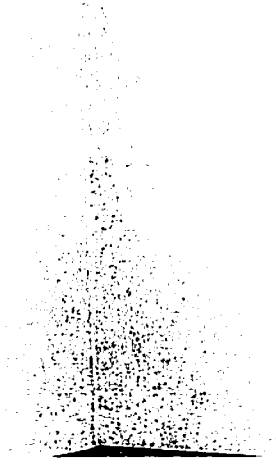
ART AND TIME



First published 2007
Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd
7 Lt Lothian St Nth, North Melbourne, Vic 3051
Tel: 03 9329 6963 Fax: 03 9329 5452
Email: aspic@ozemail.com.au
Web: www.scholarly.info

A Cataloguing-in-Publication entry for this title is available
from the National Library of Australia.

ISBN 9781740971737

Design and typesetting by Adam Bextream
Printing and binding by the BPA Print Group, Melbourne
Cover Photograph: *Winged Victory of Samothrace*. Photograph: Derek Allan

In memory of
Iain Wright
(1944–2006)
Professor of English
at The Australian National University and
Life Fellow of Queens' College, Cambridge

Thus, as Walter Benjamin forecast in his famous paper "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", art distances itself from its cultural foundation, and its aura: "the unique manifestation of a distance, however near it may be", disappears. Today we live in time's art (*ars temporis*). What will be next?

* * *

1 Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, V, 6, 4.
2 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, D. F. Pears and B. F. Mc Guinness, trans. (London: Routledge, 1999) 6. 4311.
3 Cf. Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989).
4 Aristotle, *Phys.*, IV, 12, 221a 30–221b 3.
5 Hans-Georg Gadamer, (1996), "Ästhetik und Hermeneutik", in *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 8 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1993) 5. The translations of Gadamer's texts quoted in this essay are my own.
6 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Die Aktualität des Schönen", in *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 8, 136.
7 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Ästhetik und Hermeneutik", 2.
8 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Wahrheit und Methode", in *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 1, 171.
9 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Wort und Bild- so wahr, so seiend", in *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 8, 374.
10 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Wahrheit und Methode", 293.
11 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Die Aktualität des Schönen", 132.
12 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Die Aktualität des Schönen", 136.
13 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Die Aktualität des Schönen", 142.
14 See Aristotle, *Phys.*, IV, 11, 219b 12–16.
15 See Aristotle *Phys.*, IV, 13, 222a 17; also 223 a 22–3.
16 "The 'continuous' is a subdivision of the contiguous: things are called continuous when the touching limits of each become one and the same and are, as the word implies, contained in each other: continuity is impossible if these extremities are two". Aristotle, *Phys.* V, 3, 227a 10–15.
17 See Aristotle, *Phys.*, VI, 3, 234 a 3–24, where Aristotle says that the present is something that is an extremity of the past (no part of the future being on this side of it) and also of the future (no part of the past being on the other side of it). He establishes thus the indivisibility of the instant, which means that it, rather than dividing past and future, unites them; the instant does not introduce time between past and future, but it makes them passing from one to another so immediately that it seems there is a fusion through the instant. And so the instant can, in its essence, unite and divide time's continuum.
18 See Aristotle, *Phys.*, IV, 11, 220a 9–18; 13, 222a 13–14.
19 Plato, *Parmenides* 156d1-e2.
20 Aristotle, *Phys.*, IV, 13 222b 14–15.
21 In IV Sent dist.49, q. 3, a. 1: "*Sed vitio et aliae apprehensiones, non sunt in tempore, sed in instanti. Ergo et delectatio non mensuratur tempore*". Also: "*in instanti enim verum est dicere hominem delectari; unde non est in tempore nisi per accidens (…). Nobis delectatio non est in tempore quo ad intellectivam partem etiam per accidens, nisi valde indirecte, inquantum scilicet operatio intellectus nostri conjungitur phantasmatibus. Tamen verum est nullam delectationem esse in tempore, per se loquendo*". Pleasure (*delectatio*) consists of an appetite in such a way that its movement is finished in that which it intended. And the end of movement is not in time, but in the instant.
22 See Aquinas, *Summma Theologiae*, I, q. 10, aa.4–5; See I, q. 46. Eternity is simultaneously whole (*aeternitas est tota simul*) and time has a beginning and an end (*in tempore autem est prius et posterius*) (I, q.10, a.4). Aeviternity is simultaneously whole; yet it is not eternity; because "before" and "after" are compatible with it (*aevum est totum simul: non tamen est aeternitas, quia compatitur secum prius et posterius*) (I, q.10, a.5 ad 2).

Hermeneutics, Historicity, and Poetry as Theological Revelation in Dante's *Divine Comedy*

William Franke

Art and immortality, or the normative value of the classic

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, for all its emphasis on the finite historical conditionedness of understanding, also aims to render intelligible such a "suprahistorical value" ("*übergeschichtlichen Wert*") as "the classical". Gadamer writes, "When we call something classical, there is a consciousness of something enduring, of significance that cannot be lost and that is independent of all the circumstances of time — a kind of timeless present that is contemporaneous with every other present".[1] Hermeneutic consciousness and self-reflection make possible a rehabilitation of "the classical" — from being merely descriptive of an historical period and style to being normative. As such, classical art belongs to the hermeneutic experience of truth. In this sense, the "classical" work of art serves as a touchstone of values such as beauty and truth prescinded from mere fluctuating standards of taste. As normative, whatever deserves to be called "classical" is trans-historical because it is always already operative before historical reflection begins; it is a constitutive, structuring part of the tradition within which alone such reflection can be carried out. The classic, before it begins to be consciously examined, becoming an object, always already shapes reflection on aesthetic values through the binding power and authoritativeness of the standards it embodies.

Thus the classical is defined by Gadamer, following and adapting Hegel, as "self-significant" and "self-interpretive". By its power of interpreting itself, the classic reaches into the present and addresses it. In so doing, the classical precedes, encompasses and anticipates latter-day interpretations within its own already-in-progress self-interpretation: "the classical preserves itself precisely *because* it is significant in itself and interprets itself; that is, it speaks in such a way that it is not a statement about what is past — documentary evidence that still needs to be interpreted — rather, it says something to the present as if it were said specifically to it".[2] This suggests specifically how the hermeneutic theory of the classic finds in the instance of the *Commedia* as classic, with its highlighting of the address to the reader, an exceptionally acute and self-conscious instantiation.[3]

Moreover, Dante has purposefully woven an ideal of the poetic classic as resistant to time together with his model of Christian salvation and resurrected life in the cantos of *Purgatory* recounting his meeting with the first-century Roman poet, Statius. Statius' remark that "poet" is "the name that most endures and honors" ("*il nome che più dura e che più onora*" — XXI. 85) gestures towards a trans-historical value in literature parallel to the eternal truth of the word of the gospel. This parallelism achieves lapidary form when Statius gives credit for his discovery of enduring, preserving, saving value in both the literary and the religious domains at once to that greatest of classical authors, in Dante's view, Virgil, to whom he says: "*Per te poeta fui, per te cristiano*" ("Through you I became poet, through you Christian").[4]

Purgatorio XXI-XXII intimates that *poiesis* is fundamentally a way through which humans may participate in immortality. Though immortality is certainly a gift from the transcendent Lord of life, it does not come as an object wrapped up neatly for humans in a package. It

comes, or rather is given, through their own making, through an active involvement with what transforms them in their own activity of self-transcendence. Taken in its etymological sense of "making" (employed frequently in the Middle Ages and perhaps implicitly by Dante himself in *De vulgari eloquentia* II. iv), poetry can encompass the nature of all art, and it is in this sense, furthermore, that art becomes so fundamental to the experience of all of Purgatory, issuing in the rising up to an eternal life. Art, and quintessentially poetry, is how humanity participates in creating enduring forms. To the extent human beings aspire to what they interpret as some eternal form of existence, the hermeneutic nature of interpretation dictates that they can attain it only by participating in its making. All of the *Purgatorio* illustrates how human effort contributes to the work of rehabilitation of the soul through purifying and edifying. Salvation does not merely fall out of the sky. Even with its unconditional transcendence of all merely human possibilities, it must nevertheless be received, nurtured and "seconded" (see Virgil's discourse on love: *Purgatorio* XVII. 82ff) within the human sphere. The integrity of the secular order in co-ordination with the divine dispensation is well recognized as one of the determinative constants in the work of Dante as "poet of the secular world". Hence also the argument with regard to human freedom — and its need to be guided and disciplined — in *Purgatorio* XVI. 73ff, so central thematically, as well as numerically, to the *cantica*. This freedom is exercised eminently in the art of poetry, where self-fashioning through interpretation opens up possibilities for freedom *vis-à-vis* one's whole world of experience.

The *Purgatorio* teaches that a genuine participation in divine reality is fashioned over time by assiduous human effort, and poetry is exalted as the model for this human endeavour of self-fashioning in the divine image. This is the great message particularly of the Statius cantos.

But because salvation is realized through a making which transpires essentially in time — and all the images of action and endurance of souls in Purgatory depict this temporal dimension of sanctification — there is also inevitably loss. Time — at least in human experience as we know it — even while serving as the medium of redemption and reformation, at the same time distances and deletes, and Dante agonizes over its losses. Virgil, in the economy of the *Commedia* as a whole, tragically symbolizes this concomitant loss inherent in the temporal nature of existence.

In the person of Statius, by contrast, the discipline of poetry (not to the exclusion, naturally, of penance) is manifestly fused with the efforts by which the soul frees itself from Purgatory and struggles its way from time into eternity. Of course, the delusion of achieving immortality through poetry or through any other human endeavour has also been acutely exposed and damned in several of the most haunting episodes of the poem. Brunetto Latini's teaching how man eternalizes himself ("*come l'uom s'eterna*") through humanistic works such as his *Tesoro* is seen in *Inferno* XV to have blown up in his eternally charcoaled face. Similarly, the prologue scene, especially as Freccero teaches that it be read, would demonstrate the futility of all efforts to attain, by the power of human intellect, that is, philosophically, the redeemed state symbolized by the top of Mount Purgatory; rather, the pilgrim has to go down into Hell along the other way ("*altro viaggio*"), that of conversion, completely surrendering all his human resources in unconditional abandonment to the divine. And again Ulysses, sailing by the guidance exclusively of human virtue and knowledge, "*virtute e canoscenza*", with all his stirring rhetoric, belongs to the same constellation of false star-seekers all seeking transcendence through merely human means.

Yet all these powerful scenes still do not discourage Dante from entrusting to an irreducibly poetic itinerary his own journey to salvation. Centrally in the Statius episode, together with the concentration on poetry thenceforward to the end of the *Purgatorio*, Dante emphasizes rather the continuum between the human activity of "making" and the divine.[5] In this conjunction, Dante shows himself willing to embrace the ancient pagan cult of poetry and poet as attaining to immortality, sublating the ancient immortality of fame to the eternal life of Christian resurrection. Although he has shown poetry and its meaning and truth to be historically determined in absolutely decisive ways, still he also sees it as leading beyond the temporal order, "*a l'etterno dal tempo*".

This opening upon something infinite and immortal opens precisely in the historical situatedness that characterizes quintessentially the act and event of poetry. Dante's exaltation of poetry as a way of communicating with divinity and as a vehicle to immortality is no mere reiteration of the idealizing clichés and self-deceptions he himself devastatingly critiques. Rather, in the phenomenon of poetry he is contemplating the central mystery of the Christian religion, the mystery of the Incarnation. This is the mystery of a transcendent God existing as an historical man in order to make it possible for humans again to share in the divine life. The central motif of Resurrection, of the body's rising up to life again, through its affirmation of the necessarily and eternally incorporated nature of human life, is in fact a corollary of Incarnation. Both in this life and for the next, the making and interpreting which poetry essentially is constitutes an historically concrete nexus between the human and the divine.

This connection becomes comprehensible only when we learn to view poetry as interpretation and to understand interpretation

hermeneutically as an event involving humanity with its other, with what utterly transcends it, ultimately divinity. Poetry of the sublime sort treated here by Dante is not essentially only a human activity — although unmistakably it takes up and includes the human, even as condemned, as in Virgil — so much as a participation in an event of the divine. This stupendous possibility is developed by Dante in the episodes involving poetry in the *Purgatorio* following in the wake of the Statius cantos, signally where he describes himself as one who writes poetry by taking dictation interiorly from an inspiring Love: "when/ Love inspires me I note it down" ("*quando/ Amor mi spira, noto*" — XXIV. 52-53). Poetry's potential for making itself into a vehicle for transcendence towards a specifically Christian divinity is implied in the Trinitarian underpinnings of the poetics Dante intimates in these famous verses defining his "*dolce stil novo*".[6] Since this is a lyric poetics, its full consideration belongs to a discussion of language as essentially lyrical as it is revealed in the *Paradiso*.

It is possible at this stage — without yet attempting to develop the *Paradiso*'s positive implicit theory of transcendence of time through language — to allude to the essential role that poetic language is destined to fulfil: that is, of bridging the gap of static, logical incompatibility between historical contingency and something eternal, transcendent, predestined from the foundation of the world. The truth revealed in and through time as Dante understands it is nevertheless a truth that transcends time: in the *Paradiso* — through his applied, poetic reflection upon language as interpretation — he probes the conditions of interpretation that make possible such an apprehension (or rather happening) of a truth understood as itself trans-historical and even "eternal". At this point it becomes evident how it is specifically through poetic language that Dante strives to attain eternity.

If the *Inferno* shows the necessity of transcendence breaking into time conceived as a closed circle of fate — the endless cycle of repetition the damned are condemned to and what St. Augustine proposed as the shape of history for pagans without the Incarnation — and if the *Purgatorio* illustrates how religious revelation is actually constructed in and across time poetically, realized through the historically conditioned unfolding of tradition; then the *Paradiso* completes this journey of poetic, historical and theological interpretation by the transcendence of time through language towards the vision of divinity.

Hermeneutics, historicity and suprahistorical truth

In the Statius cantos of *Purgatorio* XXI-XXII, Dante underscores how the Christian truth of Virgil's text — at least insofar as the latter can be disclosed as messianic — is actually produced by an event distant in time and especially in culture, not to mention in inspiration, from the original production of the text. This emphasis, in effect, constitutes an acknowledgment that the truth in question is of the nature of an event, determined ineradicably by time. Today we would willingly take this to mean, moreover, that there is no truth inherent in Virgil's text, especially none of the kind Dante elicits from it, and consequently conclude that there is no pre-established truth standing ready for the disclosure which comes to Statius when he understands himself in terms of Virgil's texts. This would be, supposedly, to do away with any metaphysical ghosts lurking behind the event itself in its sheer contingency, producing an "effect of truth", in a certain postmodern critical vocabulary.

Even hermeneutic thinkers, who still wish to allow for a genuine experience of truth in art, philosophy and other humanistic disciplines, agree at least that any truth which is disclosed must necessarily be

changing and time-bound, even though they may also concede that it is problematic how this can be compatible with "truth". The consensus against claims to a truth that is transcendent with respect to time and history, widely shared among hermeneutic thinkers today, is voiced, for example, by Jean Grondin, in a statement purporting to define a norm for "philosophical hermeneutics": "Philosophical hermeneutics holds that the pretention to a timeless truth springs directly from a denial of one's own temporal character". Metaphysics and its aspiration to timeless truth is precisely what hermeneutics first overcomes or leaves behind: "Philosophical hermeneutics at first leaves the metaphysical obsession with the supratemporal behind itself ..." (*"Die philosophische Hermeneutik lässt sich zunächst die metaphysische Obsession des Überzeitlichen ...*).[7] Even theological thinkers like David Klemm typically concur that in hermeneutics "understanding does not purport to reach transtemporal truth".[8]

In concert with this view, across a wide spectrum of disciplines and intellectual constituencies today it has become virtually a dogma of modern hermeneutic theory that there can be no such thing as transcendent or timeless truth. The "revelation" of the historical conditionedness of all claims to knowledge, and indeed of all thinking, is taken as tantamount to the demise of all transcendental notions and of every way of thinking that forgets or denies or abstracts from the contingent, perspectival, history-bound occurring of any cognition whatever. This line of argument has been continuously asserted in philosophy at least since receiving one clamorous, if belated, inauguration in Nietzsche's "death of God" pronouncement in the *The Gay Science* (*Die fröliche Wissenschaft*, 1887), sec. 125.

But this exclusion of suprahistorical, metaphysical truth does not necessarily belong to the hermeneutic phenomenon as such. It

expresses rather, parochially, the spirit of the modern age, secular and earth-bound. The energies of hermeneutic activity over the vast arc of human experience, as recorded for example in myth and ritual, have bulked largely in favour of discerning what has been understood to be divine truth or revealment manifesting itself in the sublunar sphere. This direction of discernment was ambiguously present in Heidegger's hermeneutic thought too, increasing in intensity in the later Heidegger, in the interrogation of a disclosure enfolding gods and mortals.[9] And Gadamer himself, to whom "philosophical hermeneutics" professes allegiance, expressly leaves open the possibility of a suprahistorical, sacred time (*"überzeitliche 'heile' Zeit"* — *Truth and Method*, p. 122) such as Dante's work strives to let happen, as well as probing possibilities of such trans-historical phenomena as the beautiful and the classical.

The putative truths of Christian faith are represented by Dante as revealed in timely ways that make unique interpretive events belong intrinsically to these truths. Nevertheless, Dante still conceives the Christian truth as time-transcendent, as beyond historical contingency; he propounds it unequivocally in a language of the eternal: "*la* vera *credenza, seminatal per li messaggi de l'*etterno *regno*" ("the *true* faith sown/ by messages of the *eternal* kingdom" — *Purgatorio* XXII. 77-78). Dante fully embraces the historicity of truth and at the same time its transcendence. In doing so, he participates in what Christian tradition understands as the revelation of God incarnate. The resources of hermeneutics, as discovered anew through Dante's poetry, have helped us to think through, and especially to apprehend poetically, the possibility of such a paradox. We have seen, and must now reflect on, how Dante's treatment of the problem opens perspectives and possibilities for hermeneutic thinking that are by and large overlooked

today or are even ruled out as impossible *a priori*, in what often amounts to a form of intellectual coercion *not* to think "the eternal".[10]

Thinking the eternal proves difficult for hermeneutic thinkers because the language of the eternal seems necessarily to presuppose some sort of pre-constituted truth that at certain opportune junctures in history can come to be known for what it in any case *is*, quite apart from historical happenings; this would seem, moreover, to fall short of the Heideggerian insight into truth as "aletheic", as nothing but the happening of a disclosedness of beings.[11] But the difference between this aletheic conception and a rhetoric of pre-constituted truth — what is often taken as some kind of ultimate, "substantive" difference — is actually without decisive importance once we are no longer trying to say literally what truth is, but instead are simply letting it happen, *via* the co-operation of *poiesis*, in its own time and way. Truth is discovered in a timely fashion, but when it happens, the way the experience of truth is represented or objectified might just as well reify it, since no statement can do otherwise. What is important is not that the statement tell the truth about truth — as if that, as opposed to speaking from within the truth, were even possible — but that it feed back into the experience of interpreting truth, helping to make the condition of openness to, and of the letting happen of truth, freshly possible. This end might sometimes be served more effectively by re-actualization of community-constituting memories and beliefs, as in ritual, or even by the re-iteration of foundational insights, as in dogma, than by exacting philosophical ratiocinations. To think truth definitively as "event" or "happening" is still to confine it within the metaphysics of a concept, a concept perhaps with certain advantages but also comporting a certain loss and impoverishment with respect to the concept of the eternal.

Indeed only if we, quite erroneously, take "historicity" as some positive object of knowledge is it exclusive of eternity and transcendence. Understood dynamically as precisely what always remains ungraspable because inhabited by flux — and, as Dante has concretely shown, by the dynamism of interpretation itself — historicity itself becomes the key to recognizing how truth is disclosed as what transcends the historical occasions of its own disclosure. Have we ever definitively understood the nature of this radical openness and indeterminacy that inescapably characterizes all our experience and our very existence? Certainly not by fixing a label such as "historicity" to it, in however modest a mood and illusion-wary a way the notion may be defined. After all, what is "historicity"? What is "event"? The very terms of hermeneutic philosophy are not self-evident; their intelligibility is itself circumscribed by an event in which they are employed and alone can occur intelligibly. It is no good one-sidedly emphasizing "*Geschichtlichkeit*" (historicity) — though this may give us the feeling that we have discovered the right orientation to living as earthly beings, unlike those metaphysics-beclouded medievals — for "*Geschichtlichkeit*" as some sort of essential property is no more intelligible *per se* than is "the eternal". Indeed we cannot but suspect that the one, as it turns out, is always already thought in and through the other.

What hermeneutic thought has fundamentally to think is historicity *as* transcendence. It is precisely the historical, time-conditioned, event-character of human existence that opens it towards what cannot be determined as merely worldly or historical. In its ineradicably temporal constitution human existence is constantly transcending itself towards what is other than every achieved, objective form of existence within the world. The radical experience of this historicity has always been fraught with the paradox that what is encountered within the eye of the tornado

of constant flux is apprehended and articulated as the very opposite of flux, and has been described throughout Christian and other traditions in terms of the "eternal". This is the experience of the still point of the turning world. It is characterized often as "the mystical".[12] Frequently proponents of hermeneutics declare the complete independence of hermeneutics from anything mystical in nature. But this forced circumscription cuts hermeneutics off from certain of the deep springs of meaning in human experience, the interpretation of which is thereby regrettably impoverished and constricted.

The ground-breaking insight into the historicity of our knowing, when formulated as a proposition and advocated as the general principle of hermeneutic thought, betrays this very insight. It becomes closed to instances of suprahistorical knowledge, such as metaphysics and religious revelation purport to realize, and ends up legislating against all claims of "transcendence"; whereas its own purpose, in accordance with its radical motivations, must rather be to understand the sense that such claims can have — that is, the sense they have had and do have historically for vast segments of humanity — understood together with and through the meaning they can have for the interpreter who asks this question. Thus the first obvious problem with too one-sidedly embracing hermeneutics as ushering in the good news of a definitive break with "any 'transcendental' standpoint beyond historical consciousness"[13] is that it is also characteristic of hermeneutic thinking to engage in genuine, self-questioning dialogue with all other points of view. If hermeneutics emphasizes the historical nature of all culture and understanding, nevertheless it must still consider claims to transhistorical or transcendent knowledge, for example, about the "other" world of religious discourses, which have been and are in fact advanced historically. To reduce any form of culture or thought

to preconceived "historical" terms, while inevitably taking one's own notion of history as positively given, would be to traduce the hermeneutic ethos. However often hermeneutic thinking has hit upon and rested with that term "historicity", this term must itself remain open to being defined historically. For this reason, hermeneutics cannot even define itself so as to exclude openness to any form of transcendent knowledge or revelation. All it can establish in advance, in accordance with its own guiding rule and spirit, is that it will approach such claims out of its own historically grounded and specific experience, given its understanding of what "historical" means in the present tense and tension of its own thinking.

Rather than "historicity" being taken as a new fixing of the real status of all possible knowledge in the human situation, anticipating with this concept *a priori* all the possibilities that can ever be confronted, the term can and deserves to be interpreted with the emphasis on the historical character of existence as a continual transcending of itself towards what exceeds it. Historicity as the self-transcending, open structure of human, temporal existence is what estranges every objective order of the world, including history itself. History as a fixed order of events within the past is upset by historicity, which entails the openness of the event of history, and which therefore resists all definitive ordering.

Not the objective order of things always and ever the same as themselves for a subject, but the unattainability, the unfixability of things for an existing knower immersed in historical flux, always arriving on the scene too late to find things except as always already there, is what is expressed most immediately in acknowledging or conceptualizing a givenness and an order of things as "eternal". For precisely in realizing the constantly self-transcending character of

historical existence, what has been experienced is the miraculous givenness of beings and of an order or gathering beyond all objective, worldly, historical experience. What comes here to experience (and to language) is the openness and the transcending inherent in and subtending historicity, the miraculous givenness of things in their relatedness even beyond the limits of all historically imposed orders of objects (indeed as their enabling condition). This is what so often has been called "eternal".

Almost all of Heidegger's energy is concentrated on truth as immanent in the coming to pass of beings — and as nothing else.[14] To make his point — that truth *is* only as an event of disclosure transpiring in time (in some sense a restatement of the insight that truth is revealed only as incarnate in history) — he felt compelled to deny any possibility of transcendent or eternal truth — truth "somewhere in the stars". This seemed necessary in order to focus attention on truth as really and truly happening in the event of disclosedness of beings. For if truth was allowed to be something pre-constituted in a Platonic heaven, then all that happens historically, it seemed, could at best be only an appearance, expression, annunciation, etc., of it. But this is not actually so, no matter how naturally the denial of pre-constituted truth is attracted to the affirmation of the eventhood of truth as a way of apprehending and driving home the latter conception. Once the "truth" of the eventhood of truth has been firmly grasped and established, we are ready to look into it a little further and see its own internal insecurity and instability. The possibility that truth may indeed exist somewhere in the heavens from all eternity may then be seen to emerge from the phenomenon of the event of truth itself; and indeed just this possibility has been passionately envisaged, demonstrably by poets and thinkers from the dawn of every known civilization. This

is a further step that hermeneutic theory in modern and postmodern times has rarely had the lucidity and resoluteness to take. It is true that it opens a door to intractable dogmatisms — but this too, more than ever in an era of the return of religious fundamentalisms, needs to be understood in its genuine possibility, rather than being alienated as incomprehensible, unintelligent behaviour.

What is absolutely astonishing is that the early Church did have the lucidity and resoluteness to proclaim, as at Chalcedon in 453, that Jesus Christ, its Truth, was unequivocally an historical man and yet also fully God eternal. It could hardly have made any harder sense. Predictably, heresies continued to proliferate. But somehow, through it all, the absolute paradox of the Incarnation — which complements the numerical paradox of the Trinity — was preserved in the experience of faith. The Christian revelation had embraced the historicity of truth together with its eternity. It proclaimed that God indeed had come into history and had become human. And although by the schematisms of the imagination which come to be called "logic" this precluded the Divinity from being an eternal being, that too was nevertheless affirmed uncompromisingly as true — known at an existential level, by faith, with respect to which formalizable logic is superficial.

Even purely philosophical hermeneutics has never ceased to interrogate itself about the possible or necessary universality of truth in the wake of the full disclosure of its ineluctable historicity. Any effort to communicate with others — other countries, cultures, languages — presupposes the possibility that insight generated in one specific historical situation may have a validity recognizable even outside that original context by others in their diverse situations. Thus any such effort is predicated on a belief that thought is not reducible to the historical conditions under which it is formed, but can reach out

and meet and connect with alien contexts and conditions. This degree of universality of the truth formulated under specific circumstances, and the transcendence of those circumstances that communicability implies, suggests the basic hermeneutic experience that contemporary theorists feel the need to be able to account for and that work such as Dante's validates in terms of a full-blown theology of interpretation.

Grondin's Gadamerian presentation of philosophical hermeneutics identifies the problem of how truth in any universal or binding sense is compatible with historicity as the central problem of philosophy since Hegel: "Its problem is the question concerning the possibility of a binding truth [*einer verbindlichen Wahrheit*] and therewith of a conclusive philosophy within the horizon of a self-consciously historical world. Are all truths or moral principles dependent on their historical context?". [15] The spectre of historical relativism and even of "*historischen Nihilismus*" poses a sceptical challenge that "philosophical hermeneutics", as represented by Grondin, deems itself called into the lists to meet. What has become clear through our study of Dante's hermeneutic practice, as exemplary of a vast tradition's, is how the problem of a communicable and *binding* truth is best understood in terms of responding to what we are responsible to, and how this means in the last instance to someone who addresses us.

The decisive test of one's hermeneutic openness, of the relinquishing of one's securities in the submission to time and change in human existence, is the readiness to be spoken to by an "Other". Finding oneself face to face with a divinity who commands and disposes one is discovered in the Bible as the ultimate hermeneutic experience of human beings and their communities. Old Testament religion is an especially rich resource for studying this primordial hermeneutic disposition to "hear God".[16] Dante's poetry, by its address to its reader,

extends this biblical revelation of a suprahistorical truth in historical time into the temporality of reading.

All types of human rites and religious obeisances, as forms of controlled submission to time and contingency, have in general stemmed from this — recognizing the divine power and its claims upon humans. The aim of the hermeneutic quest, accordingly, can normally be defined as that of encountering otherness. This holds even for the renegade, post-structuralist hermeneutics like deconstruction. In fact, rather ironically, "otherness" has taken on an aura of holiness in the discourse of deconstruction. But, to those who are willing to believe, it seems that no *démarche* of openness to the other, except maybe those of other world religions, comes so close to realizing this goal as the Judaeo-Christian tradition, centred on an encounter with "the living God" who disposes all subjects antecedently to their conception of him or even of themselves.

Western humanity learned the meaning of its historicity first and foremost from the Bible. This book is written out of the heart-rending historical experience of a people repeatedly subjugated, bearing in the acutest degree the suffering and, according to the Gadamerian/ Hegelian definition (*Truth and Method*, p. 353ff), the "negativity" of all genuine experience. The fact that this tradition also tenders a revelation of eternity is the more marvellous. Fixing and dictating the contents of this revelation for historically distinct peoples is excluded by the very logic of the present argument. But openness to transcendence of one's own time-bound experience, as illustrated exemplarily by Dante, has shown itself to be a possibility that can and should be embraced.

* * *

Acknowledgment: This essay is adapted from *Dante's Interpretive Journey* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 216–32. Reprinted with permission.

1 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1960); translated as *Truth and Method*, D. Marshall & J. Weinsheimer, trans., 2nd ed. rev. (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 287. Further references in the text are to this edition.
2 *Truth and Method*, 290.
3 See Erich Auerbach, "Dante's Addresses to the Reader", *Romance Philology* 7 (1953–4): 268–78 and chapter 1 ("The Address to the Reader") of my *Dante's Interpretive Journey*.
4 Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, G. Petrocchi, ed., 4 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1966–67). My translations.
5 In a significant exception at the very end of the *cantica* (XXXIII. 85–90), helping to maintain its balance, Beatrice reproves Dante's adherence to a "school" whose doctrine is as far from the divine way as is heaven from the earth, echoing the *topos* from Isaiah (55.9) of humiliation of all things human before God.
6 The topic has been skilfully pursued by Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) p. 192ff.
7 Jean Grondin, *Einführung in die philosophische Hermeneutik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991) 15.
8 David Klemm, *Hermeneutical Inquiry*, Vol. II (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986) 2.
9 The term "hermeneutic" is largely silenced in the later Heidegger. But in "Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache: Zwischen einem Japaner und einem Fragenden", in *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Verlag Günter Neske, 1959), it is hinted that the term drops out of use because it designates what slips into namelessness and so coincides with the un-nameable essential source of appearing which all Heidegger's thought is about. See especially pp. 121–3.
10 Even Ricoeur brackets the question in *Temps et récit* I (Paris: Seuil, 1983) 19–20.
11 "The Origin of the Work of Art": "But truth does not exist in itself beforehand, somewhere among the stars, only to descend later among beings. This is impossible for the reason alone that it is after all only the openness of beings that first affords the possibility of a somewhere and of a place filled by present beings" — *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1960; originally in *Holzwege*, 1936). Trans. by A. Hofstadter in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 61.
12 For example in the concluding paragraphs of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (6.45, 6.522; cf. 6.4311) on "*das Mystische*".
13 Donald G. Marshall, "Truth, Tradition, and Understanding", *Diacritics* 7 (1977): 70–7.
14 George Steiner has emphasized Heidegger's attempt to articulate "an ontology of pure immanence" and its ultimate, inevitable failure, in *Martin Heidegger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) xviii.
15 Grondin, xviii.
16 See, for example, Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Munich: Kaiser, 1965–6).

Dynamic Sensation: Bergson, Futurism and the Exteriorization of Time in the Plastic Arts

Paul Atkinson

Art or time?

The Italian Futurists hoped to recreate in art the sense of speed and optimism associated with the acceleration of Modernity in the early part of the twentieth century. This involved the exploration and examination of dynamism in art and reflection on the relationship between art and time, both in their artworks and in their critical writings. Underpinning many of their arguments was the philosophy of Henri Bergson (1859-1941), whose theory of time as duration was extraordinarily popular at the turn of the century. In Bergson's process philosophy, art is always *in time* as a moment in a broader ontology of change. The Futurists were also interested in the immanence of time, and it served as a theme in many of their works, but the externality of the plastic arts presented a number of difficulties that are instructive for the general examination of art and time. This article examines the Futurists' attempt to concretize immanent time in the form of the "dynamic sensation" and uses Bergson's philosophy as a critical guide to understanding their work. The Futurists sought to make time visible in art; they took dynamism as their starting point, as a means of demonstrating how art is always a product or expression of time. Importantly, the article does not examine time as a supplement to the art object, as art *and* time, because such approaches accept first