

The *Holzwege* of
Heidegger and
Finlay

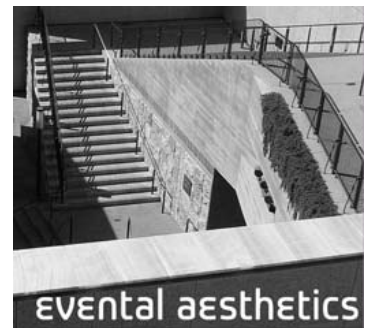
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ABSTRACT

On both conceptual and methodological levels, this article explores the relationship between Martin Heidegger's philosophy and the work of the poet and visual artist Ian Hamilton Finlay. At the center of Heidegger's account of experience is the notion of the clearing or the open, a space within which and against which entities are "disclosed" or become fully apparent. The purpose of this text is to examine how Finlay's work might be seen as a response to this Heideggerian framework. In particular we look to the poet's garden *Little Sparta*, part of which instantiates Heidegger's vision of the clearing and of the "*Holzwege*" or "wood paths" that shape it. We demonstrate the way in which *Little Sparta* sustains a distinctive form of aesthetic inquiry, from our initial state of doubt in the *Holzwege* thicket to a deeper understanding of the process of meaning.

KEYWORDS

Martin Heidegger
Ian Hamilton Finlay
Holzwege
Little Sparta
Meaning
Aesthetics



On both conceptual and methodological levels, this article explores the relationship between the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and the work of the poet and visual artist Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925–2006). At the center of Heidegger’s account of experience is the notion of the clearing (*die Lichtung*) or the open (*das Offene*), a space within which and against which entities are “disclosed” or become fully apparent.^{1,2} Conceptually, this clearing can be understood as the context in terms of which meaning or sense accrues and through which we thus encounter the world. Heidegger often supplements this metaphor with another, that of binding or gathering. He argues for example that the original definition of *λόγος*, typically translated as “word” or “reason,” was a “constant gathering,” a knitting together of the world around us.³ He combines this with an emphasis on the ability of physical objects in particular to act as focal points around which such senses might gather and stabilize – his famous analysis of the jug in “The Thing” concludes that the “jug’s presencing,” its capacity to exemplify and tie together a way of life, is this “manifold simple gathering.”⁴ However, Heidegger’s discussion of these ideas is marked by repeated warnings about the dangers inherent in philosophical treatments of them. The fundamental challenge is to prevent intellectual reflection from distorting or deforming the tacit experience of meaning which characterizes our lives.⁵ He therefore suggests that his own work should be read not as demonstrating some set of doctrines but rather as pointing back to experience. “One cannot prove these ‘theses,’” he writes, “rather, they must prove themselves in phenomenological experience itself.”⁶ Heidegger’s task, as he sees it, is to sustain a mood of experience that is attentive enough to the structures that form it – avoiding both the “tranquilized” nature of everyday life and the overly intellectualized project of much traditional philosophy.⁷

The purpose of this essay is to examine how Finlay’s work might be seen as a response to this Heideggerian framework. In particular we look to the garden *Little Sparta*, created by the poet at his isolated home in the Pentland hills, South Lanarkshire.⁸ This land was formed into a garden for and crucially by his artworks from 1966 until his death in 2006. Finlay openly casts part of *Little Sparta* in terms of Heidegger’s vision of the clearing and of

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the “*Holzwege*” or “wood paths” that shape it: the garden and the objects within it model the Heideggerian process of encircling, opening, and gathering. In this sense, at the methodological level, *Little Sparta* provides a guiding thread by which one might envisage the type of phenomenological exploration that Heidegger calls for. Simultaneously, however, discussion of Finlay’s garden raises the very dangers of which Heidegger warns – how can one adequately capture in a theoretical discussion the physical act of walking through the landscape, of moving from one artwork to the next, and of returning to the first via another path?⁹ One option would be to attempt a conceptual analysis of the distinctive nature of physical experience (for example, via a discussion of non-conceptual content). But the concern from a Heideggerian point of view is that the discursive nature of such a project would automatically skew its conclusions in favor of a misleading intellectualism. We have therefore adopted an alternative approach. We will combine a close description of the physical tenor of the garden – the even pacing of one path and the uncertain nature of the next – with a structure designed to mirror the cant and topology of the experience. Instead of operating within the linearity of a proof, this discussion will map the viewer’s progress through Finlay’s *Little Sparta*, starting in one woodland, walking out beyond it, and finding oneself in a second woodland before returning to the first.

More broadly, the investigation of specific areas of *Little Sparta* will show how Finlay’s practice may be read as taking up and elaborating themes implicit in Heidegger’s thought. For example, Finlay’s work explores violence and conflict – themes which are largely suppressed in Heidegger’s magnum opus, *Sein und Zeit*, and yet which come increasingly to the fore in the *Schwarze Hefte*, the recently published notebooks kept by Heidegger from the 1930s onwards.¹⁰ Ultimately this article aims to show how Finlay as an artist and poet both realizes and responds to Heidegger’s philosophy. In doing so, the article explores the nature of aesthetic inquiry, tracking the ways in which an artist might engage, extend, and challenge a philosophical research program. Given the scope of the discussion, it will not include all of the standard texts of Heideggerian aesthetics such as “The Origin of the Work of Art”; rather it focuses on the ideas and passages with which Finlay directly engages. In line with the methodological considerations noted above – particularly the concern that philosophical language will “level off” experience – this discussion requires a range of approaches and is therefore co-authored by a philosopher and a visual artist.¹¹ The hope is that our

cooperation will allow us to respect Heidegger's methodological warnings by moving between straightforwardly assertoric and more phenomenological or poetic styles. We begin with Finlay's foundational engagement with Heidegger – with what one might call the *Holzwege* plinths (Figure 1).¹²

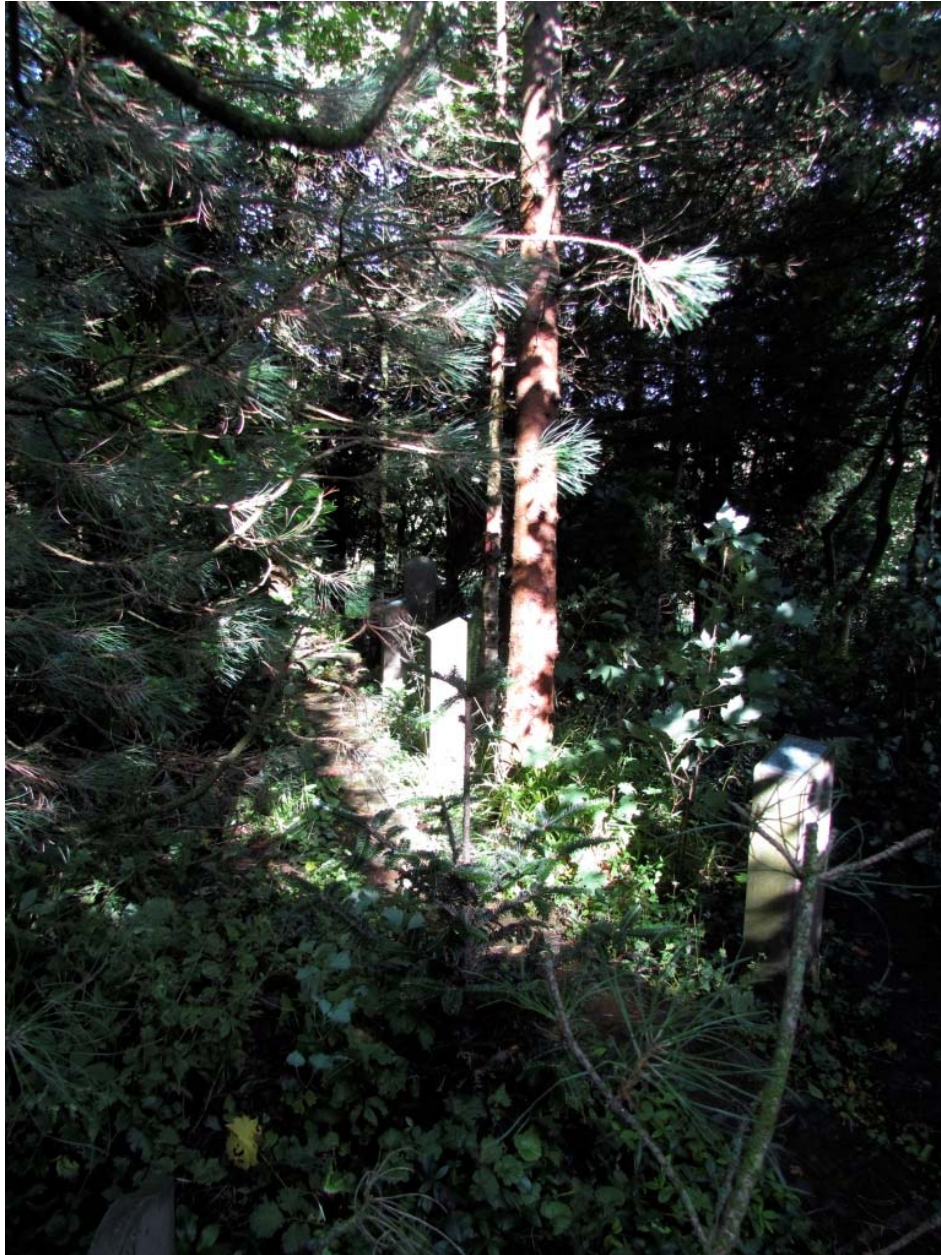


Figure 1. By courtesy of the Estate of Ian Hamilton Finlay.
Photo by Kathleen McKay.

An Opening Description

On entering an area of woodland at *Little Sparta*, it quickly takes a heavy, Northern Romantic turn and the wood turns to thicket. Such qualities were described by Finlay as the “Glooms and Solitudes” of the garden.¹³ Distinct from other areas of *Little Sparta*, which are more open to the sky and views of further land, here the evergreen canopy sets the domain of the wood with such force that everything beneath appears dark and overwhelmed. It is with a sense of the trees’ claim to their own place that ways through the wood are made, quickly subsumed, and ended. Walking there, we come across various sections of track or path; some are cast, others have been laid with stone or brick, and some remain earthen. Yet they appear disjointed, and any certainty of course or footing soon passes.

It is under these same conditions that Heidegger’s prefacing note to the collection of texts entitled *Holzwege* (*Wood Paths*) is made:

Holz lautet ein alter Name für Wald. Im Holz sind Wege, die meist verwachsen jäh im Unbegangenen aufhören.

Sie heißen Holzwege.

Jeder verläuft gesondert, aber im selben Wald. Oft scheint es, als gleiche einer dem anderen. Doch es scheint nur so.

Holzmacher und Waldhüter kennen die Wege. Sie wissen, was es heißt, auf einem Holzweg zu sein.¹⁴

“Wood” is an old name for forest. In the wood there are paths, mostly overgrown, that come to an abrupt stop where the wood is untrodden. They are called “wood paths.”

Each goes its separate way, though within the same forest. It often appears as if one is identical to another. But it only appears so.

Woodcutters and forest keepers know these paths. They know what it means to be on a wood path.¹⁵

The darkness of the wood before us is a destitution in which we now find ourselves. As we move further into the woodland, the darkness increases. So too does the thicket. Signs and marks become harder to see; things that would be points of orientation within the impenetrable mass of branches are covered over in the darkness.

We come upon three identical plinths along the way, each made from a composite stone. Three inscribed metal plates mounted on top of the three successive plinths read:

IN THE WOOD
ARE PATHS
WHICH MOSTLY
WIND ALONG
UNTIL THEY END
QUITE SUDDENLY
IN AN
IMPENETRABLE THICKET.

THEY ARE CALLED
WOODPATHS.

OFTEN IT SEEMS
AS THOUGH ONE
WERE LIKE ANOTHER.

YET IT ONLY
SEEMS SO.

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Here on a doubtful path – on finding Finlay’s adaption of Heidegger’s note – we approach an understanding of the poetic economy of the woodland garden and Finlay’s wider philosophical approach. In the following paragraphs, we look at Finlay’s work in light of Heidegger’s thoughts on the role of the poet within the wood’s deep cover and destitution. Starting from Finlay’s formulation of Heidegger’s lines, we follow the route it offers us into Heideggerian thought – specifically toward the phenomenology of “disclosure.” We will find that Finlay’s approach has close ties with Heidegger’s thinking both with respect to the artwork as a gathering, a point at which meaning coalesces, and with respect to the model of progress, charted by Finlay’s garden and by Heidegger’s wood paths, from which this “gathering” quality arises.

Making Way

The three inscriptions on Finlay’s plinths offer Heidegger’s remarks on *Holzwege* as a succession of passages that end without conclusion. The passage or movement of Heidegger’s text is deliberately re-arranged; typographically, Finlay pushes the text to the right-hand limit, visually emphasizing the sense of an ending. Finlay separates Heidegger’s text into three sequential parts, one for each plinth. The first sets the reader on a way; the second establishes something, confirming the reader’s way; the third introduces doubt and offers the possibility of a discovery. The poet establishes a route sequentially through the text by moving from plinth to plinth. On first sight, the three equally-spaced plinths set a regular pace and imply a step-by-step progression. But the inscribed text parts us from that rhythm: the last passage turns back on the previous two and questions the way of understanding they established. At this juncture there is something for the reader to reconsider. The poet leaves us in doubt. Significantly, Finlay omits the final lines of Heidegger’s text, leaving them to be discovered. This is what Finlay’s woodland garden will itself come to say to those standing within: “Woodcutters and forest keepers know these paths. They know what it means to be on a *Holzweg*.”¹⁶ We too will come to know the revelation of these lines. Finlay’s plinths are the point at which we begin to orientate ourselves to this and revel in the wider course of this thought.

On making our way through the wood, we will begin to realize the poetic progress instantiated there. For Heidegger, the open is experienced as a disclosure, the act of opening up a previously closed space full of meaning. It is the poet's task to bring about this clearing, a revelatory disclosure of being in which the world accords to the person, to the extent that he or she finds it recast anew. Finlay's plinths will model this same understanding of the poet: they will bring the reader into a clearing. Yet within this shared framework of revelation and disclosure, there are tonal differences, and it is with these that we need to begin. Heidegger's post-war work, as has been widely noted, is marked by a valorization of passivity and an almost meditative attitude to meaning and the clearing. In contrast, Finlay is often decisive in acts of clearing, accepting the "command" inherent in the poet's advance. Heidegger himself discusses the poet's venture and the risks involved in the essay "What are poets for?"¹⁷ The quality of being during poetic venture, of seeking to rework meaning, is that of being flung loose. Being on *die Wage*, Heidegger writes – using an archaic spelling of *Waage* – is a balance; one may quickly tip one way or another. Heidegger thus associates the path or way (*Weg* and the archaic verb *wegen*) with the wager (*wagen*) and risk involved in the instrument of a balance (*die Wage*).¹⁸ A stone in the way is a wager around which different routes become weighted. Risk is incipient in the wind of the *Holzwege*: "if that which has been flung were to remain out of danger, it would not have been ventured."¹⁹ For Finlay, pursuing on the natural track at Stonypath – the wider location for his creation of *Little Sparta* – such venture is vital to the poetic task. Growth is met as if it were itself an advance; trees claim ground, and their canopies establish dominion, cutting paths short. Finlay's works there often respond by marking out a domain that seems at first glance to be a rejoinder to nature: predominately through the use of classical motifs, the works impose an order and a sharpness that is not only distinctively human but also presents itself as a civilizing and rationalizing force. Simultaneously, however, Finlay recognizes an inherent violence in this human drive to order, which makes it not so much an alternative to the natural cycle but another expression of it. Indeed, Finlay stated that "conflict is one of the givens of the universe. The only way it can ever be tamed or managed or civilized is within the culture. You cannot pretend that it does not exist."²⁰ Violence is as much part of the cultural or political revolutionary cycle as it is of the natural cycle. *Little Sparta* enforces this view; when we come across gate piers with hand grenades as finials, we realize that both the grenade and the more familiar

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acorn and pinecone which it mirrors are for Finlay isomorphic points within a single overarching cycle.²¹ To take another set of examples, Finlay's sequence of works on the subject of Arcadia, involving *Arcadia* (1973), *Et in Arcadia Ego* (1976), and *Homage to Poussin* (1977), all deploy a Panzer as a central image and exemplify the poet's willingness to take on and embed in a natural context the interlinked risks of conflict and violence.²²

Clearing

The task now is to further develop Finlay's conception of the clearing. We will see that Finlay's work while often extremely assertive also contains a Heideggerian notion of dwelling, which tempers the confrontational character of the artworks that appear in the garden and gives us a more coherent impression of *Little Sparta* as a whole. In the woodland among the natural declarations of tree post and new leaf are Finlay's poetic declarations creating an "intercalary day amid the natural darkness."²³ The poet's clearing comes in several forms. First it may be found, as we have seen in the *Holzwege* inscriptions, in the form of textual assertion: Classical lettering is carved on numerous objects, foundation stones, and plaques of wood, metal, and stone throughout the garden. There is a forcefulness and finality to the assertions, which are most often quotes, short statements, or single-word warnings. The initial declaration often clears a direct path between two concepts or entities so that one can fully reach the other. In *Exercise X* (1974), a booklet made with George L. Thomson, Finlay uses two crossing calligraphic lines to compare the ways in which two paths might meet.²⁴ In one "X," an open circular space appears at the point where the two direct lines make an abiding bind, each bending in accordance with that meeting. Here two ideas become a joint in thought rather than, as another demonstrates, strike past one another. As well as modeling this clearing, "X" is the most immediate mark to hand, used for example to indicate the critical point of a topography, and also a substitute for that thing that has clearly struck the mind but which defies further extrapolation beyond that one clear sign. This "X" therefore brings together several fundamental aspects of the clearing as presented at *Little Sparta*. Describing the phenomenology of a sudden point of poetic concentration and the subsequent attempt to re-

orientate oneself following it, Finlay wrote: “that one word was everything... it just seems to open onto another possibility completely.”²⁵ Finlay plays here on the sense in which that clear revelation whilst eluding our discursive abilities might be opened up by a single word, for which “X” stands. This calls to mind Heidegger’s 1959 lecture “The Word” on Stefan George’s 1928 poem of the same title, which describes the poet’s experience of such a word: “they are words by which what already is and is believed to be is made so concrete and full of being that it henceforth shines and blooms and thus reigns.”²⁶ We will return to this sense of fullness and subsequent reign.

We can now turn to a second example of Finlay’s modeling of the clearing: concretion of the clearing action and the physical and ideological way it clears appears in the form of an axe. Finlay placed the object of an axe, made in 1985, in the *Garden Temple of Little Sparta*.²⁷ Inscribed on the handle is the declaration:

HE SPOKE LIKE AN AXE • BARÈRE ON SAINT-JUST

Louis Antoine Léon de Saint-Just (1767–1794) was a central figure in the French Revolution’s “Reign of Terror.” The incisive impression that Saint-Just’s speech left on Bertrand Barère is made in turn on Finlay’s axe. Saint-Just’s speech cut through doubt in the minds of his audience, creating connections between disparate drives and visions and thus made things clear. A later axe made by Finlay in 1987 concisely articulates the essence of this idea (Figure 2).²⁸ On the head is inscribed “*acte*” (act), and on the handle at the point at which one would grip in order to swing the axe is “*idée*” (idea). The close-coupled words carved on this one, functional object relate their inextricably bound purpose as coincident makers of a way. The swiftness of the clearing axe also relates the suddenness of poetic disclosure brought by such a word or phrase, as Finlay described, and the permanence of that mark embedded in the mind.

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Figure 2. Photo by John Andrew. Courtesy of the artist.

The violence and clarity represented by Finlay's axe – an archaic weapon and deforesting technology – manifest what Heidegger called “repetition”: a return to the past to identify resources that one might use to determine the present.²⁹ Here the object, the axe, functions as a tightly gathered form that inherently retains its cultural position. This upholds a class of object in the vein of those made by Daedalus – a classification that was dominant in early Greek thought and which Heidegger echoed in his description of the object as a gathering point of sense. This type of object – a *daidalon* – was asserted wholly, a persistent gathering: a highly wrought form in which the object's exterior appearance was consistent with its inbound purpose. Objects made in this vein could be swiftly and decisively redeployed by Finlay, their purpose having remained vital. In Finlay's garden setting, figures such as Saint-Just make way with these instruments and tools, cultivating the ground assertively, forcibly even.

Tempering Violence

The initial incisive point of the Saint-Just wood axe widens; a tempered, more pastoral aspect follows. This occurs first in the axe's proximity to the other objects in the *Garden Temple*. Many have been sanctified there as instantiations of the actions involved in seasonal turns such as the bee hive and flower vase. Yet our view of the axe and several scythes in the *Garden Temple* may turn color when we realize that they mark words spoken by a

figurehead who was beheaded: Saint-Just's own death was by guillotine. Elsewhere, a different functional and seasonal object – a watering can – weeps for Saint-Just, its inscription recording the date of his birth and death. It offers solace in the form of rain that breaks the heat of high summer and thus reminds us that Saint-Just's death was a tipping point in the French Revolutionary calendar: his execution was part of the Thermidorian Reaction. The Revolutionary calendar is also deeply governed by turns in nature's cycle, mirroring the cyclical aspect of Finlay's understanding of history discussed above. The break of summer's peak is declared by a lightning strike, the force of which heralds rain and the harvest to come. Indeed, Saint-Just's execution marked the end of the Reign of Terror: the extremely violent, most radical phase of the French Revolution and a watershed moment in the revolutionary process. The lightning strike is a repeated motif elsewhere in Finlay's work — for example in the mutation of a lightning bolt's shape from the *ff* of musical force towards the final, violent force of the Third Reich's SS in a work from the booklet *SF* (1978)³⁰ and again in the mutation of the form of a sickle's blade in the lithograph *Sickle/Lightning Flash* (1990).³¹

Thus the wood axe is used as an instrument with which to forcefully cut back to the French Revolution, but it also leads to a re-establishment, prolonging those movements' spirits and values here in Finlay's garden, where they may abide. As we have seen, the manner and spirit of this re-establishment is a re-armament in the case of Saint-Just. From this point on, following the axe, a revolution of sorts comes about at Stonypath. Finlay defined his statement of intent in *Revolution, n.* (1986), a lithograph produced with Gary Hincks, thus: "REVOLUTION *n.* a scheme for the improving of a country; a scheme for realizing the capabilities of a country. A return. A restoration. A renewal."³² We have seen how the redeployment of an object of war and revolution has a necessarily violent point for Finlay from which new poetic lands are borne and cultivation and civilization unfold. Incised objects highlight the poet's cutting advances in pursuit of such a return. Through concise inscription, Finlay rebinds — or in Heideggerian terms "repeats" — parts of earlier thought in our contemporary world, cutting through thicket.

Gathering

Finlay's engagement with the French Revolution forms one part of what theorist and fellow Concrete poet Stephen Bann called his "poetic cosmology"; a complex framework which locates the French Revolution, German Romanticism, and the Third Reich as developments and mutations of Greco-Roman values.³³ It is to this Classical fulcrum of Finlay's work that we will now turn; as will become clear, his practice here links the conception of the clearing explored above to one of the notions that underlies it in Heidegger's own work, that of the Classical object. At *Little Sparta*, Finlay seeks to re-affirm aspects of Classical thought – more specifically Classical values – and their rigorous assertion through action. Thus Finlay not only selects objects that are Classical, he selects the most longstanding objects of the Classical world: column, capital, temple, marble bust and stone inscription. There is a force to many of the clear-cut forms asserted by the poet, objects dominant and certain of their place. This builds on the notion of the *daidalon* introduced above: such objects are a gathering or concentration of truth; they penetrate the mind intact and established meaning there. The material density of a longstanding object goes hand in hand with the sharpness of any inscription thereupon. Hence in Finlay's word-bearing object there is twofold clearance: by the clear-cut form of the object and by the incisive poetic inscription.

The density of Finlay's word-bearing objects is both a function of the phenomenological instilment of the poetic disclosure, which allows us to suddenly "see" something, and a function of the extent to which there develops and dwells an investment of bind, a gathering in the Heideggerian sense, a coalescence of meaning, which has reached a concretion of form. Thus density of material and certainty are tied together in direct relation to the semantic and conceptual binds thereby held. But this sense of the inbound rigor of such objects is hard to retain, Heidegger warns:

Our thinking has of course long been accustomed to *understate* [sic] the nature of the thing. The consequence, in the course of Western thought, has been that the thing is represented as an unknown X to which perceptible properties are attached. From this point of view, everything *that already belongs to the gathering nature of this thing* does, of course, appear as something that is afterward read into it. Yet the bridge would never be a mere bridge if it were not a thing.³⁴

How should we think about Finlay's plinths without applying a "reading" after the fact of the artwork? Heidegger continues, offering a useful point:

What the word for space, *Raum*, *Rum*, designates is said by its ancient meaning. *Raum* means a place cleared or freed for settlement and lodging. A space is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary, Greek *peras*. A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something *begins its presencing*.³⁵

As in a woodland clearing, so too here in this new clearing created by the artwork's presence, disclosure allows being to dwell and become apparent. In phenomenological terms, the art object forms a boundary – its clearing – the space within which meaning occurs. Under these metaphysical conditions, by its very existence, the art object is a gathering: being has an "incipient power gathering everything to itself, which in this manner releases every being to its own self."³⁶ In the artwork, the thing's own binds, its capacity to tie strands to the point of coherent unity, subsist there with such purchase that it has a hard, certain quality. By laying down a Classically Greek boundary in the sense mapped by Heidegger, a thing is bound to be fulfilled: the objects of Classical art as he conceived them were points at which the concretion of meaning occurred, points at which the physical form of the object was sharp enough to mark a space of understanding. When it reaches a state of being fully bound, the thing comes to fruition and "reigns." Thus fullness is vital.

This restored object's reign exerts a gravity on its surrounding field, recasting lines of thought in accordance to the object. Admittance can be gained by being on the way of or following the "draw" to such a gathering. Thus it is through the effect of the object on its surrounding domain – not by "reading into" the object – that we come to know the object more than its tightly gathered state allows. We come to see that Finlay's word-bearing objects are, to paraphrase the poet Edwin Morgan, constructions that hold.³⁷ There is a creation of a new poetic order around such points of anchor, which harness other cultural fields to our own. Surrounding the artwork, the paths in Finlay's garden become deeper and wider, more certain of their way; some are even laid with stone. Thus it comes to pass that, around the single point

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of an artwork, the poet becomes “sure of his word, and just as fully in command of it.”³⁸

Therefore, Finlay answers Heidegger’s appeal not only in his choice of objects but also by the manner in which they exist in the garden and hence by our approach to them, which is also gathering by nature. It is precisely the poet’s task to create clear opportunities, which will lead us to dwell intently in the manner described by Heidegger. This is an inevitable consequence of our innate state of bind; bound here only temporarily, we “*must ever learn to dwell.*”³⁹

What the Woodcutters and Forest Keepers Know

When we come across Finlay’s *Holzwege* plinths in the woodland garden, we find this point around which to orientate. From these incisive plinths unfolds a more gradual wind – a contemplative re-working – as the gravity of the certain object goes to work on the doubtful thicket surrounding it.

Finlay’s garden and the pull of the word-bearing objects placed there begin to reveal what Heidegger’s woodcutters and forest keepers know. As we walk there, the wood paths – disjointed parts of a path in doubt – start to cohere. The axe in the temple, the objects surrounding it, the longer draws of Classicism and French Neo-Classicism: these exert draws on our understanding and recast the wind of paths we develop around the *Holzwege* plinths. It starts to make sense that there would be sections of deeply grooved tank tracks marking one way to the plinths. The woodcutters and forest keepers know why the wood paths make a certain pattern of movement apparent on the ground; they have made way there in the wood.

Here is what the woodcutters know: that it is their process of clearing that governs the paths that draw us into the open. Once we see the disclosure in the wood clearing, what seemed to be doubtful ways now manifest the economy of the woodland. The necessary precedence and violence of the poetic disclosure is realized in Finlay’s axe, after which the wood paths are deepened in accordance with the newly disclosed open, cut trees borne along and pulled out along certain lines. Paths, once uncertain, now deliver the clearing to us. The poet has shown us what it is to be on a

Holzweg. Thus it comes to be that Finlay's woodland enacts the poet's task in the world as described by Heidegger: the processes of cutting, disclosure, and establishment of dwelling deliver the revelation promised in the *Holzwege* inscription. The artwork establishes a foundation stone that functions as a joint in thought, allowing a wider field to unfold in accordance to the object. The cohering operation it performs on the wider garden is not achieved by introducing some new or external model of unity but rather, as Heidegger identified, by making visible connections that already belong to the gathered nature of the object. The poet's thought there dwells and by that dwelling gains a deepening hold on the ground, answering Heidegger's call "to bring dwelling to the fullness of its nature."⁴⁰ We may find this in the poet's expanding territory, in the more tightly wrought bent of paths in the established garden, and in the flattened areas of earth around an artwork, where approaches gather. It is by poetry's nature that this progressive dwelling develops: "poetry that thinks is in truth / the topology of Being."⁴¹ With each persistent mark on wild land, the garden's poetic scope and potential territory enlarge. To the forest keeper and poet, the woodland is now increasingly bound to disclose. Thus the larger artwork of *Little Sparta* begins to emerge – and with it Finlay's conception of being in the world.



Figure 3. By courtesy of the Estate of Ian Hamilton Finlay.
Photo by Kathleen McKay.

Another Way

On a path descending from the peak of *Little Sparta*, we approach another patch of woodland, located just beneath the summit of the garden. Finlay proposes an alternative route through this wood. As if stating a founding tenet, a plaque is fixed to the first dominant tree establishing this new territory (Figure 3).⁴² It reads:

All the noble
sentiments of my heart,
all its most praiseworthy
impulses – *I could give them
free rein, in the midst of
this solitary wood.*⁴³

The heart and woodland are aligned. This “solitary” wood – alone, a unity – is tied-off from other parts, is something sole. A concordance begins to take hold, which increasingly positions both heart and woodland as gatherings: both are solitary thickets. The dark density of Finlay’s woodlands and the impossibility of any new opening in the heart’s mass of branching parts align the two closer still. Resonances between heart and woodland are perhaps most notably traced to Homer who described the heart as close-textured, highly bound, or bushy in quality.⁴⁴ Plato understood that the lungs took on the impact of the “leaping” heart – cushioning it – their volume thick with branches.⁴⁵ Thus the lungs’ many branches and pathways developed in response to the heart’s one insistently set and highly bound passage. The bushy nature of the heart was thus thought to map the extent and quality of its awareness as the seat of consciousness within the body.⁴⁶ The reign of the heart within the body becomes palpable as does its curiously involved autonomy there.

This sense of the heart’s reign may reach a critical point at which it seems to turn against us; we dwell in the world only to the extent that the heart allows. The bounds of the heart not only delineate the physical extent of its bleeding field through the body but also delimits the duration of that

hold. The form of the heart is felt to repeat an inbound rhythm that sometimes sits like a stranger in the body, throwing its weight about.

This may prompt the poet to revolt. For example, the poet Theodore Roethke defies the heart and its boasting dominance, describing it as a “knot of gristle”: old, over-wrought, and assuming.⁴⁷ He questions the authoritative position that the heart is said to hold as the primary seat of being or seat of the first nutritive soul. Here, poetic “free rein” – abundant and expansive in its course – makes way in defiance of the one ingrained way of the heart, which goes over the same course again.

After Counter-Revolt, Louvet

Having turned against the idea of the heart as a thicket, we reconsider the route proposed by Finlay through the wood before us, returning to Finlay’s plaque and the different area of woodland it introduces. Once inside and in contrast to the dark *Holzwege* thicket, this woodland is lighter, full of young, deciduous trees, yearlings, and in parts has the appearance of a coppice. The author of the passage quoted on the plaque at Figure 3 is Jean-Baptiste Louvet de Couvrai (1760–1797), who came to hold a position post-Thermidorian Reaction. This point in the French Revolution was a revolt against the extreme violence of the Reign of Terror that led to a turn towards a non-reactionary, more temperate way, curbing the counter-violence of figures such as Saint-Just. Here Finlay hints at an alternative course of action towards insight – towards disclosure – and puts down Saint-Just’s axe.

Finlay’s Louvet plaque establishes a post-Thermidorian Reaction position both in accordance to the former figures we have explored and in the form of the woodland’s terrain. We may remember the objects in the *Garden Temple* devoted to Saint-Just and the clearing action they were devoted to and also the watering can dedicated to Saint-Just. After this peak of terror follows the water’s run: here is Louvet’s landscape. The path through the wood now before us is downhill, closely following the course of a stream, tipped from the peak behind us and flowing from a full reservoir high in the garden. The nature of Louvet’s “rein” is said by the text to be free. It follows that the water through the Louvet wood makes a gradual passage,

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easing its way and pooling. A more intricate relation is wrought between land and water alongside which our path winds.

Free Rein

We can see that Finlay has built a territory of meaning with a different turn in nature in the Louvet wood, and when we consider this terrain in combination with other figures of the French Revolution chosen by the poet, we recognize a wider topology of being at *Little Sparta*. Louvet's passage though the wood is perhaps comparable to the way in which Heideggerian meaning is gained; made on the way, its grip on the ground deepens with being's inherence in the world. Yet Louvet's grip is weak. Washed-out and sentimental in comparison to the clearings created by Saint-Just's axe, Louvet's passage is far more defined by the established extremes of Revolutionary and counter-Revolutionary positions than by any will of his own. The way through the Louvet woodland is conciliatory and hardly creates clearings; rather, the course settles on its way via the least contested pass, following the course of water. Louvet has free rein only within uncontested territory.

If cutting and clearing are not active here in the Louvet wood, how can insight be gained? One option would be to trace the idea of "free rein" back through Heidegger's own widely discussed use of "*walten*," meaning "to prevail" or "to let rule." Heidegger himself uses "*walten*" to capture the process of a coming to presence that establishes a context of meaning, which creates a context in terms of which other objects are understood and so "reigns."⁴⁸ This is precisely the process discovered via the *Holzwege* plinths in the first half of this article. There is an implicit violence in the term, a violence borne out by its cognates such as the deeply ambiguous "*Gewalt*"; standardly "violence" but in many contexts something closer to "legitimate authority."⁴⁹ In the contrast between the *Holzwege* and Louvet woodlands, we see Finlay working with this type of tension: the freedom that Louvet attains, his "free rein," exists only where dominant territories will allow. Again Finlay's greater willingness to recognize the interpenetration of "*walten*" and "*Gewalt*" is apparent; the freedom Louvet gains is generated and dominated by the cyclical process of revolution and the violent assertion of meaning

exemplified by figures such as Saint-Just. Yet there is also an alternative route that will ultimately bring us back to and further illuminate the idea of disclosure: the heart's way.

The Heart and the Thicket

The significance of metaphors based on the heart deepens in Heideggerian aesthetics, where it must be conceived outside of a purely biological discourse. Heidegger states: "the widest orbit of beings becomes present in the heart's inner space."⁵⁰ The heart is an open: an auditorium within which being's way resounds and is discovered. Thus the heart becomes a device that, inherently attuned to the throws and pitches of being, will gain insight. The heart's hold over the body no longer sounds estranged nor authoritarian; instead it accurately gauges the way in which we dwell: "the whole of the world achieves here an equally essential presence in all its drawings."⁵¹ Recognition of the heart's involvement ties the artist's methods closer still to the Heideggerian instruction that we "must ever learn to dwell."⁵²

Curiously, a work by Finlay may have anticipated this connection. *Woodpaths* (1990) is a small booklet in which Finlay restates the first two parts of the *Holzwege* inscription.⁵³ He adds a last, third passage of his own making:

"In the wood are paths which
mostly wind along until they end
quite suddenly in an impenetrable
thicket."

"They are called woodpaths."

They are paths where the heart and
the foot walk hand in hand.⁵⁴

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For Heidegger, the manner in which being is discovered is *grounded* in the explorative disclosure of the world; meaning is made on the way, on and by the foot at Stonypath. By fixing the Louvet plaque to the first tree, Finlay “recognizes” the heart’s way in the woodland that follows and provides further ground for this alternative Heideggerian course towards clearing.

Resonance

We have found that a rhythm has built between the heart’s thicket and the wood’s thicket. One crucial emphasis that arises is on their common isolation. When pitched together, two distinct unities – wood and heart – can build a familiarity of meaning. The heart’s thicket and the wood’s thicket develop, and we become attuned to their common binds – their concordances – between the two. When the two are set to work together, meaning that is incipiently gathered within each thing can be realized outside of its individual bounds.

Between solitary and fixed artworks resonance builds; concordances between the two things bind them increasingly. As these points coincide, they coalesce, holding things in relation. Indeed, Finlay made the role of resonance clear, stating that he thought of poetry “in terms of the *resonant* image, and it is precisely this resonance which animates and justifies the surrounding space.”⁵⁵ A resonant image gathers meaning towards it. From a Heideggerian perspective, this idea is fundamentally linked to that of atmosphere or mood. Heidegger’s preferred term for these – *Stimmung* – is deliberately and naturally read as “resonance” or “tuning.”⁵⁶ In this sense, Finlay’s remark that “superior gardens are composed of Glooms and Solitudes and not of plants and trees” captures the Heideggerian process through which a mood attunes in a certain way, making certain things apparent.⁵⁷ Atmosphere does not occlude: it is the air’s pitch turned toward the persistent object. For Heidegger, therefore, atmosphere is a cultivating substance in which we are “trans-planted” and in which meaning grows.⁵⁸

We have found resonance not simply within a single aspect of the garden terrain but a resonance between two distinct parts: the *Holzwege*

wood and the Louvet wood. In working together, the woods illuminate aspects both of the open and of the manner in which meaning is gained: in turn on the way, strikingly, or resoundingly through concordance.

In Conclusion

By engaging with Finlay's response to Heidegger, we have demonstrated how *Little Sparta* sustains a distinctive form of aesthetic inquiry – from the initial state of doubt in the *Holzwege* thicket to a deeper understanding of meaning's progress. The works of art located in Finlay's garden and the form of garden surrounding them, as exemplified by the interaction of the *Holzwege* and Louvet woods, all serve to model the way of meaning traced by Heidegger. In this sense our study has sought to discover Finlay's description of his own work as "a model, of order, even if set in a space which is full of doubt."⁵⁹

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Notes

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1 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 171.

2 As Sheehan observes, Heidegger employs a range of terms for this structure with "*Lichtung*" ultimately coming to dominate:

[T]he goal of *Being and Time* was to identify and explain the openness that makes it possible to take something as this-or-that ... This 'open space' went by a series of cognate and mutually reinforcing terms throughout Heidegger's career, among which are *Da*, *Welt*, *Erschlossenheit*, *Zeit*, *Temporalität*, *Zeit-Raum*, *Offene*, *Weite*, *Gegend*, and *Zwischen*. In his later work, however, all these terms tended to gather around *Lichtung* (Thomas Sheehan, "What, after all, was Heidegger about?" *Continental Philosophy Review* 47 (2014): 263).

3 Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. G. Fried and R. Polt (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 136.

4 Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Perennial, 2001), 171.

5 Dahlstrom refers to this as the "paradox of thematization." For discussion, see Daniel Dahlstrom, *Heidegger's Concept of Truth* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 433–4.

6 Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. M. Fritsch and J. Gosetti-Ferencei (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 57.

7 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 223.

8 Ian Hamilton Finlay and Sue Finlay, *Little Sparta*, 1966–2006. The title is in part a reference to the complex role the Classical world plays in the artistic and intellectual space of the garden; we return to this theme below.

9 We are grateful to an anonymous referee for pressing this point.

10 There is of course an extensive and important debate occurring over the intellectual and political complicity of the *Schwarze Hefte* writings in the violence against the Jews and others during the NS-period, but our concern here is not that but the increased use there of a violent imagery of domination to frame Heidegger's own question, the question of the clearing and of being. See Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen II-VI: Schwarze Hefte 1931–1938* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2014), 362.

11 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 201.

- 12 Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Untitled* ("Holzwege plinths"), 1990–5, composite stone and bronze, each plinth 20 x 26 x 91.5 cm, Figure 1. There is not an established date for this work. A printed work on *Holzwege* – Finlay's booklet *Woodpaths* – was published in 1990, and an exhibition of his work titled *Holzwege* was staged at the *Neuer Aachener Kunstverein* again in 1990. A different version of the three plaque-plinths quoting the same passage from Heidegger was installed in 1995 at the *Schlosspark*, Grevenbroich. It therefore seems likely that the version at *Little Sparta* is within or close to the period 1990–5.
- 13 Ian Hamilton Finlay, "Detached sentences," in *Little Sparta: A Portrait of a Garden*, eds. R. Gillanders and A. Finlay (Edinburgh: Scottish National Portrait Gallery, 1998a), 1.
- 14 Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe 5: Holzwege (1935–1946)* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1977), [no pagination].
- 15 Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. J. Young and K. Haynes (London: Cambridge University Press, 2002), [no pagination].
- 16 *Ibid.*, [no pagination].
- 17 Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 87–139.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 101.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 100.
- 20 Malise Ruthven, "Gardens: Politics of Little Sparta," *Architectural Digest* 46, no.7 (1989): 111.
- 21 See, for example, Ian Hamilton Finlay and David Edwick, *Gate Piers*, 1991, brick and stone.
- 22 Ian Hamilton Finlay and George Oliver, *Arcadia*, 1973, screenprint on paper, 35.5 x 43.7 cm. Ian Hamilton Finlay and John Andrew, *Et in Arcadia Ego*, 1976, marble, 28.1 x 28 x 7.6 cm. Ian Hamilton Finlay and John Borg Manduca, *Homage to Poussin*, 1977, booklet, 16 pages, 13 x 13 cm.
- 23 Walter Pater, *The Works of Walter Pater, Volume 4: Imaginary Portraits* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 132. This comment is made by Pater on Apollo, who is a recurrent figure in Finlay's work. Indeed, Apollo is directly identified with Saint-Just in works such as the *Proposal for a temple of Apollo/Saint-Just* (1994). While numerous and close ties can be made between Saint-Just and Apollo, this would draw our present study too far from its course. For discussion, see Stephen Bann, "Epilogue: On the homelessness of the image," *Comparative Criticism: Walter Pater and the Culture of the Fin-de-Siècle* 17 (1995): 123–128.
- 24 Ian Hamilton Finlay and George L. Thomson, *Exercise X*, 1973, booklet, 24 pages, 9.5 x 14 cm.
- 25 Ian Hamilton Finlay, "The sail-boat on the pillow," in *Little Sparta: A Portrait of a Garden*, eds. R. Gillanders and A. Finlay (Edinburgh: Scottish National Portrait Gallery, 1998b), 53.
- 26 Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 144.
- 27 Ian Hamilton Finlay, *Axe*, 1985, wood and iron, 93 x 23 x 7 cm.
- 28 Ian Hamilton Finlay and John Andrew, *Axe*, 1987, wood and iron, 93 x 23 x 7 cm, Figure 2.
- 29 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 437.
- 30 Ian Hamilton Finlay and George L. Thomson, *SF* (Dunsyre: Wild Hawthorn Press, 1978), [no pagination].
- 31 Ian Hamilton Finlay and Gary Hincks, *Sickle/Lightning Flash*, 1990, lithograph, 29.8 x 46.9 cm. See items 4.90.13–15 at http://www.ianhamiltonfinlay.com/1990_Prints.html.
- 32 Ian Hamilton Finlay and Gary Hincks, *REVOLUTION, n.*, 1986, lithograph, 43 x 43 cm.

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- 33 Ian Hamilton Finlay, Ron Costley, and Stephen Bann, *Heroic Emblems* (Calais: Z Press, 1977), 29.
- 34 Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Perennial, 2001), 151. Emphasis original.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 152. Emphasis original.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 98.
- 37 Alec Finlay, ed., *Wood Notes Wild* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1995), 7.
- 38 Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 145.
- 39 Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 159. Emphasis original.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 159.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 12.
- 42 Ian Hamilton Finlay and Andrew Whittle, *Tree-plaque*, 1991, stone, approximately 40 x 30 cm, Figure 3.
- 43 Original emphasis.
- 44 Homer, *Iliad* (London: William Heinemann, 1928), XVI, 553 f. For further discussion of the heart and its quality as a thicket, see Richard B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 23–43.
- 45 Plato, *Timaeus* (London: MacMillan, 1888), 70 B ff.
- 46 Plato, *Theaetetus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883), 194 E f. For discussion, see Richard B. Onians, *The Origins of European*, 28–9.
- 47 Theodore Roethke, *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* (New York: Anchor Books, 1975), 75.
- 48 Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 175–7.
- 49 The inherent ambiguity in the term and the significance of this for Heidegger's work were particularly stressed by Derrida in his final seminar series: see for example Jacques Derrida *The Beast and the Sovereign*, trans. G. Bennington (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009), 279.
- 50 Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 125.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 125. This heart is not essentially biological. The metaphor relates the core Heideggerian sense in which meaning is gained and drawn equally to being.
- 52 Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 159.
- 53 Ian Hamilton Finlay and Solveig Hill, *Woodpaths*, 1990, booklet, 14.5 x 8.8 cm.
- 54 Ian Hamilton Finlay and Solveig Hill, *Woodpaths* (Dunsyre: Wild Hawthorn Press, 1990), [no pagination].
- 55 Ian Hamilton Finlay and Stephen Bann, *Midway* (London: Wilmington Square Books, 2014), 152. Emphasis original.
- 56 For example, a *Klavierstimmer* is a piano tuner.
- 57 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 172–77.
- 58 Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 131.

59 Ian Hamilton Finlay, "Letter from Finlay to Pierre Garnier, September 17th, 1963," *Image* 10 (1964): 10. Finlay describes the operation of his Concrete poetry in this quote; however it can be applied more widely to other word-bearing objects such as those at *Little Sparta*. The poet's later work *Little Sparta* – a work of "avant-gardening" – shares a lineage and logic with his earlier Concrete poetry. In 1966, Finlay states:

I have become interested also in concrete poetry in relation to architecture and avant-gardening. This is not a whim, but the logical development of earlier concrete poetry – from the poem as an object on the page to the poem as an object properly realized in sandblasted glass, stone or indeed concrete (Ian Hamilton Finlay, "Autobiographical sketch," in *Ian Hamilton Finlay: Selections*, ed. Alec Finlay (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), xx).

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