# **Richard Tuttle and the Open**

Peter N. Miller

Objects are incredibly important for me, "who" often paradoxically parades as an anti-materialist. The polarities are perhaps what makes art. This may be why the object has so much importance for me.<sup>1</sup>

We are surrounded by objects, which we never see, both because of our lack of interest and because they are held in a conceptual construct, which holds them back. To live well, we can surround ourselves with objects that are of the nature that we can see them for what they are.

Richard Tuttle is known as an artist who has spoken in his own distinct voice for many years. He has challenged those who prefer their artists to occupy singular and stable categories. What is less known is that over this same long period, he has been collecting objects of human manufacture. The collaboration between Richard Tuttle and Bard Graduate Center is something of a natural: an artist who collects with an institution that studies the meaning of collecting and collections in the widest possible way. This exhibition poses the central question Richard asked of his collection and of BGC: "What is the object?" This essay asks the same question, but it also uses the importance of the question to Tuttle as a clue, or lead, for the better understanding of his art-making thinking. And this, in turn, may help us see the general question about objects and meaning in a new light.

## What Is the Object?

So as to avoid the impossible perils of trying to answer this question either historically — "What was the object?"—or comprehensively—"What has everyone said about objects?"— we will instead begin representatively, with Martin Heidegger. The argument could be made that Heidegger is the major philosopher in the Western tradition who puts thinking about things at the heart of thinking about the human. With the expansion of interest in material culture, his treatment of objects was studied and made the foundation of "object-oriented ontologies."<sup>2</sup> Art historians have long been captivated by the essays he published on art and architecture after 1950.<sup>3</sup> Heidegger is a good place to start trying to answer Tuttle's question—because one of the answers he gives will take us in an especially fruitful direction: the Open.

Heidegger started talking about the way human life unfolds amid objects from the very beginning of his teaching career, in "The Idea of Philosophy and the Problem of Worldview," his lecture course from the winter, "emergency," semester of 1919. In a lecture hall, he wrote, "I see the lectern in one fell swoop, so to speak, and not in isolation, but as adjusted a bit too high for me. I see—and immediately so—a book lying upon it as annoying to me (a book not a collection of layered pages with black marks strewn upon them)." Yes, he says, we all might "see this complex of wooden boards *as* a lectern." That did not imply that

objects had a context-independent existence. If "a farmer from deep in the Black Forest is led into the lecture-room [d]oes he see the lectern," Heidegger asks, "or does he see a box, an arrangement of boards?" The farmer might instead see "the place for the teacher." And if he saw "a box, then he would not be seeing a piece of wood, a thing, a natural object." But, Heidegger continues, an African "from Senegal suddenly transplanted here from his hut"—for Heidegger in 1919 this stock figure seems to have stood for the opposite of the civilized European in a different way from the farmer—"what he would see, gazing at this object, is difficult to say precisely: perhaps something to do with magic, or something behind which one could find good protection against arrows and flying stones. Or would he not know what to make of it at all, just seeing complexes of colors and surfaces, simply a thing, a something which simply is?" He concludes that while the object might remain the same, its understanding could vary from person to person.<sup>4</sup>

If, for Heidegger in 1919, the individual object was dissolving into its phenomenological context, it was also dissolving into its material neighborhood. "This environmental milieu (lectern, book, blackboard, notebook, fountain pen, caretaker, student fraternity, tram-car, motor-car etc.) does not consist just of things, objects, which are then conceived as meaning this and this; rather, the meaningful is primary and immediately given to me.... Living in an environment, it signifies to me everywhere and always, everything has the character of world." "The object," Heidegger concludes, "being an object as such, does not touch me." In fact, for Heidegger, the object as an object "is as such re-moved, lifted out of the actual experience." And Heidegger's goal is to reverse that relationship and bring people back to understand their relationship with things. For him, the lectern isn't a process, even, "but rather an *event of appropriation* [Ereignis]." Objects are recoded as lived experience, and lived experience is recoded as something made by people.<sup>5</sup>

Focusing on objects as "experience" was fundamentally different from focusing on objects in isolation. There were epistemological consequences of this phenomenological turn. Heidegger was uninterested in neo-Kantianism but not untouched by its concern for epistemology. "Granted that I could make clear that my experiences are of a distinctive character, and are not thing-like or object-like beings, this evidence would have validity only for me and my experiences. How is a science supposed to be built upon this?" Heidegger defined science in terms of knowledge and knowledge in terms of objects. ("Science is knowledge and knowledge has objects.") He was aware that that science and experience were in conflict. "A science of experiences would have to objectify experiences and thus strip away their non-objective character as lived experience and event of appropriation."<sup>6</sup>

Heidegger stops, and stops us in our tracks, with two questions: First, can we construct a science "that does not treat experience in an objectified [Objektartiges] manner"? And second, "How is this 'burning' question of the reality of the external world to be solved?" The question, he writes, "is 'burning' because it inhibits every step forward." Still thinking that "forward" refers to all that can be known, he explains that "the empirical sciences, historical science as also the natural sciences, are constructed upon the reality of the

external world."<sup>7</sup> Objects and objectification are connected to science. If we move away from objects, whether in the direction of a phenomenological recentering or in the direction of an environmental recentering, we are risking our ability to speak about the external world in an intelligible way. For Heidegger's straw man, having objects made it possible to talk about the world.

In 1919, Heidegger clearly connects the shape of this problematic with Kant. "Criticaltranscendental idealism poses the problem: how, remaining within the 'subjective sphere', do I arrive at objective knowledge?"<sup>8</sup> This whole construct, he writes, upholds "the primacy of the theoretical," and the theoretical, Heidegger continues, blocks our ability to experience the environmental conditions of existence.<sup>9</sup> Returning to the example of the lectern, when viewed through a theoretical lens it is seen only as a thing, with both "the Experience of the environment" and the human experience ("the historical 'I'") stripped away. What's left—bare material culture—he describes as "the lowest level of what we call the objectivity of nature."<sup>10</sup>

In his summer 1925 course, the History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena, Heidegger returned to our question. "What can I say about the chair?" he asks. "I would say that it stands in Room 24 next to the desk, and it is probably used by lecturers who prefer to sit while they lecture. It is not just any chair, but a very particular one, the desk chair in Room 24 at Marburg University, perhaps somewhat worse for wear and poorly painted in the factory." This type of account treats the object as an "environmental thing." A second type of account treats it as a piece of wood. "[I]t is so heavy, so colored, so high, and so wide; it can be pushed from one place to another; if I lift it and let it go, it falls; it can be chopped into pieces with a hatchet; if ignited, it burns." This is the chair as a "natural thing." The chair is both natural and environmental. We experience both of these. When we say "the chair is hard," Heidegger notes, we are saying "the chair is uncomfortable." We see here characteristics belonging to nature, such as hardness and weight, presenting themselves as environmental features. But, he continues, as we evaluate the chair more carefully, we see it as neither environmental nor natural. In studying its "materiality" and "extension," or "color" or "mobility," in fact, we are "concerned with *thingness* as such."<sup>11</sup>

Later, he offers a broader but different kind of answer to the question, What is an object? Objects are objects *for* something. "The shoe is for wearing, the table for use, the clock for telling time." All this means that the object dissolves into the human world all around it. "The tool I am using is brought by someone, the book is a gift from . . . [someone], the umbrella is forgotten by someone. The dining-table at home is not a round top on a stand but a piece of furniture in a particular place, which itself has its particular places at which particular others are seated everyday." Coming very close to our own formulation, Heidegger tells us that "[t]he child's question, 'What is this thing?' is thus answered by stating what it is used for, defining what one finds in terms of what one does with it."<sup>12</sup>

Heidegger relates this approach to objects with what he identifies with modern science and research.<sup>13</sup> Its logic is basically Kantian. Knowledge is out there, and we—bravely!—

go, explore, describe, compare, catalogue, and collect. Heidegger proposes an alternative: "The apprehending of what is known is not like returning from an expedition of plunder with its acquired booty back into the 'housing' of consciousness." In the split, subjectobject way of thinking, the knower always remains with their booty on the "outside." Heidegger rejects this in favor of a "being-involved-with" (Seins-bei), where one's knowledge of the outside world and one's inner processing of that knowledge lead to the conclusion that "knowing is nothing but a mode of being-in-the-world."<sup>14</sup>

But Heidegger's discovery of the importance of objects for humans did not extend, initially at least, to the object for itself and by itself.<sup>15</sup> Only in his 1935 essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" does the solitary object become the focus of his attention. His first move was to insist that works of art were things before they were art; that they were material artifacts before, and independent of, their existence as art. Leather is a thing, and leather worked into the form of a shoe is another thing, but Vincent van Gogh's painting of shoes was a third and very different kind of thing. (The first he calls a "thing," the second he calls "equipment," and the third is "art.") In Heidegger's words, "A stone is worldless. Plant and animal likewise have no world; but they belong to the covert throng of a surrounding into which they are linked. The peasant woman, on the other hand, has a world because she dwells in the overtness of beings, of the things that are."<sup>16</sup> A work of art, he writes, "opens up a world." Heidegger explains that the work "makes space for . . . that spaciousness out of which the protective grace of the gods is granted or withheld." This he calls the "Open."

The "Open" (das Offene) is an odd term. He does not tell us more about what it is or where it comes from. But he continues to use the term to explain how art works. For instance, in a Greek temple, he writes, the material out of which it is built does not disappear but comes forth "into the Open of the work's work." Or: "Upon the earth and in it, historical man grounds his dwelling in the world. In setting up a world, the work sets forth the earth.... The work moves the earth itself into the Open of a world and keeps it there."<sup>17</sup> Extending still further, he writes, "The world is the self-disclosing openness of the broad paths of the simple and essential decisions."<sup>18</sup>

Most of the time, however, the world is obscure, "a veiled destiny" in which "what is known remains inexact, what is mastered insecure. And yet," he writes, there is something else. "In the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing, a lighting. . . . This open center is therefore not surrounded by what is; rather, the lighting center itself encircles all that is, like the Nothing which we scarcely know."<sup>19</sup> This clearing, he suggests, lets us understand what we are and what we are not. First drafted in 1935, this essay was not published until 1950, along with another essay that dealt much more directly with the Open.

### The Open

In 1946 Heidegger first presented the material published—also in 1950—as "What Are Poets For?" It tells us in much greater detail what he meant by the Open. It begins with a quotation from Friedrich Hölderlin about poetry in a "lean" (Hamburger) or "paltry" (Hoff) or

"destitute" (Hofstadter) time—which lends a distasteful, self-pitying tone to the whole. He does not connect this opening line with the fact that Hölderlin seems to be the first to have talked about the Open and that he actually talked about it in the same poem from which that quotation was taken. Nor does Heidegger explain anything about the way Hölderlin used the term. What all this might mean we will come back to later.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, Heidegger had been thinking about the Open, and also Hölderlin, between 1935 and 1946. In the summer semester of 1942, for example, Heidegger's course was focused on Hölderlin's hymn "The Ister." In it, Heidegger identifies the Open with "unconcealment," and also refers to the primordial "unconcealment of beings, when correctly understood." The Open was present "at the commencement of Western thought yet at once became lost as a fundamental experience." To be able "to 'see' the Open, thus understood," Heidegger says, is "the distinction of human beings." He explicitly contrasts this with the condition of animals who cannot "see" the Open in this way and cannot "say" the Open because they are without words. In a note, Heidegger contrasts this assessment of the human/nonhuman relationship to the Open with that of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke. He says that "it should be clear" that his treatment can hardly be compared "at all" with Rilke's and "at most it thinks the complete opposite." Heidegger takes the trouble to clarify his position "because the thoughtless lumping together of my thinking with Rilke's poetry has already become a cliché." We are not concerned here with the broader Heidegger-Rilke relationship. But it is worth noting that Heidegger links Rilke's version of "the Open" with the "fateful, modern, and metaphysical concept" of the "unconscious" and the "irrational," which is identified as "the preserve of feeling and instinct."21

Six months later, for the winter semester of 1942–43, Heidegger returned to the Open at the end of his course on Parmenides.<sup>22</sup> It was located in a discussion of truth as unconcealedness (Alethia). Truth emerged from the concealed into the unconcealed— Sophocles says of it, "time lets come forth into appearance."<sup>23</sup> But of what that Open is, Heidegger says, "the Greeks are silent." His claim is that what can come into the Open is what is already "self-opening" or "free." Heidegger warns us from a too-simple identification of openness and freedom. In European metaphysics, he writes, freedom is always understood in relation to will, and the freedom of the will to soul. But he wants to think about freedom not from the point of view of soul, or of an individual soul, but from the place of Being. The Open, he writes, is not a safe place. It is "rather the place where what is still undetermined and unresolved plays out, and therefore it is an occasion for erring and going astray."<sup>24</sup> For the Greeks, unconcealedness was connected to the Open but also to light. "The Open is the light of the self-luminous. We name it 'the free' and its essence 'freedom.'" This freedom he distinguishes from the traditional definition. It is not "free from" or "free for"—Isaiah Berlin's famous "Two Concepts of Liberty"—but "the free of Being." "Being, as the Open, secures in itself every kind of unconcealedness of beings."<sup>25</sup>

Heidegger then explicitly turns on Rilke, whom he identifies as the one who gets it all wrong. He says that Rilke's Open as an "unrestrained progression of beings never arrives at the free of Being." He accuses him of being led astray by the "metaphysics lying at the foundation of the biologism of the nineteenth century and of psychoanalysis, namely the metaphysics of the complete oblivion of Being.<sup>26</sup> For Heidegger, Rilke's Open has in common with his "only the sound and the vocalization." He accuses Rilke of rendering "only a poetic form of the popular biological metaphysics of the end of the nineteenth century." He says that in it "and in fact ever since Descartes, man's representing is called a consciousness of objects." This is but "some sort of derailed Christianity.<sup>27</sup> Because Rilke's poetry discounts the differences between the vegetable, the animal, and the human, or "the historical being," it would "never attain the mountain height of a historically foundational decision.<sup>28</sup>

These were Heidegger's thoughts about the Open and Rilke at the time he was asked to speak at a twentieth-anniversary commemoration of Rilke's death in 1926. Even though he had so sharply rejected Rilke, he seems to have found the topic of the Open, and their mutual attraction to it, too hard to resist. The discussion of the Open in "What Are Poets For?" begins with some lines from Rilke written around June 1924, a year after publication of the *Duino Elegies*. In these "improvised verses," Rilke points humans toward a life that is "more daring," that is "outside all caring," and that "is our unshieldedness on which we depend." To preserve life, he says, we turn to "the Open." Heidegger's text is loosely structured around readings of lines of the 1924 poem, and not the *Elegies*, which are, in fact, barely mentioned.<sup>29</sup>

Heidegger, interpreting Rilke, tells us that in the Open it is possible to meet the infinite without dissolving into it. What bounds, or blocks, creates "confinement," and "whatever is so barred is forced back upon itself and thus bent in upon itself. The barring twists and blocks off the relation to the Open, and makes of the relation itself a twisted one." Just as "blocked" and "twisted" and "confinement" are obviously bad, the Open "is a great whole of all that is unbounded." One could imagine that Heidegger found in the heightened drama of the Open an alternative to the moral flaccidity of an "everydayness" in which individual and social life twist and deform.<sup>30</sup>

Heidegger cites in extenso from a letter written by Rilke to a Russian reader who had asked him about the Eighth Elegy. Rilke talks about the way he imagines animals existing in the world and contrasts their intimate relationship to nature with humans' more oppositional one. The animal is "*in* the world" while humans are "*before* it." Because of the "peculiar turn and intensification which our consciousness has taken," when humans refer to sky, air, and space, they are for them "'object' and thus 'opaque' and closed to the man who observes and judges." Heidegger may have rejected Rilke's effort to blur the human/nonhuman division, but he surely shared Rilke's criticism of the human tendency to dichotomize into subject and object—the objectification Heidegger had earlier referred to in terms of the "theoretical"—that is not found in the nonhuman. The "animal" and the "flower"—nature—have, for Rilke, an "indescribably open freedom" (unbeschreiblich offene Freiheit).<sup>31</sup> Humans turn the world into an object and then organize that world around them. This is what bars access to the Open. Nonhumans, whether animals or flowers, don't do this. Within the process of objectifying nature and bound up with the posture that enables man to identify nature as object, Heidegger identifies an attitude he calls "willing." Plant and animal do not will because they do not make objects out of their perceptions. For Heidegger, this willing is identical with modern man. It has in it "the character of command" or "purposeful self-assertion." Moreover, it is this kind of willing that turns everything into "raw material."<sup>32</sup> This language points us toward "The Question Concerning Technology" (first presented in 1949, a year before this essay was published).

Technological production blocks access to the Open. Heidegger finds support here from none other than Rilke. In a letter dated November 13, 1925, Rilke laments the onrushing "Americanism" of a machine-driven material culture of "empty indifferent things, sham things, *dummies of life*."<sup>33</sup> The problem isn't things, Heidegger finds in Rilke, but the falseness of modern things (or modernity as refracted in things). Once there was "worldcontent" to be found in things. Now there is only "the object-character of technological dominion." "Willing" or "self-assertive" man as the "functionary of technology" "opposes himself to the Open." Industrial production levels "down to the uniformity of production."<sup>34</sup> Later, Heidegger reaches for Rilke's "Tun ohne Bild"—an act without an image—from the Ninth Elegy to capture the calculating rationale of the modern technological society that humans have built.

As remedy, Heidegger quotes, again sympathetically, from a letter of Rilke's that is more or less coterminous with the "improvised verses" (August 11, 1924; the poem was written in June and so named in a letter to Clara Rilke of August 15) in which Rilke describes an inner space even more vast than outer space. In it live the dead, memories, imagery. If consciousness, and thus the realm of the three-dimensional, "lives on the tip of a pyramid," in its enormous, widening base "we appear to be merged into those things that, independent of time and space, are given in our earthly, in the widest sense worldly, existence." These object-images—a preserve, perhaps, for a "Tun mit Bild," a "doing with Images"—Heidegger in the essay contrasts with "the objectness of the world," which relates only through "quanta of calculation." Later, Heidegger describes "self-willing man" as reckoning "with things and men as with objects." This turns these objects into "merchandise." Humans absorbed in willing, or "purposeful self-assertion," cannot reach the safety of the Open. And neither can things, "because they have become objects." Things in the world, on their own, may have their "frailties." But when they are taken up by humans "the thought-contrived fabrications of calculated objects" turn them into "objects produced to be used up." Things that are "produced as objects merely for consumption" are substitutes all the way down.<sup>35</sup>

What Heidegger is articulating here, via Rilke, is a rejection of the object as conceptualized in terms of industrial production, on the one hand, and as conceptualized in subject-object and space-time dualisms, on the other. But there is more here than just diagnosis. Heidegger believes that things can be "rescued" "from mere objectness." His thought is not easily made concrete. But when he turns back to Rilke, we may find firmer footing. In the letter of November 13, 1925, cited above, Rilke describes our task as impressing "this preliminary, transient earth upon ourselves . . . that its nature rises up again 'invisibly' within us. . . . The inner recalling converts that nature of ours which merely wills to impose, together with its objects, into the innermost invisible region of the heart's space." We are getting close to seeing, from a different angle, how necessary is the Image (*Bild*) in order to act (*tun*) in the world. It is in this "innermost invisible region," Heidegger concludes, that "we are free." The objects we "set around us" "only seem to give protection."<sup>36</sup> But letting go of the defenses offered by objects to subjects means going knowingly unprotected, and this is "hard" and "uncommon."<sup>37</sup> The "inner recalling" of the world into that vast interior space of images is, precisely, the answer to Heidegger's leading question, "What are poets for?" We may also find in it the answer to our question, What is the object?

Heidegger does not go deeper into Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, perhaps because of the clear line he insisted on drawing between their presentations of the Open. But is there more in Rilke that we might want for our purposes? To explore the furthest reaches of the Open, which we will need to answer Tuttle's question about objects and our question about Tuttle, we need to leave Heidegger behind and face Rilke on our own.

In the Seventh Elegy, Rilke announces that "one Earthly truly grasped Thing counts for many." This announces his declaration that "Hiersein ist herrlich"—being here is, literally, grand. But the happiness in this world, he writes, is not visible to us "until we transform it, within." Turning the world—"an enduring house"—into an overly "Cerebral structure" (erdachtes Gebild) makes it "completely belonging to the realm of Concepts." This approach led to building "vast reservoirs of power, formless as the straining energy that it wrests from everything." Objectification leads to exploitative uses of power. Against this kind of preservation-by-concept, Rilke holds up the possibility of "the chance to build it inside themselves now, with pillars and statues: greater!"<sup>38</sup>

We know what Rilke means by "inside." But what is this "greater"? Rilke contrasts it with those "to whom neither the past belongs"—because it is gone, over, vanished—"nor yet what has nearly arrived"—because its reconstruction in the mind depends upon drawing a sharp line between subject and object. This should not be a cause for despair, however, but rather lead us to be "strengthened in our task of preserving the still-recognizable form." The surviving object has a value, even as a concept: "This once *stood* among mankind, / in the midst of Fate the annihilator." This is the classic antiquarian preservationist move—they called their bogeyman *Tempus Edax Rerum*—and Rilke does not dismiss it. But the angel to whom this plea is addressed can see past these dichotomies ("in your endless vision it shall stand, now finally upright, rescued at last"). Rilke tells the angel "that we could achieve this," that "we have not failed to make use of these generous spaces, these spaces of *ours*." The angel's vision of a more capacious way to think—an ethereal complement to that vast "innermost invisible region"—is held up as possible. Rilke comments parenthetically, as he did in a letter of August 1924 quoted by

Heidegger, that these inner spaces must be enormous "since thousands of years have not made them overflow with our feelings."<sup>39</sup>

This deep space of transformation beyond objectification takes us right to the beginning of the Eighth Elegy and the appearance of the Open. "With all its eyes the natural world looks out into the Open." The human eyes "surround plant, animal, child-like traps, as they emerge into their freedom." Heidegger may have resisted Rilke's blurring of the human/nonhuman barrier, but he would have shared Rilke's goal of overcoming the barriers raised by subjectivity. They were put in place from early on: "for we take the very young / child and force it around, so that it sees / objects—not the Open, which is so / deep in animals' faces." And when we are so twisted, it affects our ability to understand the things in our world. "Forever turned toward objects, we see in them / the mere reflection of the realm of freedom, which we have dimmed."<sup>40</sup>

Animals are sad for a different reason. According to Rilke, they hold the memory of a more intimate, womblike existence in their past. "Here all is distance; there it was breath." They remain happier the more they remain in contact with those first spaces, whether the gnat that grows "from externally exposed seeds" or birds within their nests.<sup>41</sup> But then Rilke magically swerves from imagining animals with awareness of their embryonic as well as adult homes to the human, and so he describes the bird living in the world "as if it were the soul of an Etruscan, flown out of a dead man received inside a space, but with his reclining image as the lid." The space in the world doubles the space within—and here we can imagine Rilke thinking about those vast interior spaces of memory freed from objectification. The Etruscan smiling knowingly on the threshold between inner and outer space—this does capture some element of the feeling Rilke is trying to evoke. But it also sets up the astonishing end of the discussion:

And how bewildered is any womb-born creature that has to fly. As if terrified and fleeing from itself, it zigzags through the air, the way a crack runs through a teacup. So the bat quivers across the porcelain of evening.<sup>42</sup>

The gnat, the bird, the bat—they all fly. Their zigzag flight Rilke reads as a sign of blind fear. The cracked teacup, like the Etruscan sarcophagus, is not just of the human world; it is made by humans as a container. Maybe we *are* meant to read back into the meaning of objects from the meaning of the animal: maybe we *are* to read the cracked porcelain cup, or the ancient sarcophagus, as symbols of our blind fear etched into the objects with which we shield ourselves for security and preservation. For in the very next lines Rilke calls us directly to account: "And we:" he begins. We are "spectators" "turned toward the world of objects, never outward." That world fills us to overflowing. "We arrange it. It breaks down. We rearrange it. Then break down ourselves." This is the fate of living with objects that are outside, held apart from us in order to stand as a barrier between us and the porcelain night.<sup>43</sup>

How did this happen? Rilke asks. "Who has twisted us around like this?" Rilke is ending the elegy as he began: "for we take the very young child and force it around, so that it sees objects [Gestaltung]—not the Open." Living like this means living not just in the past, but in a twisted relation to the present: "we are in the posture of someone going away." Life with a fear medicated by objects and then haunted by their inevitable cracking is like living here while "forever taking leave."<sup>44</sup>

The Ninth Elegy no longer speaks of the Open. But it tries to give some hope for a reconciliation with things that could only happen under conditions of the Open (based on what he has already told us of the Open). "To have been at one with the earth, seems beyond undoing." Are we to hear in the earthiness of earth (*irdisch*) an echo of the porcelain that is both the human-made cup and the bird's dome of the sky? Heidegger heard it. "Upon the earth and in it," he writes, "historical man grounds his dwelling in the world. In setting up a world, the work sets forth the earth... The work moves the earth itself into the Open of a world and keeps it there."<sup>45</sup> The work and the world are the home we share. Rilke says that seeking their union is what we do. "We keep pressing on, trying to achieve it, trying to hold it firmly in our simple hands, in our overcrowded gaze."<sup>46</sup> The "überfüllter Blick" takes us to the end of the previous elegy, where we were told that the world of objects "Uns überfüllts."<sup>47</sup>

But these things in the world that we are trying to grasp—"things like house, bridge, fountain, gate, pitcher, fruit-tree, window"—to really say them we have to embrace them "*more* intensely than the Things themselves ever dreamed of existing." This is about wearing down the threshold between us and the things in the world and thus abandoning the ever-on-the-defensive crouch of the subject-object dichotomy. For Rilke there is an impersonal urgency to this affirmation, because "the Things that we might experience are vanishing, for what crowds them out and replaces them is an act without image" (Tun ohne Bild). As bad money drives out good, Rilke is telling us that bad objects are driving out good Things.<sup>48</sup>

Rilke's telling the angel about the "rope-maker in Rome or the potter along the Nile" astonishes not only the angel but us, his readers, too. The things pass away, but by passing away into our "praise" we give them some deliverance. Yet this is no replay of the poems from ancient Egypt and ancient Greece about material or human loss made good by poetic posterity. For in the last lines of the stanza Rilke tells us, "They want us to change them, utterly, in our invisible heart / within—oh endlessly—within us!" It isn't memories proclaimed poetically to posterity that will preserve things, but their transformation within us, in our interior vastness, with the wearing away of that threshold between people, between people and things, and between life and death. Rilke ends by coming back again to *Erde* and the porcelain dome of our vast inner sky: "Earth, isn't this what you want: to arise within us, *invisible*?... What, if not transformation, is your urgent command?"<sup>49</sup>

## **Richard Tuttle**

One could say that Richard Tuttle's art has always been a striving toward the Open.

Let us begin with his very intentional blurring of categories. To be clear: I don't see this as an "unwillingness to be limited," or as a quest for "independence from" aesthetic categories, or as a quest for "autonomy" by landing "in between."<sup>50</sup> Rather, I see him as trying, more or less consciously, to go somewhere in life using art as his means. For instance, what he calls *Floor Drawings* are actually sculptural assemblages. The *Turquoise* series from 1988 and Sentences from 1989 are drawings in the same way that the pieces of display furniture Tuttle has designed for What Is the Object? are sculptures. They are, and they are much more than that. Looking back still further, to the three-inch paper cubes Tuttle made between 1963 and 1964, Susan Harris writes that "[h]anging on the wall or lying on the floor, these pieces hover between painting and sculpture," making us wonder about the differences between two and three dimensions.<sup>51</sup> The crossing of sculpture and drawing in the Wire Pieces (1972) does the same. Tuttle's collaging in the 1980s challenged different boundaries, those conventionally upheld by materials, shapes, colors, volumes, and frames. Tuttle put wood and fabric, for example, to work in ways that made the viewer rethink their possibilities and meanings. And constantly, according to Harris, Tuttle treated line as an experimental space, moving toward freedom and "the liberation of drawing from timeworn concepts of life, surface, colour and space."52

Tuttle's creations don't just challenge our neat divisions between types of art. Many of them also, magically, take on identities. The 1964–65 floor drawings *Water, Fire, Bridge*, Hill, *Flower*, and *Fountain* have descriptive names but represent color and shape. They hover, though, in Rilke's thoughtscape: "Perhaps we are *here* in order to say: 'house, bridge, fountain, gate, pitcher, fruit-tree, window'" (Ninth Elegy).

Madeleine Grynsztejn sees Tuttle inventing "character" the way a novelist might: "works of uncanny individualism, with eccentric, self-congruent traits, specific features, 'personhoods', even."<sup>53</sup> Some of these characters are zoomorphic and challenge the boundary between the human and the nonhuman. There are the indexical zoomorphisms, such as those signaled in *Portrait of Herbert Vogel* (1974), which refers to bent, blue painted wire, or *Portrait of Marcia Tucker* (1976), which names a small wooden oblong attached to the wall. And there are categorial zoomorphisms, such as the *Monkey's Recovery* series from 1983; *Beethoven Stop on the Way to Egypt* (1986); *There's No Reason a Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1988); the *Lonesome Cowboy Styrofoam* series (1988); *Done by Women Not by Men* (1989). These works explicitly refer to living creatures and challenge the viewer to walk the line—and walk it back and forth repeatedly—between human and nonhuman, living matter and nonliving matter. But then there are the works that look creaturely, even if they are not identified as such by Tuttle, works like the *Title, Titre, Titolo* series that were displayed at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (1979), the *Z Series* collages shown at the Galleria Ugo Ferranti in Rome (1981), and *Mists VII* (1985).

By pushing constantly at the human/nonhuman frontier, Tuttle is also moving us toward the diaphanous, Rilkean membrane between being-here and not-being. As Neal Benezra

wrote in his director's foreword to the catalogue of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art show in 2005, "At times he has traversed the outer limits of impermanence and transience, seeking to create objects that are barely there, yet reshape our perception of reality in fundamental ways."<sup>54</sup> Marcia Tucker, in her 1975 Whitney catalogue, stressed the way all Tuttle's works "integrate with the environment." Tuttle's art makes "constant reference" to what lies "outside itself—to us the viewers, to the space which houses it, to a state of being which it is both part of and reflects."<sup>55</sup>

With this commitment to making objects that force us to think about conventional boundaries that go unexamined, it should come as no surprise that Tuttle has spent a lifetime paying attention to objects made by others in the past. And I am not referring here to artworks—we know that he, like so many other artists, is educated in art's history. No, I am talking about "historical objects"—three-dimensional artifacts that have been made by humans no longer alive to do things both functional and aesthetic. Yet this element of Richard Tuttle's artistic life has been totally ignored to the point where there is no discussion of anything like "Richard Tuttle's collection of historical objects.<sup>56</sup>

What I want to suggest here is that we can take what we know of Richard Tuttle's artmaking challenge to the notion of what an object is and bring it over to historical objects. For him, *there is no difference* between the objects that he makes and those that he collects. Richard Tuttle thinking about objects might, then, be able to help us think about objects, too.

Heidegger's rejection of the Cartesian-Kantian dualist position is crucial. But his shift in the direction of the phenomenological was still conducted under the banner of Edmund Husserl, and thus still in pursuit of a transcendental platform, at least before *Being and Time*. It was not without thought that Heidegger consistently referred to his "phenomenological researches." Through the 1920s, at least, he was seeking some kind of certainty. This might explain his struggle with Rilke's thinking about objects, a thinking he could only bring into his own twenty years later. Tuttle rejects that transcendental position entirely and so, while attentive to the phenomenological move, he cannot be satisfied by it. He starts off where Heidegger struggled to arrive: the Open.

If we think about how Heidegger, but especially Rilke, talked about the Open, we will find striking congruences with Tuttle. We can begin with the human/nonhuman framing device adopted by Rilke in the Eighth Elegy and which, as we have just noted, runs right through Tuttle's art-making career. Getting us to see the object in the human and the human in the material works to erode that boundary. In making us less self-consciously human—we might now accuse Heidegger of harboring metaphysical bias on this point—we are brought closer to the state of being that could live in the Open. And then, think about Rilke's and Heidegger's description of objectification and the way the hard dualisms of modern scientific consciousness block the way to the Open. Now let us pay attention to Tuttle's

war—I don't think it's too much to call it that, though surely it is a guerilla war, waged with line, color, and material—against the subject/object division.

As the beast who came out of the cold, I can sing of the object, but it is the cultural side of material culture that's doing the singing. Who knows if the material side wrote the music? I would like to know....

Let it be said, the object, for me, exists in a kind of free space that allows everything to enter, as one likes. Because poor Romanticism is still so dominant, it blocks the free space and must be destroyed so that later it can be given life, because we are in free space.

In the simple distinction that God is not man and man is not God, man is the total concern to obtain "object-freedom" for me. Of course, one can rhapsodize all one wants. It's more like having man—all that he is—in the object, as I see it.

I like Fichte's development, or discovery, of the operations between the self and non-self. I would say, the two have become one in the passage of time. Perhaps this is what is interesting in having the one-ment of the object in free-space—why it feels so good?

We are surrounded by objects, which we never see, both because of our lack of interest and because they are held in a conceptual construct, which holds them back. To live well, we can surround ourselves with objects that are of the nature that we can see them for what they are.

My current thinking is, this book, the show, the video, are all aimed at establishing the post-conceptual object in a context without strings attaching it to Romanticism. My view is this will give an open-ended all-ness to the object from which we can go back with leisure and comfort to reap the benefits of conceptualism, Romanticism, various historicisms, etc.

The postconceptual object matters to Tuttle because "[i]t opens regions of the self, closed off conceptually.... I suspect we can walk through the world as much better people among other people when we are free of the conceptual bias."<sup>57</sup> "Free" is a recurrent term for Tuttle. It also has the effect of liberating us from the pendulum-swinging debates about the meaning of art that otherwise seem encoded in the word "concept."<sup>58</sup> The Open frees us from this construct.

Light is a key feature of the Open. Recall that Heidegger wrote, "In the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing, a lighting. . . . This open center is therefore not surrounded by what is; rather, the lighting center itself encircles all that is, like the Nothing which we scarcely know."<sup>59</sup> Tuttle writes, "Very often, the dark contrasts with the light. My work began with a huge burst of positive light energy. Light will always win

without my help. We know how the concept is formed. We do not know how light is formed, but we can try to find out. Very much, I am hoping to learn a little bit about how light is formed."<sup>60</sup>

Tuttle adds color to Rilke's light. "If our bodies are made of colors, just as we go toward the light, do not colors, also?"<sup>61</sup> He thinks about it as Rilke does light: "Color is a subject which I feel is by nature open."<sup>62</sup> Part of what this means is escaping from easy-to-navigate dualisms. "What is important is," he writes, "to break away from the inner/outer, where the inner is connected to an Ideal—the Berkeleyan notion of the entire world within. The realist's is opposite, the entire world without. I am not interested in getting caught up in that dilemma."<sup>63</sup> But even more, we might say that for Tuttle color is a direct path to the Open. Color is "outside the parameters of things held by language." And he goes further down our path when he proposes to speak not of color but "colouration": "as such, it is a quality which can be added to something else, and brought into interpersonal communication."<sup>64</sup>

And finally, his work, especially the interleaving of drawing and doing, as in the "floor drawings" and "wire pieces," is a "doing with images," a *Tun mit Bild* that is the thing Rilke (and after him, Heidegger) seeks.

Rilke groups animals, young children, and lovers at their moment of first infatuation as those creatures that live in the Open. Animals because there is not a human consciousness; and we have talked about Richard's pull to the zoomorphic. Children, because they have not yet been "turned around" and away from the Open; and no one can deny the childlike character of Tuttle's sculptures and drawings (this could only sound pejorative to those who have entirely missed Rilke's point). Marcia Tucker not only saw these components in Tuttle's early work; she also perceived the Rilkean connection between them. She writes in the Whitney Museum of American Art's catalogue of 1975 that "for the child, 'material objects, living or not, are regarded as having an animal spirit that makes them behave as they do."<sup>65</sup>

And then there is love. Heidegger's expanded notion of "care" takes us from preservation as care for an object to caring as an interpersonal, ethical obligation. Richard Tuttle goes a step further, to a place of love. "Yes," he argues, "you treat the object. But it's about people. Unless you love humanity, you won't get over the bumps in the road."<sup>66</sup>

And the biggest of our "bumps in the road" is death. Finally, and at the core of Rilke's vision and Tuttle's, stands the human in the presence of mortality. "My ambition," he says, "is someday to be able to stand face to face with life itself and to be completely unafraid. For me that's the only way to live."<sup>67</sup> Rilke counterbalances the terrors of life with the vastness of our interior space. In 1975 Tucker emphasized the way Tuttle's art is an "expression of interior states," or "a translation into objects of interior states."<sup>68</sup> In 2019 Tuttle wrote, closer and closer to Rilke:

What does it mean to see direct ly? It does n't take any time, like an awareness before it is named. or seeing through a heart full of love to the vastness of the unknown, edge to no edge, a com prehensi ble duty to the incom prehensi ble, form with no struc

ture...<sup>69</sup>

Richard Tuttle's description of how he understands his art making and how he understands objects is the same. The Open is the answer to both. This is, I think, a crucial biographical fact. But it is also a crucial answer to questions we might have about objects, an answer we would not have been able to grasp without the help of Richard Tuttle's making of art. For instance, Richard Tuttle makes art objects now. And Richard Tuttle collects historical objects now. We could ask the obvious questions about how his collecting affects his art making or how his art making affects his collecting. But through the window of the Open we have seen that they are the same practice. Tuttle says so, too: "This is why I feel, once the object is in free space, we can use all the ideas and attitudes of the past, in fact better, for they are renewed. What does that, is a new definition of history, too."<sup>70</sup> Hence the significance of the handmade in Tuttle's collection: the absence of industrial production, for him as for Rilke, is part of evading the crushing subject-object separatism of modern facture.

And this brings us back, in the end, to Hölderlin. For all that Heidegger lectured on Hölderlin's hymns "Germania" and "Rhine" (1934–35), "Remembrance" (1941–42), and "The Ister" (1942) and then pulled the phrase "destitute" (or "lean" or "paltry") time from "Bread and Wine" to launch "What Are Poets For?" Heidegger never acknowledged that it is Hölderlin who first used the term "the Open" and does not try to explain what that use would have meant. Nor does Giorgio Agamben, who devotes a small book to exploring the much broader meaning of Heidegger's thinking around the Open for the purpose of understanding the place of humans in the biological plenum, mention anything about Hölderlin's treatment of the Open.<sup>71</sup>

Without trying to explain the nonengagement by Heidegger and Agamben, let me instead suggest what we get from including Hölderlin in our discussion of the Open. "Come, into the Open, friend!" is how he begins "A Walk in the Country."<sup>72</sup> The weather is glowering and the sky is close, but Hölderlin hopes that he and his friend, Christian Landauer, will be able to smile when they set out for their walk. That "the flower of heaven will bloom and the wide-open / view will open to him who shines down" (Mit der unsern zugleich ders Himmels Blüthe beginnen, / Und dem offenen Blik offen der Leuchtende seyn). What we want, the speaker notes, is not "beyond us" or "too mighty" for us (Denn nicht Mächtiges ists) but rather "belongs to life" (zum Leben aber gehört es). "Open, as the heart desires"—having reached this moment Hölderlin can declare, "That's why we're climbing the hill so full of desire today" (Daß, we dies Herz es wünchst, offen. . . . Deßhalb wollen wir heut wünschend den Hügel hinauf).

The "Open" as deployed here by Hölderlin seems like a state of mind, though closely tied to place—sun, sky, flower, view, hill. In another poem written around the same time, "Bread and Wine," the trail to the Open takes us through time. It is signaled with the same gesture of direct address: "So come! Come behold the Open" (So komm! daß wir das Offene schauen). But immediately we are taken elsewhere: "search for what's ours, however distant it may be." This thing we are searching for, whether at night or noon, eventually takes us away—far away, as it turns out—to the Isthmus of Corinth where the "open Sea" rages—and that is the place of the god Dionysus. This leads in the next strophe to an extended lament for "blessed Greece" that is gone. "Where," Hölderlin repeatedly asks, are the thrones, the temples with their vessels, the song, the oracles, the destiny—all is passed away. "Thebes has faded and Athens; the weapons no longer clash / In Olympia, ... / And will the ships of Corinth be wreathed never more? / And the theaters, ancient and holy, why are they silent?" The "Open" now seems impossibly far away. "But friend," Hölderlin begins the next strophe, "we come too late. It's true the gods live / But they live above us in another world" (Aber Freund! Wir kommen zu spät. Zwar leben di Götter / Aber über dem Haupt droben in anderer Welt). The concluding direct address to a friend takes us back to the opening line of "A Walk in the Country."

Agamben wants us to think that Heidegger presented his Open as historical because it is human in a way that Rilke's nonhuman Open is not.<sup>73</sup> Adrian del Caro focuses instead on

how the Open is about the self-definition of the poet's mission. "This travel backwards through time," he writes, "as an event of recollection or remembrance, has the effect of placing the poet directly in the company of the gods." By so doing, the poet can mediate between past and present, establishing a connection. "Then a historical Open exists and humanity is not banished to exist only in the present."<sup>74</sup>

Turning back to Tuttle, we might ask whether the painter, like the poet, can help us establish a connection between past and present. What *are* painters for? Recall what Heidegger says in his discussion of Sophocles: "The Open is the light of the self-luminous. We name it 'the free' and its essence 'freedom.'"<sup>75</sup> If we were puzzled by the question, "How does Richard Tuttle the collector of historical objects help us understand the art that Richard Tuttle makes?" then this detour into the Open offers us an answer. The historical offers a way out of the fixity of the present. For some, it is just a turn into another set of *x-y* coordinates. But for Tuttle, as for Hölderlin, the historical offers a path to the "indescribably open freedom" of Rilke, where new identities, new understanding, and new relationships become possible.

Richard Tuttle's second exhibition at the Betty Parsons Gallery in 1967 coincided with publication of Sol LeWitt's "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art." This manifesto of the Idea over the visual and material form ("Ideas alone can be works of art. . . . All ideas need not be made physical") laid down a marker that Tuttle has been pushing against ever since.<sup>76</sup> What *Is the Object?* can be seen as a reply to LeWitt from the other end of Tuttle's career, an insistence on the object and its character. It's an answer to the implied question about why art matters, too. Rilke teaches us that "Willing" or "Self-assertive" man as the "functionary of technology" "opposes himself to the Open." If we can follow Tuttle and learn not to objectify objects, but to see them in their free liquidity, can we also learn to live in the Open?

#### Notes

I am grateful to David Kishik and Roy Ben-Shai for taking the time to read and comment carefully on a draft of this essay.

1. This and all subsequent block quotations in this essay are drawn from emails written by Richard Tuttle to the author between summer 2018 and April 2021.

- 2. Harman, *Tool-Being*; Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology*.
- 3. Boetzkes and Vinegar, Heidegger and the Work of Art History.
- 4. Heidegger, Towards the Definition of Philosophy, § 14, 57.
- 5. Ibid., 58–60.
- 6. Ibid., 60.
- 7. Ibid., 61–62.
- 8. Ibid., 63.
- 9. Ibid., 68.
- 10. Ibid., 70.
- 11. Heidegger, History of the Concept of Time, 37–39.
- 12. Ibid., 192, 239, 260-61.

13. "The entire sequence of the phases of knowing, from the primary directing-itself-toward to the retaining, simply exhibits the cultivation of a new stance of the being of Dasein toward that which is known. It exhibits a possibility of being which was already also announced as science and research." Ibid., 78. 14. Ibid., 164.

15. I am intentionally skirting Heidegger's discussion of objects in *Being and Time*, first division, chapter 3, § 15, both because it is much better known, being the core of Harman's *Tool-Being*, and because it builds on the earlier thinking just surveyed.

16. Heidegger, "Origin of the Work of Art," 43.

17. Ibid., 45.

18. Ibid., 47. This sentence finishes with the words "in the destiny of an historical people." Words like these, thoughts like this, written in 1935, have an unmistakable referent in National Socialism. We cannot pretend that Heidegger's thought in the 1930s was insulated from the events of the day; on the contrary, it is clear that to some extent he viewed the political revolution in Germany as a heightening of the opportunity for his philosophy to clarify and speak to the moment. His disappointment at not being recognized as the philosopher of the movement and his gradual distancing from the political establishment does not mean that he did not see himself as working with the Zeitgeist. In the same way, of course, we cannot read his philosophical work of the 1920s as a precursor or foretaste of a National Socialism that did not yet exist. 19. Ibid., 51.

20. For the translations, see Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?," 89. The Hölderlin editions are *Poems & Fragments* and *Odes and Elegies*. See also Mattéi, "L'Ouvert chez Rilke et Heidegger." I am grateful to Servanne Jollivet for sending this reference to me. More broadly, see Grossmann, "Myth of Poetry," 29–38. 21. Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 91n2. Here and in subsequent quoted translations, I have reverted to Heidegger's practice of capitalizing the noun "Open."

22. Heidegger, *Parmenides*, § 8–9, 140–62.

23. Ibid., 142.

24. Ibid., 144.

25. Ibid., 148.

26. Ibid., 152.

27. Ibid., 158.

28. Ibid., 160.

29. Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?," 96–97. In what follows I will focus my reading on the Open as it relates to objects, sidestepping the debate about the adequacy of Heidegger's reading of Rilke, which is less germane to our purpose.

30. Ibid., 104. In Being and Time, Heidegger introduces "Alltäglichkeit," at § 11.

31. Ibid., 105.

32. Ibid., 109.

33. Ibid., 111.

- 34. Ibid., 112, 113, 114.
- 35. Ibid., 126–27.

36. Ibid., 127–28.

37. Ibid., 134–35.

38. Rilke, "Seventh Elegy," in *Ahead of All Parting*, 373. Stephen Mitchell, in his translation, here uses "Cerebral structure" and "realm of Concepts," both of which seem to me overly determinate since "Bild" and "Begriff" had very clear meanings at the time and to use one and not the other seems arbitrary, philosophically speaking.

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39. Ibid.

40. Rilke, "Eighth Elegy," in Ahead of All Parting, 376–77.

41. See the note in Rilke, Ahead of All Parting, 567.

42. Rilke, "Eighth Elegy," 379.

43. Ibid., 381

44. Ibid., 381, 377.

45. Heidegger, "Origin of the Work of Art," 45.

46. Rilke, "Ninth Elegy," in Ahead of All Parting, 383.

- 47. Rilke, "Eighth Elegy," 380.
- 48. Rilke, "Ninth Elegy," 385.
- 49. Ibid., 387.
- 50. The quotations are from the first paragraph of Grynsztejn, "Universe of Small Truths," 18.
- 51. Harris, "Twenty Floor Drawings," 51.
- 52. Ibid., 59.
- 53. Grynsztejn, "Universe of Small Truths," 18–19.
- 54. Benezra, director's foreword, 7.
- 55. Tucker, Richard Tuttle, 8.

56. There have been some exceptions, but they mobilize specific types of objects in the context of contemporary art making, not as part of a retrospective view, nor as a point of entry into his collecting practice.

- 57. Tuttle and Miller, "What Are These Stories For?," nos. 49–50, in this volume.
- 58. See, for example, Costello and Iverson, *Photography after Conceptual Art*.
- 59. Heidegger, "Origin of the Work of Art," 51.
- 60. Tuttle and Miller, "What Are These Stories For?," no. 47, in this volume.
- 61. Tuttle, "Light and Color (Color and Light)," 313.
- 62. Tuttle, "Mystic Commitment."
- 63. Tuttle, Role of the Storyteller, 41.
- 64. Ibid., 44.
- 65. Tucker, *Richard Tuttle*, 17, quoting from Stone and Church, *Childhood and Adolescence*, 185.
- 66. Conversation with Richard Tuttle, July 30, 2020.
- 67. Richard Tuttle speaking in Glaesmer, "A Talk with Richard Tuttle," 33.
- 68. Tucker, Richard Tuttle, 10–11.
- 69. Sent by Richard Tuttle to Peter N. Miller, May 12, 2020.
- 70. Tuttle and Miller, "What Are These Stories For?," no. 50, in this volume.
- 71. Agamben, *The Open*.

72. I have followed the translations of Nick Hoff in Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, "Der Gang auf Land" / "The Walk in the Country," 128–31; "Brod und Wein" / "Bread and Wine," 132–43.

73. Agamben, The Open, § 13, 59.

- 74. Caro, "Hölderlin's Ontology of the Open," 384.
- 75. Heidegger, Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister," 148.

76. LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," 79–83. This sentence is found in "Sentences on Conceptual Art," first published in 0–9, no. 5 (January, 1969): 4. It is sentence no. 10.

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