the distinction of *wissen* as knowing in an unfamiliar, albeit not scientific nor objective, sense proves quite important. Thus, by understanding the complexities of the German, the following question proves more dynamic: How do we relate to artworks and know art? Do we *know* art in a merely familiar, inauthentic way or in an uncanny, but nonetheless truthful way?³⁸

Ayim, Germany, and her Stories of Racism

May Ayim, born in 1960 and died in 1996, stands as yet another significant figure within the course of German culture, albeit less well-known than Heidegger. On May 3rd, 1960, May was born in Hamburg as Sylvia Andler to an unwed white German mother and a Black Ghanaian father. Because of her parents being unwed, German laws in place at the time considered May to be an ‘illegitimate’ child. The rights of the biological fathers of ‘illegitimate’ children were withheld and thus, May’s father was prohibited from taking custody of her.³⁹ As a result, May’s mother placed her into a children’s home and there, the Opitz family adopted her.⁴⁰

Raised in the Westphalia region of West Germany as May Opitz alongside the Opitz’ biological children, May endured a difficult childhood during which she was not protected from harm or racism.⁴¹ She recounts of her childhood: “My strict upbringing, the beatings, and being imprisoned by my foster parents was done out of love, responsibility, and ignorance. Knowing

³⁸ To help non-German readers, the former way of knowing would be tied to *kennen* and the latter to *wissen*. Therefore, maintaining the original German meaning as much as possible proves both necessary and worthwhile in upholding Heidegger, to the best extent possible, in English.

³⁹ Elizabeth LeBuhn, “Biography of May Ayim,” last modified May 17, 2015, <https://u.osu.edu/berlin2798mayayim/2015/05/17/biography/>.

⁴⁰ LeBuhn, “Biography of May Ayim.”

⁴¹ LeBuhn, “Biography of May Ayim.”

the prejudices that existed in German society, they unwittingly adapted my upbringing to these prejudices. I grew up with the same feelings that they had—the need to prove that a ‘half-caste’, a [‘n*****’], an ‘orphan child’ could be a whole person. Alongside all that there was hardly time for me to discover my ‘me.’”⁴² May’s adoptive parents were complicit in the pathologizing of Black people and foster children, subjecting May to cruel treatment which inhibited her development of and comfortableness with her self.

Unfortunately, May’s encounters with racism and racist people were not limited to her childhood nor her interactions with her adoptive parents. While writing her university thesis in the mid-1980s, May again came up against the brunt of ignorance and racism. May studied psychology and education at the University of Regensburg and dedicated her thesis to understanding the history of Afro-Germans, entitling her project *Afro-Germans: Their Cultural and Social History on the Background of Social Change*.⁴³ A professor of May’s denied her project and snidely declared: “There is no longer racism in Germany today.”⁴⁴ Thankfully another advisor in Berlin approved May’s project, yet the hardship of the situation was one of the many disturbances racism caused within May’s life. During her time at Regensburg, however, May also had the opportunity to travel to various countries, including a visit to Ghana where she met her father, Emmanuel Ayim, and the rest of her paternal family.⁴⁵

By 1984, May settled into Berlin where she trained as a speech therapist.⁴⁶ From 1984 until her death in 1992, Caribbean-American poet and social activist Audre Lorde visited Berlin

⁴² May Ayim, “Departure,” in *Daughters of Africa*, ed. Margaret Busby (New York: Random House, Inc, 1992), 935.

⁴³ LeBuhn, “Biography of May Ayim.”

⁴⁴ “Rassismus gibt es im heutigen Deutschland nicht” (Mertins, “Worte“).

⁴⁵ LeBuhn, “Biography of May Ayim.”

⁴⁶ May Ayim, *blues in schwarz weiss* (Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1995), biography given at the end of the book.

while employed at the Free University of Berlin as a guest professor of North American literature.⁴⁷ In 1984, Lorde met many Black German women at the university, including May and Katharina Oguntoye. Through her emphasis on the necessity of self-definition, Lorde helped these Black German women create the label Afro-German (*Afro-Deutsch*). Out of Lorde's encouragement and a desire for better social treatment, May and Katharina also helped co-found the Initiative of Black Germans (*Initiative Schwarze Deutsche* or ISD) in 1985.⁴⁸ The following year, May and Katharina along with Dagmar Schultz, the professor who offered Lorde a teaching opportunity at the Free University of Berlin, edited *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out* (*Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*).⁴⁹ Grown out of the heart of her thesis, *Showing Our Colors* gave rise to the Afro-German history and stories which May so desperately needed and sought after.⁵⁰

In 1992, the same year Lorde lost her battle with cancer, May adopted her father's last name and began going by "May Ayim."⁵¹ In 1993, May had an article published in the collection *Entfernte Verbindung* in which she recounts her experience of the reunification of Germany. May begins the article, entitled "The Year 1990: Homeland and Unity from an Afro-German Perspective," as follows:

I scroll back to my thoughts at the end of 1989 and into 1990, to the confusion and contradictions, the departures and disruptions, the memories of repressed experiences, the new discoveries. At the time, I felt as though I were on a boat in choppy waters. I was so preoccupied with not getting shipwrecked in the whirl of events that I could barely differentiate and process the events

⁴⁷ "estate Audre Lorde," Freie Universität Berlin, accessed April 1, 2022, https://www.fu-berlin.de/en/sites/uniarchiv/bestaende/abteilung3/nachlass_lorde/index.html

⁴⁸ "Über uns," ISD, accessed April 1, 2022, <https://isdonline.de/ueber-uns/>

⁴⁹ Audre Lorde, *Dream of Europe* (Berkeley: Kenning Editions, 2020), 16.

⁵⁰ Tiffany Florvil, "Remembering Afro-German Intellectual May Ayim," accessed April 1, 2022, <https://www.aaihs.org/remembering-afro-german-intellectual-may-ayim/>.

⁵¹ Amy Lynne Hill, "May Ayim," accessed March 31, 2022, <https://my.vanderbilt.edu/amylynnehill/authors/may-ayim/>.

happening around me. In hindsight, I can see only the shadows of some things; others I can make out much more clearly from a distance.⁵²

The fall of the Berlin Wall did not usher in calm or collection but rather brought forth utter disorientation and perplexity for May. May collapsed into a survival mindset that only complicated extracting herself from the raw experiences she was undergoing. Ultimately, comparing her experience of post-fall to a boat amidst a storm relays how encompassing and difficult it proved to simply navigate the social landscape but also to avoid the more serious threat of racially motivated harm.

The threatening torrent of racial attack and its purveyors, in part, related to skin color. May describes the bigotry present then: “In the first days after November 9, 1989, I noticed that there were hardly any immigrants and Black Germans visible in the cityscape, at least those with dark skin. I asked myself how many Jews were (not) in the streets.”⁵³ This absence of people of color, immigrants, and Jewish people following reunification cannot be attributed to a mere lack of those groups within Berlin at the time and instead indicates their retreat to safety, an acknowledgement of the streets as a nexus of danger for these ejected groups.

Streets in this way are a unique image because the night the wall fell, a rather mundane place became the site of celebration for tens of thousands of white Germans. In this way, streets bear witness to many experiences, including the tedium, excitement and apprehension, of life. For those reticent to step foot in the streets, which expose them to the possibility of racial attack, trepidation disrupts the familiar monotony that streets so often pose. Those marginalized are not blindly worried but justly assume such trepidation because of blatantly hateful and violent social exclusion.

⁵² May Ayim, “The Year 1990: Homeland and Unity from an Afro-German Perspective,” in *Germany in Transit*, trans. Tes Howell (California: University of California Press, 2007), 126.

⁵³ Ayim, “The Year 1990: Homeland and Unity from an Afro-German Perspective,” 126.

The strain noticeable in the streets pervaded the rest of German life. However, not all were effective in acknowledging or handling such struggle. May addresses the hypocrisy inherent in political discourse, a hypocrisy which overlooks many people's vulnerability to suffering at the hands of prejudice: "The new 'we' in 'this country of ours'—as Chancellor Kohl loved to say—did not and does not have room for everyone. 'Get lost, [n*****], don't you have a home?' For the first time since I moved to Berlin, I have had to defend myself on an almost daily basis against blatant insults, hostile looks, and/or openly racist defamation."⁵⁴ A new 'we' contrasts with the hostility bubbling in German cities, including Berlin. This 'we' did not extend its welcome to everyone in Germany and thus fell flat as an inclusive political measure. May continues on about the ineffectiveness of politics:

In 1990, I found this silence and resistance surrounding racism, even among 'progressive' leftists and feminist women, frightening and shocking, and yet I was hardly surprised. To be sure, discussions on the topic of a 'multicultural Federal Republic' have occurred more frequently since the mid-1980s. Only in exceptional cases, however, have these discussions changed lives and political connections in such a way that an uninterrupted, equitable collaboration with immigrants and Black Germans would become an indisputable given and the analysis of racism a permanent undertaking.⁵⁵

Politics, politicians, and those politically engaged failed to take racism seriously. May encountered this inability or unwillingness to handle racism as a worthwhile point of concern and consideration countlessly. This article shares the bleakness of racism itself and the apathy toward those who have experienced racism, a negligence that wore May down a lot, especially as the fall of the wall exacerbated such lack of concern.

May struggled with her mental health throughout her life and her battles with racism never made such pursuit of health easy. In 1996, the further complication of a multiple sclerosis

⁵⁴ Ayim, "The Year 1990: Homeland and Unity from an Afro-German Perspective," 127.

⁵⁵ Ayim, "The Year 1990: Homeland and Unity from an Afro-German Perspective," 128.

diagnosis overwhelmed May. Overtaken by the diagnosis and all the cruelties that distressed her throughout her life, May decided to take her life on August 9 of 1996.⁵⁶ To honor May's legacy, I see it fit to fulfill May's request of taking racism and an analysis of it seriously. As I wrote before, politics at that time was quite ineffective and inconsistent in validating racism as a genuine problem. Noticing the limitations of politics in engaging racism allows us to turn to other sources for understanding and change, like the personal. May's life story and many of her poems attest to the severity of racism, offering us an opportunity to take up racism as a matter of investigation as May had urged.

Philosophizing the Poetic: "blues in schwarz weiss" as a Heideggerian artwork

Written in 1990 and published in 1996 alongside other poems of May's, "blues in schwarz weiss" brings one to feel the rawness of being unwanted and uninvited. This poem is a work of art in its own right; however, I will venture to argue how "blues in schwarz weiss" can be understood as a Heideggerian work of art. Below, I have provided the original German version and a translated English version of the artwork.

„blues in schwarz weiss“ by May Ayim⁵⁷

während noch immer und schon wieder
 die einen
 verteilt und vertrieben und zerstückelt werden
 die einen
 die immer die anderen sind und waren und
 bleiben sollen
 erklären sich noch immer und schon wieder
 die eigentlich anderen
 zu den einzig wahren
 erklären uns noch immer und schon wieder

„blues in black and white“ translated by Tina Campt⁵⁸

over and over again
 there are those who are
 dismembered, sold off and distributed
 those who always are, were, and shall remain the others
 over and over again
 the actual others declare themselves
 the only real ones
 over and over again
 the actual others declare on us
 war

⁵⁶ LeBuhn, "Biography of May Ayim" and Silke Mertins, "Was sollen die letzten Worte sein," *taz*, December 23, 1997, <https://taz.de/!1367194/>.

⁵⁷ Ayim, *blues in schwarz weiss*, 82-3.

⁵⁸ May Ayim, "blues in black and white," in *Blues in Black and White: A Collection of Essays, Poetry, and Conversations*, translated by Tina Campt (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003), 4-5.

die eigentlich anderen
den krieg

es ist ein blues in schwarz-weiß
1/3 der welt
zertanzt
die anderen
2/3
sie feiern in weiß
wir trauern in schwarz
es ist ein blues in schwarz-weiß
es ist ein blues

das wieder vereinigte deutschland
feiert sich wieder 1990
ohne immigrantInnen flüchtlinge jüdische
und schwarze menschen
es feiert im intimen kreis
es feiert in weiß
doch es ist ein blues in schwarz-weiß
es ist ein blues

das vereinigte deutschland das vereinigte europa
die vereinigten staaten
feiern 1992
500 jahre columbustag
500 jahre - vertreibung versklavung und
völkermord
in den amerikas
und in asien
und in afrika

1/3 der welt vereinigt sich
gegen die anderen 2/3
im rhythmus von rassismus sexismus und antisemitismus
wollen sie uns isolieren unsere geschichte ausradieren
oder bis zur unkenntlichkeit
mystifizieren
es ist ein blues in schwarz-weiß
es ist ein blues

doch wir wissen bescheid - wir wissen bescheid
1/3 der menschheit feiert in weiß
2/3 der menschheit macht nicht mit

it's the blues in black-and-white
1/3rd of the world
dances over
the other
2/3rds
they celebrate in white
we mourn in black
it's the blues in black-and-white
it's the blues

a reunited germany
celebrates itself in 1990
without its immigrants, refugees, jewish and black people
it celebrates in its intimate circle
it celebrates in white

but it's the blues in black-and-white
it's the blues
united germany united europe united states
celebrates 1992
500 years since columbus
500 years—of slavery, exploitation and genocide in the
americas
asia
and africa

1/3rd of the world unites
against the other 2/3rds
in the rhythm of racism, sexism, and anti-semitism
they want to isolate us; eradicate our history
or mystify it to the point of
irrecognition
it's the blues in black-and-white
it's the blues

but we're sure of it – we're sure
1/3rd of humanity celebrates in white
2/3rds of humanity doesn't join the party

Ayim's somber testimonial that is "blues in schwarz weiss" shares a deep pain that is not hers alone – a dull ache that every immigrant, migrant, Jewish, Black person and more people can relate to. These marginalized groups are the "other," infirmed by the pathology of prejudice and turning to mourning in the face of exclusion. Surviving (in) a society that poses persistent danger, that rejects one's existence at every possibility tolls heavily upon the well-being of the other. Ayim's words, riddled with tension, are on the brink of resignation, yet radiate with a defiance to persist against what threatens her to the core of her being. Her consciousness ruptures at recognizing the fractures and dangers of her country. Resolutely, she acknowledges the bigotry of her country but her determination in the face of such a damaging power exposes her to further undoing. Overtaken by torment, she and those othered undergo indescribable pain – a pain that not only is accustomed to feeling the depths of neglect, but also has developed to perceive those mechanisms which enable such neglect.

I now will evaluate Ayim's poem as a Heideggerian artwork in hopes of finding the power of truth within. To qualify "blues in schwarz weiss" as a Heideggerian work of art entails that her artwork sets up a world and sets forth earth. To recollect what world and earth are, Heidegger offers: "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."⁵⁹ Additionally, world and earth bear the liminal experiences of humans, the moments of birth and death, blessing and curse, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline.⁶⁰

Ayim's poem tends to those who have been othered, especially in reunified Germany. I argue that Ayim invites us into the world of the othered and that such a world is an inversion of

⁵⁹ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 26.

⁶⁰ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 21 and 23.

the world described in Heidegger's essay, but that the world of the othered qualifies as a world, nonetheless. I think the inversion perhaps occurs because Heidegger intends his theory of art to apply to 'great' art.⁶¹ Western philosophy, run by an oppositional logic which Heidegger does not overcome but rather reinterprets, does not allow that which is othered to fall on the same side as that which is deemed as great. I believe Heidegger, in an attempt to be selective likely for eurocentric reasons, overlooks how great non-white works, and thereby the worlds within those works, can be.⁶²

To begin, a world essentially is open, however, the hegemonic white world promenading through 1990s Germany forcibly closes off the world inhabited by Ayim and fellow people ejected from German society. The world of the othered qualifies as self-opening, albeit in an inverted form. We can recognize the world of the othered because the world of the othered opens itself up and shares itself with us. If we did not, then the world of the othered, of the oppressed would be overrun by its negations and cease to *world*.

While I will later delve into what it exactly means for a world *to world*, I must make an important distinction about the world of the othered. We must be careful here not to mistake its closing with that of the earth; the earth resolutely closes itself off, as Heidegger affirms of the earth: "The *unforced* coming forth of the continually self-closing."⁶³ The notion of force indicates that the world Ayim describes is in fact world and not earth since earth's closing itself off lacks forceful measures. In contrast, the promenading white world, the othering world,

⁶¹ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 19.

⁶² eurocentrism is intentionally left uncapitalized here and in the sentence. To support my claims of eurocentrism, which is a partial aside, I find it most helpful to look at the works of art he references throughout the essay: Van Gogh's "Shoes," C.F. Meyer's "The Roman Fountain," Sophocles' *Antigone*. While it is unclear who created the Aegina sculptures that have been re-located to Munich and an unnamed temple at Paestum, these are undeniably european in their context and likely source as well.

⁶³ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 26. Italics mine.

violently represses the world of the othered, effectively making the world of the othered, what it is, the 'world of the othered.' Additionally, Heidegger remarks: "But world is not simply the open which corresponds to the clearing, earth is not simply the closed that corresponds to concealment."⁶⁴ Heidegger's note that the world is not merely unconcealment and earth not just concealment further encourages me to consider various types of world, in which openness is not as simple and clear cut as complete, uninterrupted openness. Thus, the world of the othered comes to us an openness that has no choice but to be closed off.

Heidegger's explanation of the world of a temple at Paestum provides further insight into world and will further inform our understanding of the poem. He writes there that "The all-governing expanse of these open relations is the world of this historical people."⁶⁵ Self-sovereignty has been lost in the world of the othered – attempts at isolation, eradication, and mystification on behalf of the dominant white world directed toward the non-white traumatize the world of the latter and cause it to disintegrate. Due to oppression and discrimination, even in the mundanity of the everyday, the world of the othered witnesses the all-governing expanse of open relations decline into a fettered regulation of restricted relationships. Therefore, the world of the othered collapses in upon itself due to the force of the othering white world and is quite constricted in its possibilities.

Because of the disparity of choice and of possibilities, the oppressor and the oppressed occupy fundamentally different worlds, one built by and for itself and one built by an-other and for an-other. The poem invites us accordingly into the emotive depth of the world of the oppressed, of a world and people not for its own sake. Despite this intimate invitation, the poem does not shy away from the oppressing world that causes it to experience such decrepitude in the

⁶⁴ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 31.

⁶⁵ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 21.

first place. The poem primarily sets up the world of the othered and through this recognition, we come to be aware of the othering world that, as I said earlier, makes the othered world what it is. The use of fractions clues us into the discrepancy of the worlds present, to that of the world of the othered and the othering world. The end of the poem demonstrates that the proportions used apply to humanity [*menschheit*]: one-third of humanity celebrates in white, while two-thirds does not join the celebration. The majority of humanity, Black and Jewish people, immigrants and migrants, likely queer, disabled, indigenous, and poor people as well, are not welcomed to join the dominant world, especially in their time of celebration. Dates like the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1990 and the five-hundred-year commemoration of Columbus Day in 1992 signify a world still enmeshed in their inheritance of prejudices, a minority of people that relentlessly others the majority and finds celebration through such exclusion. Thus, mourning befalls the majority. Overall, othering initiates a separation between these two worlds and their respective people that is not intended to be overcome.

The people of a world assume a certain trajectory and the differing trajectories of these worlds make their separation evident and even harder to overcome. Heidegger writes of the trajectories of a people: “Wherever the essential decisions of our history are made, wherever we take them over or abandon them, wherever they go unrecognized or are brought once more into question, the world worlds.”⁶⁶ Heidegger is ambiguous about *who* must make the decisions for a certain world; ideally, it will be the historical people of a respective world that determines their destiny for themselves. However, I believe Heidegger disregards that some people have been overpowered and have had these essential decisions made for them. By this, I indicate countless instances of oppression, whether it is enslavement, colonization, or forced labor, in which the

⁶⁶ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 23.

oppressor delimits the life and work of the oppressed. For those othered, especially in 1990s Germany, their world *worlds* insofar as the white Germans celebrate reunification, and the non-dominant world (the Jewish and Black people, the immigrants and migrants, and so on) mourns. This mourning and the counter-celebration are just one of many ways to bear the racism, xenophobia, and ethnic hatred that historical decisions have led to.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the nuances enveloped in the worldly separation. Most of human history has borne witness to the fact that those who have the power to other are men. Men who pass as or are white, European, masculine, and rich have been able to order worlds through a potent structural tool, othering. Countless groups can be opposed to these standards of normativity. The poem notes how Black people, Jewish people, immigrants, and migrants have fulfilled the role of the other. Queer, disabled, indigenous, and poor folk, albeit absent in the poem, have occupied the same place as well. What is provocative about this thesis is that Heidegger undeniably had the power to other. When I wrote earlier on that we must not overlook the possibility for the intersection of his alignment with the Nazis with that of his philosophy, the repercussions of this privilege to other is what I meant. I also mention this line of thought to show that the worlds masquerade under many names: the othering world and the world of the othered, the oppressor and the oppressed, the dominant culture and the non-dominant culture, normative and deviant, white and black. The black world cannot be as easily demarcated in its description due to the multitude of groups othered, which come together to make up most of humanity, as well as due to the dominant, white world aiming to keep those othered in darkness, in irrecognition and nothingness.⁶⁷ Constantly, the black world, the world of

⁶⁷ Calvin L. Warren in the introduction to his book *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation* discusses the negation, and even annihilation, of the Being of Black people. He notes: “This is, of course, a Heideggerian approach to the thinking of Being and Nothing. More than any other philosopher, Heidegger pursued

the othered and the oppressed, comes up against the violence of the white, othering and oppressing world.

Effectively, the world of the othered contained in the poem is in a state of decay. As stated in the section on Heidegger's essay, Heidegger does acknowledge the occurrence of the disintegration of a world within an artwork, mentioning the Aegina sculptures in Munich and Sophocles' *Antigone* in best critical edition as examples of such. This sense of displacement, of the world being uprooted, is undesirable because the world is cast out of its fundamental role in the work. Ultimately, the work loses its work being, thus reduced to object being, and will be unable to displace preservers from the familiar as a result of the dislocation of the world.

I propose that the world of the othered, the primary world in the work, is decayed, yet does not cause the work to lose its work being. Heidegger argues for the irreversibility of world decay as he views the displacement of an artwork's world as related to the work rather than the world itself. I disagree with his assertion of the irreversibility of world decay.⁶⁸ The othering world essentially displaces people, into the world of the othered. We can recover the displacement of the world of the othered in the poem because such being out of place is the intended nature of the world of the othered on behalf of the othering world. In other words, the poem has not undergone the displacement of the world during the work's existence, but rather the poem was already imbued with this sense of world displacement upon its creation. By viewing the deprived nature of the world as inherent to the world rather than the work itself, the opportunity arises to claim that this work of art has world decay without losing its work being.

metaphysical violence and the question of Being relentlessly, and for this reason I find his philosophy indispensable and necessary" (Calvin, 8).

⁶⁸ "World-withdrawal and world-decay can never be reversed" (Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, 20).

Again, Heidegger's inability to account for those othered, for the non-white and non-dominant majority, leads him to be unable to ascertain how complex a world can be.

Just as Ayim's work of art sets up a world, it also sets forth earth. As recognized earlier on, earth cannot be understood simply as concealment. At another point in the text, Heidegger reiterates this exact sentiment: "Earth is not simply the closed but that which rises up as self-closing."⁶⁹ Earth comes forth through its persistent concealment, a closing which the earth brings upon itself. Heidegger also refers to earth as "The coming-forth-concealing [*Hervorkommend-Bergende*]. 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."⁷⁰ Earth is firm in two ways: its unwavering self-closure and its solidness as a place upon which a historical people can reside. Uniquely, upon residing on and in the earth, a historical person dwells in their world.

Because of its stability, earth presents itself as less precarious than world. While less precarious than world, earth does not have the organized structure that world does. Heidegger shares that "The earth is openly illuminated as itself only where it is apprehended and preserved as the essentially undisclosable, as that which withdraws from every disclosure, in other words, keeps itself constantly closed up."⁷¹ Earth closes itself up and discloses itself as the undisclosable. Thus, earth reveals itself in artworks as that which is overwhelmingly obscure in addition to its self-concealing and firm character.

Due to the characterization of earth as resolute and ambiguous, I believe the earth comes forth through the poem's invocation of the blues. For one, blues alludes to the African-American blues as well as the feeling of being blue. I am struck by the insertion of an English phrase in a

⁶⁹ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 31.

⁷⁰ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 24.

⁷¹ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 25.

primarily German poem, a phrase that is repeated and invoked again and again. The collection of poems, *blues in schwarz weiss*, “[plays] on her [Ayim’s] bilingualism (as English was the language she shared with her father), as well as a larger connection to a global African diaspora through the invocation of the musical tradition the blues.”⁷² While we can add yet another nuance to the invocation of the blues, in terms of its Englishness as a way of allowing May to connect with her bilingualism and her father, we can never claim ultimate certainty as to what is meant by the blues.⁷³ However, it is clear that all of the nuances of the blues definitively evoke sorrow, a feeling deeply embedded in the experiences of diaspora and displacement. The inexactness of the blues allows me to encounter the earth in the poem, but not necessarily walk away with an entirely intelligible account of what and how earth is.

To further support the blues as the earth within the poem, I find it necessary to remember that the world grounds itself within and upon the earth. In order for world to base itself within and upon on the earth, earth must be more primordial than world. I believe the lines mentioning the blues maintain this sense of primacy: “it’s the blues in black-and-white / it’s the blues” (*es ist ein blues in schwarz-weiß / es ist ein blues*). The order of the lines boils down the blues in black-and-white simply to the blues, emphasizing how basic the blues is. The building of ‘in black-and-white’ on the ‘blues’ reflects the world grounding itself upon the earth. In this way, the world both rests upon and permeates the earth. This means that the ‘in black-and-white’ finds its basis in the blues, but also influences how the blues is.

I also think that the notion of a ‘blues in black-and-white’ is perhaps the German version of the expression of sorrow as is related to contending with matters of African diaspora. African-

⁷² Hill, “May Ayim.”

⁷³ The claim that the blues brings forth May’s relation to her father is complicated by Heidegger’s assertion of the depersonalization of the artist in the artwork, a requirement which must be met to ensure the greatness of the art. The complications of the insignificance of the artist to an artwork which they created is addressed on page 32.

Americans used the blues to express their grief, while Afro-Germans use a blues in black-and-white to capture their sorrow. Adding on the condition of ‘in black-and-white’ indicates not only the potential inspiration derived from African-American expression but also the occurrence of a conventional state that is unique to Germany. Thus, the blues in black-and-white relates a condition unique to Germans and Germany, especially in the early 1990s following the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Recognizing that the world grounds itself on and in the earth requires us to address another way in which world and earth relate to one another: their strife. Heidegger explains the interconnection of earth and world:

The earth cannot do without the openness of world if it is to appear in the liberating surge of its self-closedness. World, on the other hand, cannot float away from the earth if, as the prevailing breadth and path of all essential destiny, it is to ground itself on something decisive. In setting up world and setting forth earth the work instigates this strife. But this does not happen so that the work can simultaneously terminate and settle the conflict in an insipid agreement, but rather so that the strife remains a strife... The work-being of the work consists in fighting the fight between world and earth.⁷⁴

The artwork brings world and earth together as it performs the essential acts of setting up a world and setting forth earth. Without world, earth would retreat into itself and be entirely closed off rather than resolutely self-closed and revealing in its obscurity. World roots itself in the earth due to earth’s decisiveness, supporting earth’s lack of precariousness that I mentioned earlier on. The artwork, performing these vital tasks, achieves the intimate conflict between world and earth, or strife. The artwork brings the strife forth for the sake of the strife itself – the strife is the work of the artwork. The strife maintains the existence of the artwork; if the strife ceases, then the work of art ceases to be and truth ceases to work.

⁷⁴ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 27.

Since I have claimed that the open of the world of the othered has collapsed, this complicates the conflictual interaction of world and earth. The open of the world of the othered resembles a cavity, a hole of decay, into which that world has both retreated and been forced by the othering world. To note, the open of the othering world is the positive sense of world to which Heidegger gestures throughout his essay and thus is not open as a cavity but open as complete openness. The cavity of the world of the othered is not as clearly illuminated as worlds tend to be, but nonetheless provides a space in which earth can come forth. Because of the darkness that overtakes the world of the othered due to its collapsed inversion, the earth revealing itself is obscured further. The limited articulation of earth in comparison to the loquacious explanation of world in this thesis reflects how intensely earth is steeped in obscurity in this instance as well as how generally difficult it is to make earth intelligible. Regardless, the earth still can appear in its unforced self-closedness through the cavity, through the inverted open that is the world of the othered.

The world of the othered sinks itself into the earth, into the blues. The world of the othered tethered to the earthly blues successfully grounds itself. Normally the world grounding itself upon and in the earth entails that the world allows their historical people expansive possibilities for the decisions of a destiny. However, this matter is again complicated by the world decay of the world of the othered. Rather than the world acting on its open character to offer an expanse of choices for its people, the world of the othered acts on its hollowness to hand down options to its people that have already been determined by an-other world, that of the othering world. As an open world offers open-ended decisions, a hollow world imparts only empty opportunities.

Now that I have waded our ways through the complications of having a world in the state of world decay within an artwork and ensured that the interactions with earth can still ensue properly, the artwork is able to perform the twofold act of setting and thus attaining the strife. More concretely, the poem sets up the world of the othered and sets forth the earthly blues to achieve the primal strife of the world of the othered and the earthly blues. Like earth, the strife proves quite difficult to articulate so I will alter my approach in a way that is hopefully more effective for ascertaining the strife of world and earth.

As discussed in the section on Heidegger and his essay, truth is central to the function of the work of art. Heidegger describes truth in many ways throughout the course of the essay, one such description honing in on how truth manifests as the primal strife of world and earth. He explains: “Truth is the ur-strife in which, always in some particular way, the open is won; that open within which everything stands and out of which everything withholds itself—everything which, as a being, both shows and withdraws itself.”⁷⁵ When world and earth join together in their intimate conflict, that is strife, that is truth.

Additionally, truth makes a space for itself that is the open, an open which is different from the open of the world.⁷⁶ In order to understand that truth has set itself to work in the artwork as the strife, I must also ask how this process happens. I gathered that the happening of truth is historical, so I claim that this happening of truth, of strife will be temporally bound. Additionally, Heidegger remarks that “Truth will never be gathered from what is present and ordinary.”⁷⁷ In another passage, he clarifies: “The setting-into-work of truth thrusts up the extraordinary (*Ungeheure*) while thrusting down the ordinary, and what one takes to be such. The

⁷⁵ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 36.

⁷⁶ See page 36/7 of “The Origin of the Work of Art” for further reference to truth opening up a space.

⁷⁷ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 44.

truth that opens itself in the work can never be verified or derived from what went before.”⁷⁸

Truth happens as a thrusting away from the everyday and toward the extraordinary and unfamiliar. In this way, the truth of the poem thrusts us toward the unfamiliar in which the world of the othered is no longer the everyday, in which matters of othering fueled by dehumanization and bleak social order are brought into question rather than taken as natural and standard.

Truth, in this poem, challenges us to see the torment of the world of the othered and beckons us to seek another world order. Since truth cannot come from nor be legitimated by what went before it, it makes sense that truth encourages us to see another world order, one that is not determined by othering. Truth undoes the binding thread between the two worlds by challenging the role of othering. Since truth is the primal strife, the strife is the awareness of a false consciousness, an awareness that ultimately threatens and undoes the world order familiar to the worlds. Using an English word, the blues, ruptures the German world of a blues in black-and-white. Thus, truth, strife calls us to reckon with the rupturing of familiarity and the shifted perception of life we are left with.

While all of this engagement has been worthwhile, I believe there are a few more comments that must be made about qualifying the poem as a Heideggerian work of art. Because I have taken seriously Heidegger’s theory of art and supplied yet another example to support his ideas, there are some repercussions for the poem that must be discussed. For one, the art within the poem is to be understood as ‘great.’ As I addressed earlier on, I believe Heidegger’s notion of ‘greatness’ is limited and because of this, only understands certain aspects of the theory, primarily that of world, in a positive sense. Expanding what ‘greatness’ is allows us to include other forms of world in which positivity and thus direct alignment with a Heideggerian world is

⁷⁸ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 47.

not a guarantee, thereby validating the inverted world within the poem and the poem overall as ‘great.’

But this qualification of greatness does have a particular requisite about the artist: the creator of the work and the work itself must maintain no relation of significance. No remnants of the artist are to be found within the artwork, thus allowing the artwork to exist independently from the artist. This depersonalization and separation is necessary because it allows the truth of the artwork to be accessed by those other than the creator. However, I do not believe the relationship between an artist and their work is completely nullified. While I believe the artist is faint in the artwork, their impression remains, nonetheless. Part of what Ayim underwent as an Afro-German woman in 1990s Germany takes center, full force, in the poem. Because of these details and sharing of intimate experiences, we know Ayim to some extent. Who Ayim was and how she navigated her life came to be, to some degree, through her poem. If Ayim’s other academic or aesthetic engagements, or a biography to recount such events, were inaccessible, her poem would at least communicate some of part of who Ayim was, in instances both of and beyond creation. Thus, we can get to know Ayim through her poem, an artist through their work, despite Heidegger’s claim of the eventual insignificance of the artist to their artwork.

Ultimately, we have preserved this poem. Heidegger describes preservation as follows:

To submit to this displacement means: to transform all familiar relations to world and to earth, and henceforth to restrain all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to dwell within the truth that is happening in the work. The restraint of this dwelling allows what is created to become, for the first time, the work that it is. This allowing the work to be a work is what we call its preservation. It is in such preservation that, in its createdness, the work first gives itself as the real which now means, is present in its work-character.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 40.

Preservers differ from the historical people which a world, and by extent of its primacy, earth, serve. The artist creates the artwork, effectively bringing art to life in the work and the artwork to exist; however, such life must be sustained by the artwork's audience, the preservers. Preservers are rare and achieve the relation to truth that the creator does. Preservers are sensitive to the work and engage deeply with the art within the work. In this thesis, we have submitted to the displacement of truth of the poem and undergone the transformation of familiar relations, thus dwelling in the unfamiliar, in the opportunity for a new world order. Ultimately, I thank you for working with me to help preserve Ayim's poem and to know the art within it.

Conclusion

"blues in schwarz weiss" can be known as a Heideggerian work of art. I grasped the nuances of the world, earth, truth and strife through the effort of preservation. In the process, I noticed the bounds of Heidegger's theory of art through its limitation of what greatness can be and by completely severing the ties between the artist and the artwork. Because we know this artwork in a truthful way, we also know art as an origin better. Artworks are the places of activity where truth works and art happens as truth. Poetry pushes us beyond our everyday bounds as art, poetry harnesses a special power, the power of truth. Truth displaces the familiar and offers an unfamiliar worldly reality. Thus, artworks have the power of truth through their origin of art.

Not only can poets recognize the profundity and complexity of experience and life, but so can an audience. We began by showing that Dewey praises poets' attentiveness to quality. Now we stop to pat ourselves on the back and recognize that preservers, the audience, work to know that quality, that truth as well. Heidegger desired for people to work to get to know (*wissen*) art

in a way that is genuine and harnesses the uncanny. This knowing is done through preservation, which we did throughout the section on Ayim's poem. The thrust away from the familiar, and all the effort building up, stands as a poetic interaction in which the artwork, the poem, and its preservers, us, become intimate. Additionally, we are acquainted with the artist, yet do not know the creator as deeply as we know the artwork and the art within. Ultimately, art shifts our lives if we allow it, but we must *know* how to allow it – genuine attention like preservation is one way to know art, albeit philosophically.

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