On Shining Forth:
Response to Günter Figal and Dennis Schmidt

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I could not begin otherwise than with an expression of my gratitude to Günter Figal and Dennis Schmidt for their insightful commentaries on my book. If it is true that one sees something of oneself in the eyes of a friend, then it is equally the case that one gains exceptional insight into one’s own text through the readings that friends, out of generosity, are most capable of offering.

Both commentaries are centered in a full recognition and precise understanding of what is said in the subtitle of the book. The true sense of art is indeed that to which the entirety of *Transfigurations* is oriented. This is what I undertake to demonstrate—in the sense expressed in Greek by the word ἀπόδειξις (showing forth). This demonstration requires differentiating between truth and sense in order then to show how, in the artwork, each is transfigured in the direction of the other; sense is transposed into meaning, and meaning is rendered more friendly to sense, that is, resistant to concepts. This double transfiguration of each sense of sense into the other, of truth into sense and of sense into truth, is the true sense of art.

In both commentaries there is also recognition of how pervasive the Kantian motif is, specifically that of the *Critique of Judgment*. Except perhaps for the chapter on comedy, there are traces of Kant throughout the book. In some places these traces broaden out into explicit, systematic interpretations of Kant’s theories of song, of imagination, and of the relation between the various arts; yet even in analyses devoted thematically to Hegel’s theories of painting and of music, traces of the Kantian motif remain legible. And yet, as Schmidt stresses, *Transfigurations* ventures a move from which Kant always held back. Especially in the analysis of aesthetic ideas—though not only there—a basis is provided for expanding the compass of truth beyond the domain of the concept. It is to carrying out this expansion and others linked...
to it and to developing the relevant consequences—and not to giving an interpretation of Kant's thought—that Transfigurements is largely devoted.

Virtually the entire Kantian motif is in fact sketched in the very first section of the introductory piece entitled “Prefigurations.” This section, which indeed prefigures the entire book, consists almost entirely of a rewriting, an outline, of the Critique of Judgment, specifically of Kant’s analysis of the judgment of taste, that is, of judgment regarding the beautiful. In this rewriting there is only the slightest admixture of a Greek element: what the reader is asked to imagine is a Greek landscape and specifically the contour of a mountain that rises above this landscape. In this setting, as night is falling, it is to the entralling beauty of the sight that attention is drawn. That the passage rewrites the Critique of Judgment becomes still clearer as the mountain’s contour is described as a “figure taken up in imagination” in such a way that a pleasurable feeling, a joy in the beautiful, is aroused. Still further: something is given to understand, and so we linger in quiet contemplation of the beautiful sight, which seems to have been drawn in precisely the way appropriate to our subjective powers—that is, in Kantian terms, which appears purposive. Only at the very end, in the reference to an anterior reserve of nature, does a divergence, another script of nature, begin to come into play.

Much of Figal’s commentary is cast in terms of aesthetics, though also, in its very title, “At the Limit,” it sets in motion a certain mutation of what has been called aesthetics. I would stress, perhaps even more than Figal does, the decisiveness of this mutation; indeed I would venture to say that it is a mutation so decisive, so radical, that even the title and the concept of aesthetics must finally be set aside.

In the final chapter of Transfigurements, aesthetics is described as a kind of recoil or retreat from the metaphysics of art, like a shadow accompanying the metaphysics of art. Here is the description: “Rather than venturing to show that the artwork in its very sensibleness serves to present the intelligible, aesthetics retreats to the sensibleness and determines the artwork by reference to its way of affecting sense” (160). More specifically, the artwork is taken to evoke a feeling of pleasure, and, for aesthetics, it is this feeling that attests to the beauty of the work.

An undermining of aesthetics in this sense is already under way in the Critique of Judgment insofar as imagination, and not mere sense affection, is primary in judgment regarding the beautiful. Hegel remarks explicitly at the very beginning of the lectures entitled Aesthetics that this word is not satisfactory, because it means “the science of sensation, of feeling.” He speaks of the superficiality of this word; and though he lets it stand, as a concession to common