

6-26-2015

Politics of Poiesis: Postmodern Polysemy as World

Sarah Fayad

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/phil_etds

Recommended Citation

Fayad, Sarah. "Politics of Poiesis: Postmodern Polysemy as World." (2015). https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/phil_etds/16

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Philosophy ETDs by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact disc@unm.edu.

Sarah Fayad

Candidate

Philosophy

Department

This thesis is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

Approved by the Thesis Committee:

Iain Thomson

, Chairperson

Ann Murphy

Adrian Johnston

POLITICS OF *POIESIS*: POSTMODERN POLYSEMY AS WORLD

by

Sarah Fayad

PREVIOUS DEGREES

Bachelors of Arts, Philosophy

Bachelors of Arts, English: Creative Writing

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

PHILOSOPHY

The University of New Mexico

Albuquerque, New Mexico

May, 2015

POLITICS OF *POIESIS*: POSTMODERN POLYSEMY AS WORLD

by

Sarah Fayad

B.A. Philosophy, University of New Mexico, 2011

B.A. English: Creative Writing, University of New Mexico, 2011

M.A. Philosophy, University of New Mexico, 2015

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses several, extant, discourses of breakdown in order to ascertain what class and quality of these phenomena might be sufficient for the attainment of greater social-political change: which phenomena might meaningfully challenge contemporary nihilism. To this end, this thesis considers works by Heidegger, Lacan, Kuhn, Dreyfus and Kelly, and Ratcliffe, among others. While the paper attests to the structural similarity of these discourses of breakdown—the rupture of some all-encompassing, totalizing, structure of intelligibility by the ontological excess of possibilities—it also finds some meaningful distinctions between them. In proposing a theory of “multiple infinities,” or “plural nothings,” and thus proliferating cites of ontological excess, this paper discovers that some events of rupture, though related to *a* nothing, may be limited in their scope and reach, and might therefore fail to challenge a shared world—or to undermine nihilism. The paper ends with a speculative phenomenology of the postmodern/post-nihilistic in order to better understand what is intended by the ameliorative accounts considered.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Part I: Nothing, Excess, and World-Transition	5
I. Nothings: <i>Poiesis</i> , Different Sizes of Infinity and Proliferating Inexhaustibles of the Postmodern	5
I. a) Our Nothing, the Nothing of Death.....	9
I. b) Earth or the Nothing of World	8
I. c) The Nothing of Entities: The Nothing or Truth of Painting.....	14
I. d) Plural Nothings.....	17
II) Breakdown: Epochs as Arising from Crisis Moments.....	18
III) Enframing and Nihilism: Why We Would Want a Crisis Moment Now.....	27
Part II: Postmodernity, Polysemy, Proliferation	38
I) The Postmodern is not an Epoch: Abjection as the Reason for the Finitude of “Worldviews”	39
II) Truth-as-Aletheia	42
Part III: Types of World-Transition—History, The Ego, Psychosis, Art, and Death ...	46
I) “Whooshing-up” and Ancient Greece: Postmodern Events and Polysemic Worlds	47
II) Heidegger and Mood, Ratcliffe and Existential Feeling.....	58
III) Mirror-Stage Misrecognition of The “Human” in Art: The Triumph of Religion and God as Ego	74
IV) The Hunger Artist: Boredom, The Real, and Truth	79
VI) Non-Epochal Postmodern: The Postmodern that Has Happened	

Too Little Promise for the Danger?83

Part III: Conclusions88

Conclusion I) Breakdown and Polysemy: The Visionary vs. The Shaman88

Conclusion II) Attunement, Fugues, Paranoia, and Derridian Polyphony91

Conclusion III) Phenomenologies of Nothingness or Does the Postmodern Require
Dasein to Evolve?96

Introduction

This paper will begin by illustrating a close kinship between existential death in *Being and Time* (and related discourses on breakdown) and the poietic (world-founding) activity from Heidegger's "Origin of the Work of Art." Each of the phenomena I discuss, here, involve the breakdown of a world. In the case of *Being and Time*'s existential death, and pathologies like schizophrenia, we may think this is the collapse of a rather small world, while the world collapse which alters necessitates a new, shared, intelligibility might seem a larger-scale phenomenon. But, I will motivate an account that finds a deep kinship between even the rarest pathologies and the seemingly cyclic, routine, historical transitions between truths. Namely, breakdowns in individual existential orientations like death or the onset of delusional states of mind involve the disappearance of the taken-for-granted, shared, intelligibility which constitutes an individual subject's world. This world-collapse is explicable—even in the most pathological cases—in terms of *possibilities* offered up by the world itself: possibilities abjected in order to maintain an intelligibility as an explanatory schema for all the phenomena the subject encounters. And that the eruption of these anomalous possibilities—which so fundamentally challenge the subject's world—demand the production of an intelligibility capable of including them. I will demonstrate that this basic structure holds in the emergence and decay of more global intelligibilities: in the shared taken-for-granted, and the history of paradigmatic science.

From the ruins of the Greek temple, and the absence of a wearer for Van Gogh's shoes, we can see that certain worlds have irrevocably decayed; for the concepts, the logic, the values, gods, and significances that supported them grew brittle, fell away,

leaving only traces for us to follow.¹ This breakdown is the necessary consequence, however, of the kind of world-founding poetry Heidegger says is the heart of all great art—perhaps all *poiesis* is radically political.² The artist is always a subversive, because world founding requires the collapse of a previous world.

Iain Thomson indicates that a *lasting* world will have to be one which is not fundamentally grounded in making impossible, abject, certain possibilities. The postmodern he describes, here, is not vulnerable to—not made frail or untenable by—the possibilities that it has not accounted for *in advance* by its explanatory powers. Rather, it is inherently permeable to these possibilities and capable of including them within its explanatory powers, *because* it understands everything in terms of possibility. The postmodern is not a monosemic intelligibility, which necessarily conforms its experience of phenomena to its ready-made meanings. Rather, it is an intelligibility of polysemy, which understands any *one* understanding as ultimately inadequate to the phenomena. Contingencies emerging from our experience cannot challenge the postmodern in the way they have challenged previous intelligibilities. Thomson, Dreyfus, and Kelly all give some contemporary examples of the way postmodern events might challenge our individual mirroring in monosemic world-views, perhaps making individual *Dasein* permeable to the possibilities at the heart of such an intelligibility, but I will attempt to furnish a further account of the postmodern *as a shared world*.

I argue that we have to wonder what it might be like to live at the precipice between intelligibilities. The artist, in responding to an emerging world, and affirming it

¹ That we're forced to follow them with the concepts and values of our own world, such that the investigation is always abstracted, surreal, and inadequate to the task.

² Though, I think that we can detach it easily from the idea that any one particular "political ideology"—itself merely a concept and framing mechanism—is the "right one."

by bringing it forth seems faced with the kind of personal world-collapse Heidegger discusses in *Being and Time* and we may think that the citizens of this nascent intelligibility—with their faculty of memory nonetheless intact—may experience that same angst, as the foundations of their very *sense* come to be supplanted by new ontological and theological structures.³ What is it *like* to see another world emerging, one with the power to radically change the every day and the take-for-granted, which serves as the general condition of possibility for all of our experiences? These questions will lead to a characterization of world-transition—in all its registers: death-bound, pathological and social-political—as *bivalent* revelations of possibility. *Dasein* is revealed in its richness of possibility as much as phenomena and world when a culture affirms a novel sense of “what is and what matters.”⁴ Possibilities of phenomena, culture, and world itself emerge when we die.⁵ And I attempt to give some possibilities for what it

³ Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* demonstrates that this phenomenon *has* occurred historically at the precipice of all scientific revolutions. While the older scientists working within a paradigm are well aware that they must ignore certain sets of anomalous data in order to continue using its explanatory mechanisms, they are resistant to the emergence of new explanatory paradigms which do not have to ignore this data. They are resistant to the supplanting of their operant intelligibility.

⁴ Thomson Iain, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p. 43.

Throughout this paper, when I use the phrase ‘what is and what matters’ it will be a reference to what I think is Thomson’s most illuminating and concise shorthand for the historically contingent and plural worlds that result from great works of art. I like this shorthand in particular because it encapsulates the “ontotheological” nature of historical worlds. What *is* fulfills the ontotheological component of a world—inaugurating some beings, welcoming them, and abjecting others. What *matters* fulfills the theological component—granting both meaning in the usual theological sense, and cohesion in the scientific theorizing sense. What we will see, throughout this paper, is that these conceptions, taken together, constitute historical intelligibilities. This kind of world—totalizing intelligibilities that attempt to explain phenomena at both their ultimately basic and ultimately cosmic level—will be brought into the crosshairs of postmodernity, as I understand it. Postmodern proliferation and polysemy are seen, throughout this paper, to radically undermine such all-powerful explanatory structures.

⁵ This might seem to diverge from Heidegger’s *Being and Time* account, to some degree, because death serves in this account to reveal the possibilities of an individual *Dasein*’s life, in a kind of isolation from the *demands* of the world. But, even in this discussion of authenticity, Heidegger

might be like to inhabit a truly postmodern age. In order to do this, I engage with Lacan, Ratcliffe, Pynchon and Kafka, all of whom seem to have considered various breakdowns of the everyday, the emergence of replacement intelligibilities, and even the value of certain pathologies for polysemic worldviews.

denies the possibility that any *Dasein* is ever actually isolated from the world. Such a thing is inconceivable because *Dasein* is, by definition, a being-toward the world. The possibilities that death allows *Dasein* to confront are, in themselves, world-bound. The bivalence I argue for in this paper exists even in the *Being and Time* account.

Part I: Nothing, Excess, and World-Transition

While most discussions of the inexhaustible, fundamental, strata of possibilities in Heidegger's work tend to focus either on his discussion of death or on his discussions of being-as-such, this section will read this earlier concept back into his later concept in order to produce a kind of synthesis of the two. What I attempt to demonstrate, here, is that—if *entities* like *Dasein* and paintings *are* on the basis of innumerable, prolific, possibilities—then the other entities we encounter *are* on the basis of likely innumerable possibilities, as well.⁶ An analysis of this kind is the first step toward the speculative phenomenology of the postmodern I will attempt at the end of this paper, and I think it is an invaluable step in trying to understand the absolute proliferation of meanings—and of intentionalities—inherent to postmodernity.

I. Nothings: *Poiesis*, Different Sizes of Infinity and Proliferating Inexhaustibles of the Postmodern

Nothing is never nothing, and neither is it something in the sense of an object; it is being itself.⁷

In order to begin a discussion of the Heideggerian postmodern, we must attenuate a multitude of nothings: nothings that are not merely a kind of absence of content or characterized by a lack, but rich nothings—nothings because they are teeming fields of *possibility*, not-yets, not yet actualized into *things*, and, therefore rich fields of that which

⁶ Thomson's description of the postmodern, which I will be engaging throughout this paper, supports this view.

⁷ Heidegger, Martin, "Age of the World Picture," *Off the Beaten Track* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 85.

evades the conceptualization that differentiates *things*. Nothings that span the from the truth of the individual human being, the underlying reality of her subjectivity, to the nothing in the background of Van Gogh's pair of shoes: "...that which both elicits and eludes complete conceptualization."⁸

I. a) Our Nothing, the Nothing of Death

Heidegger's *Being and Time* analysis of *angst* demonstrates how a particular mood might reveal precisely this kind of nothing. *Angst* is *Dasein*'s response to the sudden flashes of its own contingency which lead to its awareness of its own death. Here, death is the possibility of our inexistence, and our existence is conceived as being the concatenation of all of our life-defining projects. This means that, *angst*—no matter its source—is the dread we feel not at the annihilation of our subjectivity—the cessation of our ego—but rather, the dread of our never-more, our never again, the possible impossibility of our *projects*. In fact, Heidegger thinks that, when we die, we are selves- alone—rather than selfless, rather than annihilated. It is, instead, our projects which cease to be and cease to matter in death. "Death... gives *Dasein* nothing... which [it], as actual, could itself *be*."⁹ *Dasein* remains *actual*, but death renders it *incapable* of anything at all. Capacity and projects are, for Heidegger, integral to *Dasein*'s being. *Dasein* can be nothing at all in the state of death *because* it is actual, because all that death presents it with are possibilities, adjacent to actuality, to be sure—even the basis of all actuality, as we shall see—but impossible for *Dasein* in the state of existential death. We can see, here, we do not share the nothing of our death. The possibilities for each individual life might be inexhaustible

⁸ Thomson, Iain, *Heidegger Art and Postmodernity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 85.

⁹ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.307.

but this does not mean that every life is *infinitely* possible—that every *Dasein* has every possibility, such that all *Dasein* face *the same* nothing. The nothing of any particular *Dasein* might be constrained by things as banal as its embodiment—the writer of this paper has little chance of winning a strong-man competition—or as mysterious as its psychology (an aspect of *Dasein*'s possibilities that will figure heavily in later sections of this paper). These constraints, however, seem to be what individuates *Dasein*. If everyone *is* on the basis of their possibilities for Heidegger, then we *are* different people by virtue of our having *different possibilities*.

Death shows us that all of the decisions throughout our lives might have been different, and that we might have lived differently, that our very being is contingent, and possibly impossible. But not that our lives could have been *infinitely many* different lives. Rather the possibilities that existential death presents us matter for us precisely because they are our own. If one *Dasein* had a kind of unbounded nothing of possibility, once isolated from the individuating details of their daily life, then individuation would be a phenomenon that occurs only in the shared world—a kind of social utility, perhaps, which makes interactions more convenient. We could expect that *all Dasein* faces this kind of unbounded, infinity, of possibilities when removed from the shared world that individuates it. This nothing would not be *ours* in any kind of robust sense, and would thus not seem to attach to authenticity as Heidegger has it. There are simply differences between all people that preclude certain possibilities from ever having woven themselves into the particularized nothing of death. Constellations of interests, opportunities, exposures, acquired tastes and aversions, etc. later build upon this particularization of our nothing and individuate us further.

Perhaps this teeming nothingness—this nothingness of those things, events, capacities, and actions, which failed to become actual for us in life, the no-things—are the source of deathbed regret. Lamentable because they are close to actuality. In being *possible*, the nothing is the ground of all *actuality* on Heidegger’s account. But, each of these not-things, swirling within the nothing, is structured by a specific life: the nothing is itself particular. While we might all share the phenomenon of end-of life regret, we do not necessarily share every specific—and authentic—lamentation.¹⁰

As we grow, many meaningful possibilities become foreclosed to us. We begin life as pure potential merely because we *are* not yet much of anything at all. The later development of distinct characteristics—of personality traits, aversions and pleasures, talents, values, etc.—makes us distinct people, but also dictates a far narrower field of possibilities. We might, for instance, grow to dislike loud noises to such a degree that it precludes our being a musician or a contractor while nothing precluded these pursuits in our infancies. Does the loss of these two possibilities—possibilities that if we projected into them might even provide a meaningful self-identification, and even way of life—constitute a death? Is all specialization and personal development something like this: a shedding of possibility that mimics death? Am I putting forth a decadent philosophy, whereby all of human existence, all apparent growth and maturation, is merely the covert and violent encroachment of death, a philosophy

¹⁰ Of course many people share deathbed regrets of the kind “I wish I were a better father,” or “I should have done more for my community.” But these kinds of regrets, it seems, are rather vague for the ultimately particularizing and authentic phenomenon of death. We do not share regrets like “I wish I would have been a better father to X, my son” with others, however. Perhaps, the particularities of a life structure the meaningfully and authentically regrettable in this way.

Heidegger thinks that the fact that we must always *decide* upon something to be—and thus that we are responsible for ruling-out our other authentic possibilities—is the source of an irrevocable *guilt*, inherent to *Dasein*. As we shall see, the founding of worlds, as inhabitable structures of intelligibility which might be otherwise—and which have the capacity to be otherwise due to the inexhaustibility of their source, just as *Dasein* does—has necessitated the bracketing of innumerable possibilities, and thus shares in this guilt.

that takes life to be putrefaction? I think not. Rather, it is this narrowing of the field of our possibilities that makes death our *own*: our “own most possibility.”¹¹ Arguably, if death leaves the self-alone, on Heidegger’s account, then there must be some sort of distinct self to experience it. The infant cannot die, because her nothing is too vague, too chaotic—it does not belong to her, therefore *she* cannot lose it.

I. b) Earth or the Nothing of World

Heidegger later equates ‘Nothing,’ ‘earth,’ and ‘being-as-such,’ recognizing the existence of the inexhaustibles outside of *Dasein*, and even without projects. Each of these signifies the inexhaustibly rich polysemy of non-contingent being, which, by its very nature, makes possible any understanding of being—any metaphysics, theology, ontology, or even science—by “unfold[ing] itself in an inexhaustible variety of simple modes and shapes.”¹² This unfolding, however, is a self-secluding. In its showing-up, the earth also hides, such that any one particular “historical people” has been permitted only to see one facet of it. The earth’s inexhaustibility is due partially to the inadequacy of our concepts, and partially to its own *evasiveness*—an attribute which seems, at times, to be almost intentional, or chosen by being-as-such, in Heidegger’s writings. This language of personification should not be allowed to

¹¹ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 294.

Here, Heidegger says that what is at issue in death is nothing other than our being-in-the-world. Because the possibility of death is nothing other than our possible absence from the world—the possible impossibility of all the relations and projects that define us for ourselves and give us any world at all—death lays all of these significations of life bare, as they are: as *possibilities*. Realizing that we *are* on the basis of possibilities—that we are only in terms of that which could always be otherwise—allows us also to see the contingency of our world. This slippage between the contingency of our self-significations, our relations to others, and the world in which we find ourselves will be important to bear in mind in later sections, where I’ll be discussing what I think is a deep affinity between delusional states, artistic creation, and socio-political/historico-scientific world transition.

¹² Heidegger, Martin, “Origin of the Work of Art”, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper Collins, 1971), p.45.

confuse us. We can call the elusiveness of the earth a ‘self-secluding’ insofar as this elusiveness is *inherent* to inexhaustibility. If the earth is taken to be truly inexhaustible, then it is not clear how any *one* conceptualization—or even how any combination of individual conceptualizations—might render it intelligible in its entirety.¹³ It seems hard to accept that our concepts about being—from the sciences to our morality—are inadequate to address “reality.” We do, after all, heal with the right medicine, and thus must be to some degree correct in asserting the existence of certain malevolent microorganisms, or our own cellular structures. Something as basic as this seems even to survive the ontological doubt cast over Kuhnian scientific “paradigms.”¹⁴

In order to deal with this line of criticism, we need to turn to two different components of Heidegger’s thought. I will deal with his theory of truth as *aletheia* at length, later in this paper. For now, we should unpack the distinction he draws between the ontic and the ontological. The success of medicine, the functioning of machines, and various other forms of evidence that we have in our everyday lives for the connection between our thinking about entities and their *actually* existing is all *ontic* phenomena. We are, in fact, correct about these kinds of phenomena, but might miss their *ontological* underpinnings in embracing the kinds of conceptual frameworks we have historically. In other words, we do not need to believe we’ve made some mistake in identifying certain *entities* in the world, or certain *relations* between them, in order to acknowledge that we have perhaps been in error regarding *how* they are, at their most fundamental levels. For Heidegger only an ontology of possibility and contingency would avoid these kinds of error.

¹³ Given the somewhat flat, monosemic, and homogenizing character of historical conceptions of being Heidegger elucidates, this self-concealing also has some help. The self-secluding of the earth is joined by a secluding that *Dasein* commits in order to support its historical, ontotheological, intelligibility.

¹⁴ We will return later to the paradigmatic account of the history of science in relation to our inability to finally and totally conceptualize Being.

Furthermore while our concepts are inadequate to exhaust the earth, this does not mean that they are at all *false*. For Heidegger, the inexhaustibility of earth is evinced *by* the way that our conception of being changes over time, rather than asserting what is perhaps a more commonsense conclusion: that our concepts are bereft of any link to “reality.” The failure of these concepts to fully encapsulate, and thus finally express reality in its totality indicates that many things are *true* of being. Rather than being committed to skepticism regarding our knowledge, the Heideggerian point is that “it is impossible for everything to take place in intelligibility all at once.”¹⁵ The truths of every epoch track at least some part of reality successfully. The inexhaustibility of the earth is most obvious in Heidegger’s discussion of the work of art, wherein the ‘world’—the conceptualized, intelligible, historical age we inhabit—struggles against this polysemy of being, in an always-failing effort to bring it fully into intelligibility.¹⁶

This fundamental tension at the heart of the work of art is the *essence of art* for Heidegger. The world, as an obstinate force for the creation of totalizing understandings, which cannot stand anything closed is in conflict with the earth.¹⁷ The earth, however, is not as obstinately involved with its closure. It is not coy, shy, or even completely self-obfuscating. This is likely because world, like the chains of *Being and Time*, provides our

¹⁵ See Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, p. 94.

A question we will have to address at this paper’s end is whether the postmodern is an intelligibility at all. If not, what might it be like to live in the world it characterizes? I am, after all, advocating for the transformation of our contemporary world into a postmodern one, but what does this mean if the postmodern is inherently *unintelligible*—or, if it is at the very least not an intelligibility?

¹⁶ See Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art”, *Off the Beaten Track*, J. Young and K. Haynes, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p. 37.

¹⁷ See Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art”, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 45.

everyday understanding of being. In *Being and Time*, this is the taken-for-granted understanding of *ourselves*, which makes possible our navigating our world. In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger identifies something perhaps prior to our even forming these chains of significance, a background intelligibility that is our “timeworn conceptuality...[which] provides the fore-conception for [our historical] interpretation” of being. It is the environing understanding, which structures those entities whose very nature it is to be concerned with being. The earth, on the other hand, is not contingent on *Dasein*. The way that world discloses is through the *Daseins* that dwell within and enact it: through the abilities to be that it has given them. Their intellectual pursuits, from poetry to physics, are the way the world’s dominant interpretation is carried forth to a greater and greater number of entities. They are also the very things that carry it to a failure of its concepts: to contradictions, scientific outliers, and seemingly impossible states of affairs, antinomies and contradictions. These limits of understanding are what prove the inadequacy of our concepts. These limits, much like the understandings to which they pertain, emerge from the earth. But they are not given by earth as a kind of *coup-de-grace*, letting a world die. Rather, they inhere in the very polysemy and indefiniteness of the earth itself. In its very nature—its freedom from definition and its inconceivable richness—the earth *necessarily* resists the totalizing urges of the world and its ontological explorers.

If we try to grasp the stone’s heaviness in another way, by placing it on a pair of scales, then we bring its heaviness into the calculable form of weight. This perhaps very precise determination of the stone is a number, but the heaviness of the weight has escaped us. Color shines and wants only to shine. If we try to make it

comprehensible by analyzing it into numbers and oscillations it is gone. It shows itself only when it remains...unexplained.¹⁸

The work of art first finds a world through the act of *poiesis* wherein the hints that comprise the opaque and inconceivable earth; both “unfold” of their own accord, and are responded to, brought forward, “worlded” by the artist. *Poiesis* is the activity of the great artist, and it means: responding to the earth, in its unfolding; “the poeticizing projection comes out of nothing in the sense that it never derives from what is familiar and already there” in the world.¹⁹ Heidegger cites the Greek temple as a work that once structured a world, by bringing forth the earth’s hidden “modes and shapes.”²⁰ We will go into the death of worlds at length in a later section of this paper, but for now it is only important to note that the possibilities which provided for Thales’ aquatic ontology are remote enough to us to seem like mere absurdities and falsities. On Heidegger’s account they are neither. They are part of the “incalculable,” which “escapes representation yet is manifest in beings and points to the hidden being.”²¹ Even the most remote of dead worlds arises from a hidden source, shared with our world on Heidegger’s account. This collapse of previous worlds should indicate not their absurdity, but the frailty of our own.

¹⁸ Heidegger, Martin, “The Origin of the Work of Art”, *Off the Beaten Track*, J. Young and K. Haynes (trans.), (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 25.

¹⁹ See Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Off the Beaten Track*, p.48.

²⁰ See Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 25.

²¹ Heidegger, Martin, “Age of the World Picture”, *Off the Beaten Track*, J. Young and K. Haynes (trans.), (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 85.

I. c) The Nothing of Entities: The Nothing or Truth of Painting

Thomson draws a parallel between the “nothing more” in Van Gogh’s painting and Heidegger’s earth in *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*. Heidegger says that the painting is of a pair of shoes and “nothing more” further, he calls this ‘nothing’ “merely an “undefined space.”²² Like the nothing that *Dasein* faces in anxiety, the nothing in this painting is that which escapes definition, the boundaries of which have not been drawn in the form of sharply and intentionally codified figures, or in the sense of concepts that master it, that dictate their meaning or even their content. Thomson points out that, while he and Heidegger might well be able to see a farming woman emerging from the painting, not everyone can. The inconsistency with which this particular form appears seems to indicate something deep: that Van Gogh’s painting paints *painting as such*: as *poiesis*. The earthly element of this piece is so prevalent, so powerfully present, that its interpretation resists even the power of suggestion: the, perhaps inauthentic, social pressure implicit in telling the student that *they* (Heidegger and Thomson) can see her, makes the student think she *should* also be able. The forms it can offer up instead seem, also, to be innumerable.²³ That this nothing is earth in the Heideggerian sense can be seen in the fact that the potato farmer withdraws from me, but I can see that the boots’ laces

²² See Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 14

²³ In fact, some of these forms may even allow the painting to escape the shoe as its subject matter, such that the painting itself offers up meanings completely independent of the dominant, lighted, comprehensible, locus of interpretation it presents. This is why Thomson and Derrida are right to question the relevance of Schapiro’s criticisms of the “Origin of the Work of Art.” An interpretation of this painting which is faithfully immanent to it seems not to have so much to do with shoes.

trace the figure of a scythe, dropped. This very indefiniteness is what has, above, been the definition of anxious-nothingness.

As we can see, by the time he writes the “Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger’s account of the nothing and the way it becomes actual changes significantly. The locus of possibilities, and their realization is no longer bound to *Dasein*, but rather worlding phenomena might occur in even seemingly inert *material*. The stone itself harbors the potential to be any number of equally true and beautiful sculptures. True, because they are revealed from being itself, suggested by the nothing—the not yet things—upon which all intelligibility is built.²⁴ It is not that the stone *dies*, or that it has any structure of for-the-sakes-of-which, that ultimately make it intelligible as a stone at all, that collapse for it in any way. Rather, this nothing *belongs* to the stone, can be revealed only when the artist responds to it, but constitutes its inherent *meaning*. This account is more gentle than the *Being and Time* account, because it does not require us to *die* in order to discover new meanings within our lives, rather “by struggling with the mysteries of a work like Van Gogh’s *A Pair of Shoes*, we can gain insight into art’s most “primordial”... level of truth—the very level from which... widespread insights initially emerged.”²⁵ The insights we get, on this account, are glimpses into being itself rather than glimpses into our own limited nothing, and we are capable of these insights without the phenomena of dread and world-collapse necessitated by the *Being and Time* account.²⁶

²⁴ See Heidegger, “Age of the World Picture,” *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 85.

²⁵ See Thomson, *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*, p. 81.

²⁶ As we shall see, this is the very kind of opportunity for meaning upon which Dreyfus and Kelly dwell in *All Things Shining*, while the more radical one I discuss here might be seen to be more relevant for both Thomson and Heidegger.

But it seems that the world-inaugurating artist must die. Even worse, the world inaugurating artist, in seeing the inchoate hints of being which provide the structure for a new world, glimpses the contingency of the one in which she dwells. Not only are the possibilities which fundamentally constitute *her* being called before her, but the very intelligibility that gives rise to and makes sense of these possibilities becomes frail once she has glimpsed the truth which might supplant it. Much like the scientist of a crisis moment, the revolutionary artist might be burdened by the emergence of a truth capable of undermining the intelligibility which makes sense of her work and gives her a place within the world. My later discussion of Kafka will attempt a phenomenology of this precipice between worlds, but for now I think that we might have at least some evidence that the world inaugurating artist undergoes a very different experience of meaning-discovery than the one experienced in death and authenticity. The gentle contemplation of a great work of art does not seem to require even the momentary death of *Being and Time*, as the pressing upon us of meaning by entities does not necessarily make our lives or our projects impossible. World inauguration might make the artist's project itself completely unintelligible, because it inaugurates an entirely new *intelligibility*. The artist must die, and may even face an apocalypse. Meaning-making that keeps the mundane and taken-for-granted intact might be meaningfully distinguished from the meaning-making that drives epochality in the history of being.

I. d) Plural Nothings

What these two extremely diverse accounts of nothingness seem to indicate is that a wide spectrum of individual entities might be conceived to have—as their very being—this kind of rich field of possibilities, which resists any particular monosemic interpretation; “The being is that which rises up and opens itself; that which... comes upon man, i.e. upon him who opens himself to what is present in that he apprehends it.”²⁷ Our intentional relation to any particular entity, because it is founded by, dependent on, and ultimately radically shaped and determined by the world we inhabit—by our sense of what is and what matters—and therefore takes entities to *be* particular *things*, to be good or bad for particular reasons (on the basis of which projects are intelligible within our world) rather than nothings. But these interpretations are, therefore wildly contingent and terribly incomplete; “... Never does a being’s being consist in being brought before man as the objective. Never does it consist in being placed in the realm of man’s information and disposal so that, in this way alone, is it in being.”²⁸ No particular “objective,” or even basic ontological conception of entities is guaranteed to be shared across worlds, and this is precisely because there seems to be something more to entities themselves, something which offers up multiple interpretations, uses, and even meanings to different constellations of intelligibility. The stone, the human, and even the hammer could be thought otherwise in another world, but do we really think that each of these entities is equally inexhaustible? Is each of these nothings really equally as big, or as broad, as deep? I think not. There seem to be different sizes of inexhaustibles in the postmodern

²⁷ See Heidegger, “Age of the World Picture,” *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 68.

²⁸ See Heidegger, “Age of the World Picture,” *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 68.

conception of the being of entities I have developed, here. The possibilities that confront any particular dying *Dasein* might be a much larger set than those inchoate in equipment—merely because equipment is something *made* with some particular set of *uses* in mind. While a great artist might well be able to interpret the hammer outside of the intentions and uses for which it was constructed, and to world other possibilities for it, it does not seem that it has as rich a nothing as any particular dying *Dasein* or even as any particular stone, because these entities have not, always-already, suffered from a being-made which limits the scope of their possibilities. As we shall see, Heidegger calls this equipmental conception of *all* entities, including ourselves, which conceives them at their most fundamental level in terms of need and use “dangerous”. This is precisely because *most* entities exceed this equipmental conceptualization— but, *Dasein*, in particular, since its conceptualization, as equipment is the “*greatest* danger” for Heidegger.²⁹

For now, we can note that in authenticity, metaphysics, *and* artistic worlding, a particular decision, the manifestation of a particular being or way of being in the world, forecloses certain other interpretations belonging to the earth. All worlds, as systems of intelligibility, map out and abject certain possibilities as unintelligible.

II) Breakdown: Epochs as arising from crisis moments

Art is history in its essential sense: it is the ground of history.³⁰

Metaphysics grounds and age in that, through a particular conception of beings and through a particular apprehension of truth, it provides that age with the ground of its essential shape.³¹

²⁹ Heidegger, Martin “The Question Concerning Technology,” *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, W. Lovitt, trans. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1977) p. 32-35. My emphasis

³⁰ See Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 49.

For Heidegger, epochs are moments in history, essentially inscribed by a people's "ontotheological" conception of what is—the ontological—and what matters—the theological. Ontotheologies are attempts at totalizing explanations of a shared reality. Which get their explanatory force from describing the phenomena we experience on both the most fundamental, simple, and smallest levels and the overarching, macrocosmic, ones. They tell us, for example, what entities are at their most basic level, and what laws they must follow due to their inclusion in the universe.³² The transition from Greek polytheism to Christian monotheism, could therefore be cast as the transition by which the shared imaginary of western *Dasein* moved from an epoch wherein the Greek gods *were* to one where they *were not*, and a world where the Judeo-Christian god *was not* to one where he *was*. With this theological shift go shifts in our valuations of various phenomena, some entities like demigods fade from reality, and even our definition of humanity changes—no longer divinely flawed in similar ways to the gods, for instance, some of our actions become sins, and some of our nature the product of an evil force, humanity itself a profaning, or separation from the divine. While the ontological point is only on half of what constitutes an epoch, it is the foundational aspect. What *is* necessarily dictates what *matters*. The morality, customs, and values of western *Dasein* changed because what existed demanded it. But, what instigates a transition in our conception of what *is*? Science provides the most ready examples of this particular kind of transition. In physics, the existence of atoms, quarks, strings, etc. has demanded complimentary new explanations of previous findings, casting them in the light of newly discovered fundamental principles. In biology, the discovery of DNA and its mechanisms

³¹ See Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture" *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 57.

³² See Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, p. 11-15.

completely changed our ideas of heredity, and therefore of family and human history. But, it doesn't seem obvious that such empirical findings should motivate the adoption of a new god in place of the old gods. There is no observational basis, concretely and definitively *proving* that the old gods were somehow inadequate to explain empirical phenomena, and that the Judeo-Christian god somehow better explained these phenomena. In fact, it seems that fewer people believed absurd things about our reality—flat earth theories and dogmatic geocentrism, for instance—when the old gods *were* than when they *were not*. Heidegger suggests that this transition from one god to the next is better explained in the *poietic* encounter with the work of art, wherein the earth is (in part) *revealed*. *Poiesis* shows us not only entities that have yet to be included in our intelligibilities, but entire modes of being and of valuating these new entities and modes. As we shall see, this phenomenon is parallel to transitions in scientific paradigm. One thing the genuine encounter with the work of art does is present us with something that cannot be explained by the paradigmatic conceptions of being presented in any of the historical epochs to this point.

On Heidegger's account, new worlds are founded when a work of art gives a people its first glimpse of its own constellation of intelligibility; "Standing there, the temple first gives to things their look, and to men their outlook on themselves."³³ But neither the artist nor the work produces this world *ex nihilo*. Rather, the artist picks up on something that in fact *is*, something which suggests itself in the material: the earth. As we have seen above, this activity is called *poiesis*. What we have not mentioned is that this revealing is also *truth* for Heidegger. He calls this truth—the truth involved in responding

³³ See Heidegger, "Origin of the Work of Art", *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 21.

to and revealing certain aspects of “the very thing that is”—*aletheia*.³⁴ Every new epoch, and the intelligibility that corresponds to it are, therefore, *true* on some level for Heidegger. These truths, however, have yet to be complete. Human history cannot accomplish an epoch of comprehensive intelligibility. Each age is instead founded on a particular conception of what *is* which might be ruptured by the discovery of new entities or new modes of their being, and a conception of what *matters*, which is equally vulnerable. This is because any *singular* conception of being and meaning is, for Heidegger, the product of a kind of eliminative bracketing. Being and meaning themselves are inexhaustible, to place them into any particular conceptual schema is to abject some, if not most, of their possibility. The decay of one world in favor of another is not due to what it gets *wrong* (its falsity) as we might generally think—especially when we seem to have much better explanatory capabilities than previous intelligibilities—but what that *misses* and abjects. When these bracketed possibilities arise into the world and demand new explanatory frameworks—new ontologies, theologies, and conceptions of ourselves, our place in the universe, and what matters to us based on this cosmic position—a new world emerges and the old one irreversibly decays, on Heidegger’s view.³⁵ And he thinks this first happens through the great work of art.

This means that there have been several worlds, founded on *actual* truths, according to Heidegger, which we will never again be able to inhabit. The bracketing of each epoch, however, has made its truth only partial. We might wonder, then, if this is something of a bleak picture of the future. If “world-withdrawal and world-decay can never be undone,” it seems that we can never again touch that facet of the Earth, of

³⁴ See Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art,” *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 21.

³⁵ See Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art,” *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 20.

being-as-such, which founded the Greek world.³⁶ A world founded on the *entire* truth of being, then, seems impossible. The epochal course of history has doubly foreclosed certain possible conceptions of being. First, in the bracketing—the *epoche*—which sustains a particular intelligibility for a time. Second, in the permanent recession of that truth from us, when the eruption of another truth calls for the next conception of being. If the truths that inaugurated previous worlds are now foreclosed to us, it seems that we might always-already live in an epoch, that bracketing is a necessary condition of their having been other worlds before us.

We cannot, therefore, avoid living on the basis of a merely partial truth. *Dasein* remains guilty at an ontological level, not only because all *projects* require this narrowing of being into intelligibilities—as we shall see when we discuss the breakdown of equipment—but because history and its progress involves the human species in the foreclosure of possibilities. While no world can possibly exhaust being, I think that there might be a possible world which does not actively narrow the nothing of being, nor that of entities. This world is one wherein everything appears as inexhaustibly rich on its most basic ontological level, where objects of our concern and engagement are understood on the basis of innumerable possibilities. This conception of entities in terms of their nothing cannot eliminate our guilt, any project we might take on requires some tacit *understanding* of the tools—as tolls and as they are involved in that project. In fact, in this postmodern attunement, we might be more *aware* of our ineliminable guilt. After all, if our fundamental understanding of entities is that they might well have an existence that far exceeds our uses, condemning them to the confines of our projects—even for a

³⁶ See Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art,” *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 20.

moment—might seem a kind of injustice. The question becomes whether the persistent awareness of this ontological guilt need paralyze postmodern *Dasein*, who will conceive of entities entirely in terms of these possibilities.

Thomson's conception of a Heideggerian postmodern provides a potentially useful phenomenology of our confrontations with the kind of rich nothingness we might expect to show itself in all entities of a postmodern world. He focuses on experiences that we might have within even the most hegemonic ontotheology, but which may have the power to radically change the way this world and its entities show up for us. Rather than collapsing the world, Thomson's examples seem to force it to expand. This accommodation of the new by the old does, in fact, occur, as Kuhn notes in the history of science. Old paradigms might alter their theories to incorporate some of the anomalous data which eventually crumbles them, but ultimately the inadequacies of the underlying explanatory mechanisms *must* abject some anomalous data—the paradigm cannot be infinitely flexible.

On Thomson's account, postmodernity is precisely the kind of response to the earth, which is at the heart of all great works of art. This means that postmodern *Dasein* sees the being of entities in terms of "being-as-such."³⁷ Let us unpack this. Rather than a bifurcating ontotheological construction—which takes the micro-level ontology, what it is to be *a thing* to be distinct from but derivative of the macro-level truth, the most general conception of what it is to *be*—postmodern *Dasein* conceives of things in terms of being generally. Given what we have put forth thus far in this paper, this means that postmodern *Dasein* conceives of things in terms of their *inexhaustible possibilities*: in terms of their nothings. For postmodern *Dasein*, entities become intelligible *as* entities

³⁷ See Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, p.9.

only in terms of their being much more than *this* particular entity. What this means is that postmodern *Dasein* cannot inhabit any singular conception of being, cannot interpret things within a limited conceptual schema, and cannot discard those possibilities that do not support said schema. But, postmodern *Dasein* is inherently receptive to the *truth* that inaugurated these schemas, which founded decayed ontotheological worlds. Entities cannot show up for postmodern *Dasein* as support for what is taken to be *fundamentally and solely true*. Entities can and do, however, show up in terms of multiple, always-proliferating, truths for postmodern *Dasein*, and this might very well include the earthy revelations of a long-lost world and its permanently effaced dominant intelligibility.

Dreyfus and Kelly's "whooshing up" also provides a few phenomenological examples of postmodern experiences, capable of erupting into an ontotheological world. If we attenuate *poiesis*, and its relation to truth, we see that possibilities for experiences that seem to contradict our dominant world-view proliferate around us—especially if this dominant view is *nihilism*, or meaninglessness, as Dreyfus and Kelly have it. These events are not bound to the inauguration of worlds, nor are they bound to the creation of active and transformative works of art. Rather, opportunities to respond to the inchoate, unexpected possibilities that surround us proliferate throughout our lives. It is possible for our conceptions of what is and what matters to shift dramatically without requiring the world to change.³⁸

³⁸ Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly, *All Things Shining*, New York: Free Press, 2011), p. 192

For Dreyfus and Kelly, events which provide meaningful counterexamples to our current worldview might be as mundane as the communal experience of watching a sport played beautifully, so long as we attenuate its particular excellence.

While Heidegger privileges those moments of *aletheia* that belong to the work of art as world inaugurators, we can see that it is actually possible for this phenomenon to arise in our encounters with most, if not all, of the entities in our world. There are quite possibly, possibilities inchoate in even the most mundane things that our daily conception of what is and what matters misses. In *Being and Time*, this is demonstrated in the breakdown of equipment, wherein the unnoticed fact that we take equipment to be equipment, to be useful, and therefore, that we attach it to our current project, and that this project in itself attaches to our most fundamental conceptions of ourselves allows us access to the particular nothing we in fact *are*. Butler discusses the breakdown that can occur when we realize that certain identities have been abjected from this conception of “what is and what matters,” and this is the very site of political and social transformation for her. The new order, because it is at root an intelligibility, will strive to contain, include, and explain that which it once could not. So, for her, other people are also sites of rupture that can seriously do damage to extant paradigms of intelligibility.³⁹ Dreyfus and Kelly describe “shining” moments which provide counterexamples to a totalizing nihilism, giving us an inkling that our theological conception of meaninglessness is, perhaps, incomplete and even fragile.

While epochality makes other worlds possible, it does not in fact coherently lend itself to a discussion of “progress” or even of beneficial or desirable transformations of world. This is because, on Heidegger’s account, we might think every world-founding conception of Being, of “what is and what matters” is equally *true*. Worlds arise like the Lacanian ego: as a misrecognition insofar as the *whole* picture cannot be captured by its representation. But the ego is precisely *not* a misrepresentation in the sense of its being

³⁹ See Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, (New York: Routledge, 1993) p. 168

false. It is, rather, a misidentification of a part as the whole. *Incompleteness* collapses worlds, not falsity. And, even seemingly truer replacement-worlds throughout western history, according to Heidegger, have also collapsed because their one, metaphysical, interpretation of being has been insufficient. This is not a narrative of driven progress, but rather a narrative of radical contingency.

Likewise, Dreyfus and Kelly's account of whooshing up does not necessarily lend itself to progress. Nihilism, as they describe it, is a metaphysical foundation for our conceptual schemas, which is no less *true* than the religious foundations that preceded it. Nihilism is not a *mistake*, in any robust sense, but rather our recognition of something that truly *is*. If, conversely, our metaphysics were animistic, and we took everything to have meaning, we could expect once abject, "shining" moments of utter pointlessness, to rupture the taken-for-granted. Shining moments are mere counterexamples to nihilism. At most, they only serve to undermine our *faith* in our contemporary worldview, not to end it. We might, as Dreyfus and Kelly do, construct an individual transcendence narrative from this account, but we must first accept the hidden premise that living a meaningful life is preferable for us—or even the most valuable thing conceivable to us—in order to think the transcendence of *one* individual constitutes a sufficient promise against widespread nihilism or global enframing in its most dangerous instantiation. We cannot say that a meaningful world is a "step up" from the current one, so we're left to say "we'd rather not be nihilists."

When all interpretations of being are merely responses to it, when each epoch has been founded by a *truth*, then we cannot say we have progressed, in the sense of scientific progress: leaving false theories behind for truer ones. So, how is it that my thesis could

possibly hold? How can all acts of *poiesis*, these mere truth-acts, mere responses to being, be inherently, radically, political? And, do we really want to see political activism as something like *mere* change, rather than progress? Why would we want a different world *at all*, on this account?

III) Enframing and Nihilism: Why We Would Want a Crisis Moment Now

For the sake of this battle of worldviews, and according to its meaning, humanity sets in motion, with respect to everything, the unlimited process of calculation, planning and breeding... Modernity races to towards the fulfillment of its essence”⁴⁰

Heidegger refers to our current—he thinks ultimately dangerous—worldview as “enframing,” and cites as its metaphysical foundation the twin notions set out by Nietzsche: the theology of eternal recurrence and the ontology of will-to-power.⁴¹

Thomson points out that—when the distinction between these notions collapses—it forms an ontotheology, through which everything shows up for us. Ontotheological worldviews found and form intelligibility at every level, such that all phenomena show up within their monosemic and coherent explanatory frameworks.

In order to get to the ontological level, our various explanatory pursuits, including the sciences, divide the phenomena of experience, and seek the smallest, most fundamental level of their possibility. Neurobiology and chemistry have, for instance, attempted to provide us with molecular-level explications of our affective life. Physics and chemistry furnish us with micro-level entities such as atoms and quarks, taken to be the most basic building blocks of physical entities. The human organism is divided into

⁴⁰ See Heidegger, “Age of the World Picture,” *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 71.

⁴¹ Thomson, Iain, *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 14.

cells, which are divided, again and again, until the smallest particle with any explanatory power over individual human beings stands revealed. The ontological pursuit attempts to provide us with the necessary conditions of the phenomena we observe, and also to explain them from their most basic level. Within the Nietzschean framework Heidegger diagnoses, individual entities *are* in terms of their will-to-power. All things, people, countries, etc., at their atomic level, are nothing more than force, driven to the accumulation of force. To live under the explanatory power of this ontology is to comprehend all and experienced phenomena in its terms. Because the being-of-entities on which our world is founded configures in advance the way that everything shows up for us, our institutions and values are taken—at their most fundamental level—to signify nothing but the arbitrary and utterly “natural” creation and destruction, accumulation and loss of power and force. Natural history, as evolution, becomes driven by sovereignty and power. Human history nothing more than the usurpation, maintenance, and levying of power. Even individual relationships of love or kinship appear in this guise.⁴² Our minds, seen as our *brains* come to resemble nothing more than the struggle between various neurotransmitters, all vying for power over the entire system: dopamine is a feudal lord. This is the dominant *ontology* of the late-modern epoch, according to Heidegger, and thus the predominant way that entities show up for us.

⁴² We can see this most clearly in the practice of clinical psychology, wherein counselors work first to identify the power-structures of relationships.

We can think of this ultimate entity as any larger-picture unification of all entities. I provide some examples above, but what is important to note, here, is that the eternal recurrence—as a conception of *time*—is difficult to conceive as an entity *at all*. Unifying theories, thought to explain all entities, their interactions with and relations to one another, and their general place in the universe also hold this kind of theological position. In this way, gravity is a kind of theological principle, and it necessitates “dark matter” because it is otherwise incapable of describing and explaining these sets of cosmological observations.

The theological level of such a metaphysics resembles astronomy more than it does quantum mechanics or biochemistry. “Metaphysics thinks theologically when it thinks the totality of entities as such... with regard to the supreme, all-founding entity.”⁴³ And, such an explanatory pursuit in fact reifies the place of the eternal recurrence within our shared intelligibility—even if only coincidentally. It would be tempting to think that the theological can be nothing like any of the sciences, because the explanatory power that we usually call ‘theological’ is not the product of empirical observation, but rather it seems to be the kind of explanation for physical phenomena which arises from the confusion and frustration of a nascent humanity with no explanatory apparatus—a desperate attempt to explain, where no *real* explanation is possible. But, here, a modern presupposition becomes apparent: that the only *real* explanations we have are those based in empirical observation. So, how is it that we could possibly hold a widespread belief that, at the macro-level, the universe is driven by the eternal recurrence? We do, after all, experience time and change as linear and causal. For Nietzsche, the idea comes from the scientific principle that all matter in the universe is finite, and from the thermodynamic principle that matter cannot be created nor can it be destroyed, taken in tandem with another scientific principle: the eternal and unbounded nature of time. For Nietzsche, it seems only a matter of time before the finite atoms in the universe congeal into the same shapes and forms, interacting in the same ways, as those that constituted the ancient Greek world. For us, seemingly *better* observations have at least explained the universe in terms of an infinite series of big bangs and big crunches—instigating, destroying, and instigating reality anew over time. It is possible that we do think of the universe as

⁴³ See Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, p. 15.

eternally recurring, though I am not sure this source in the empirical sciences is the only reason we might accept the assertion that our theology is the eternal recurrence. It seems that the presupposition of the superiority of empirical data, of observation, and of statistical “significance” is more at the root of the theology belonging to technological enframing.

In order to say something *true* of observed phenomena—at either the micro or macro level—a scientist must say something which will be the case *at all times*: even the truth of will-to-power is subordinated to repetition. The replicability of results is their truth-value. As a result, science relies on a presupposition of the timelessness of truth. It should be the case that, even in the ancient world, all matter consists of atoms—all matter is, largely, empty space. The truths of science are thought to repeat through time in both directions. This means that other intelligibilities merely manufacture falsities, that as science *progresses*, what was true in another epoch becomes something false, without losing the explanatory power it had for people at the time. But, the epochality of science—highlighted by Kuhn in particular—indicates that each intelligibility no matter how diligently rooted in the empirical sciences, eventually fails to explain certain phenomena. These phenomena are taken to be anomalies, abjected so they cannot undermine the explanatory power of the sciences, until the point at which they become the very *vehicles of scientific “progress” itself*. What any conceptual scheme misses becomes the engine that eventually drives it past itself. This excess, which lies at the borders of our explanatory powers, seems to destroy these explanatory powers, in favor of new ones—in favor of the very “greater truths”, which allow us to scoff at Thales’ ontology. In taking replicability as truth, the sciences miss the fact that their greater truths

lie, always, in the novel. Adherence to any particular, solitary, set of explanatory powers, then, seems to abject that which drives the pursuit of truth. It is the discovery of the unintelligible—which ruptures the intelligible—that harbors progress toward truth—not the replication of data meant to reify that intelligibility.

The late-modern ontotheological picture of being, as Heidegger describes it, is thus eternally recurring will-to-power, we “appropriate these two different ways of understanding the being of what is—the ontological and the theological—and combine them into a single ontotheological view.”⁴⁴ At the ontological level, all things are merely force. At the theological level the truth that unifies these forces is their coming together and breaking apart in a cyclic, predictable fashion. This gives us an ultimately *meaningless* picture of the universe. There can be no *point* to these ultimate levels of reality, since they are driven not by divine sentience, nor by the telos of *individual* entities. Rather, they are the *natural* and even *merely physical* behaviors of the inherently purposeless, and uninterested. On this picture, as with Nietzsche’s ethics, humanity is the seat of all meaning, our nature is to give value to things, and even human valuating is inherently arbitrary: conditioned on our time and place, to be sure, but bound to no ontologically extant source of meaning within the world—merely a product of our purposeless evolution. Within this epoch, intelligibility is marked out by an interpretation of being which takes all entities to be mere resources, awaiting optimization, because only our valuations *matter* and thus our pursuits and not the things we use are valuable—things are only valuable insofar as they enable our pursuits.⁴⁵ Heidegger calls this worldview “technological enframing.” The godlike power we gain on the modern picture,

⁴⁴ See Thomson, *Heidegger, Art and Postmodernity*, p. 13.

⁴⁵ See Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, p. 204.

he thinks, gives *no boundaries*. If we arbitrarily inaugurate some things into the sphere of the meaningful and the valuable, and if the devaluation and even revulsion at others is merely a product of an equally arbitrary decision on our part, then nothing is in itself valuable, or inviolable. The value of the forest, of the ocean, of the animal, or even of our fellow man, and ourselves is not inherent to them, but rather it is written into the systems of valuation we have created.⁴⁶ If we value monetary success, then everything is valuable to the degree that it promotes this success, for instance. The system of values the late-modern leaves is one that necessitates the optimization of entities for its ends, because those ends are the sole source of all value. Optimization for such ends appears as a moral requirement, in this epoch.

For Heidegger, technological enframing becomes the greatest danger not only when it becomes the dominant worldview, when it is shared by all conscious *Dasein*, and when all entities show up in its light, but when *Dasein* itself becomes trapped in its totalizing homogenization. When we see the traces of individuality in us as mere imperfections—when the aspects of ourselves which push back against our monosemic self interpretations, making it difficult for us to pursue shared values, making it possible for us to die, show up as nothing more than unfortunate hindrances, rather than as possible sites of multiple kinds of self-understanding, when we no longer take our tension with our jobs to be an indication that we cannot fully *be* our professions, that there is something inherent in us which resists totalizing explanation, and which should be tended to—*Dasein* is in *danger* because *Dasein* is this excess and concern for this excess. It becomes harder for the earth to “shatter every attempt to penetrate it,” to turn every

⁴⁶ See Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, p. 204.

calculative attempt at mastery over these contingencies into “impotence of the will,”⁴⁷ because it veils the most obvious, the closest, site of its inadequacies—*Dasein* itself—from us.

This seems, at first, to echo Kant’s edict against suicide: that we should not take ourselves merely as means. But, within an intelligibility which takes nothing at all to be anything more than a means, an intelligibility that seems to have both science and philosophy on its side in such an interpretation, Kant’s philosophy of the inherent value of human autonomy seems like nothing more than mythology. Unfortunately, Heidegger’s position also harbors such a presupposition of the inherent worth of *Dasein*. How might it become legible in a late-modern world, wherein it seems that any excess of self, which intervenes on the efficient acquisition of the valued, might be better eradicated from us than attended to or even cultivated? Wherein these excesses might simply cease to exist, a result for which we would ultimately be *happy*? And, why might we want to favor an interpretation of being which so deeply values these inefficiencies in the first place?

For the first of these questions, we might note that Kant’s philosophy points to particular, conceptualized, site of human value. It is our *autonomy*, which separates us meaningfully from resources, and demands a certain kind of respect. We cannot be used merely as means because we are, in ourselves, ends: we are self-determining agents and as such our value and the value of our lives is not to be subordinated to other interests, even if they are ours. Heidegger, however, points to something more persistent and less definitive than our autonomy as the site of meaning. There is no, *singular*, characteristic

⁴⁷ See Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art”, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 25.

or capacity which uniquely sets *Dasein* apart as ends in themselves.⁴⁸ This is because no *single* interpretation of any being is a sufficient explanation of that being. No *one* interpretation of humanity can unlock its entire nature. Where human autonomy is the key for understanding the status of humanity within the universe for Kant, it is the undefined, unconceptualized, excess of *Dasein*, which explains its meaning for Heidegger. We cannot be merely means because we *are* no-thing—we are in terms of possibilities for our being, and in terms of possibilities, which have not yet even been conceptualized, become *things*, which might be means at all. This means that human excess, like scientific anomalies, might erupt in the midst of even the most ossified and seemingly obvious ontotheological paradigm—or within the most neurotically policed self-identification—while a concept like our autonomy will have always already been included within it as an expected and accounted for quality.⁴⁹

Related also to the very sketchy characterization I have given of the history of science is the response to the second of these questions. Anomalous data in the sciences is inefficient as well, hinders research and damages the explanatory power of the

⁴⁸ Heidegger argues that the capacity for world-disclosure and *poietic* activity are *unique* to *Dasein*—and even that they constitute its essence. But, we can see how this capacity does not make *Dasein* valuable as an end-in-itself. Rather, *Dasein* is valuable in this case because of something it *produces* through its hallmark activity. We could see how the most stayed enframer might prefer an *efficient* machine for the production of worlds, especially if this device were able to create *better* or more complete worlds than the ones *Dasein* has managed to wrest from the rift.

The interdependence of world and *Dasein* might make this the frontier of enframing, however. It seems impossible to conceive of a world-disclosing entity that is *not Dasein*. World in Heidegger's sense cannot exist without *Dasein's* disclosive activity, and so it seems odd to take the worlds disclosed by *Dasein* to be some good separate from them. But, this seems to be the kind of logic at enframing's most extreme edges—an indication of the auto-optimization of *Dasein*. What we see here is not merely the optimization and commodification of *Dasein's* ingenuity and labor, but of its own-most character.

⁴⁹ Examples of such eruptions can be found in Lacan's discussion of the mirror-stage, to changed existential feeling in clinical psychology (both of which we will examine in greater detail later) and even Heidegger's conception of death and Butler's discourse on social progress as the inclusion of before unseen possibilities for "the human."

paradigms on which this research relies. But, as we have said, it is the eruption of the novel, rather than the replication of results and the reification of the scientific paradigm, on which scientific progress toward truth seems to rest. If we optimize away these elements of resistance to our self-interpretations, if we foreclose interpretations of ourselves, which might hinder our efficient optimization for the attainment of our self-given values, it seems that we might foreclose the progress of our self-understanding toward the truth. The reason to resist the seductions of efficient optimization, though such a resistance might seem ultimately counter to our goals and to the attainment of what we conceive as valuable, is that these inefficiencies might allow us to better understand ourselves as individual *Dasein*, and to understand *Dasein* itself as a kind to which we belong.

If we *are* on the basis of inexhaustible possibilities, then any singular interpretation of our being comes at the expense of innumerable other interpretations. Though the elimination of countless possibilities seems utterly necessary for the pursuit of any *concrete* projects at all—and, therefore for the development of any substantive self-identification—some all-totalizing self-interpretations might eliminate too many of our possibilities. We do think, after all, that there are some self-interpretations which do not allow one to “live up to their potential.” If we remove this language from the metaphysics of optimization, we could say that there is a kind of life that our possibilities *call for*. In everyday speech, we think some eliminations of possibility are a *greater shame* than others—that they serve one’s possibilities less than others might.⁵⁰ The reasons Sartre’s waiter cannot *be* a waiter are the reasons he is the particular person he

⁵⁰ Even if all such decisions are the site of ineliminable *guilt*.

is.⁵¹ The waiter, too, exists on the basis of an inexhaustible nothing of his own possibilities. Such a profession—where it is merely a *profession*—perhaps, is not the kind of *shame* we are talking about here. But, if the waiter is optimized for waiting, denied access to this excess of his possibilities—if this profession becomes a singular and totalizing conception of self—then it might eliminate too many meaningful self-conceptions for him. If we were to forcibly trim his excess—to perhaps brainwash or breed workers so that they lose the capacity to envision a self beyond their work—in order to optimize his work and his contentment with it, we can see that this scenario would exceed bad faith: become entirely dystopian. The waiter will be optimized for waiting, the CEO for running a corporation, etc. This is the specialization of insects from which we generally hope to be exempt; “in no age before this has the non-individual, in the shape of the collective been accorded prestige.”⁵² Beyond the grimness of this picture, too, is a narrowing of truth—taken as *earth*—which as we have seen, precludes other truths all together in Heidegger’s terms.⁵³

Insofar as we can learn from Van Gogh (or other similarly great artists) to see in this poetic way ourselves, Heidegger suggests. We will find ourselves dwelling in a postmodern world permeated by meaningful possibilities.⁵⁴

If we can see why we might want some alternative to technological enframing, then we can see the importance of Heidegger’s conception of “the promise”.⁵⁵ The promise is the difficult to comprehend “other side” of the “danger”. In other words, we are meant to take the promise—that which would end technological enframing, or at least seriously

⁵¹ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness*, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984) p.96-116.

⁵² See Heidegger, “Age of the World Picture”, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 66.

⁵³ Ignoring our own peculiar nothings seems only to be capable of producing a kind of dystopian homogeneity.

⁵⁴ See Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, p. 119.

⁵⁵ See Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 34-35.

undermine it—to be immanent to enframing itself. There are multiple possible ways to conceive such an immanent destructive force. Perhaps, the saving power, which “grows” out of the greatest danger, is something like the inherent contradictions *produced* by civil society, on Hegel’s account. These moments and individuals, necessitated by the dominant structure, demonstrate the limitations of its explanatory reach, eventually demanding a synthesis wherein the meaningless and the meaningful ultimately lose the identities which set them apart in the first place, but gain much from being incorporated with one another and losing their opposition. This, as I shall attempt to demonstrate, seems to be Dreyfus and Kelly’s solution in *All Things Shining*. Another, I think more radical (both politically and literally) possibility is that the late-modern epoch and its metaphysics of optimization cannot be overcome by the emergence of individual, idiosyncratic, meaning events—even if they are immanent to a metaphysics of meaninglessness. Rather, it seems to me that this entire metaphysics of optimization must be overcome and supplanted by the very world it abjects in order to maintain cohesion, for there to be any *promise* at all against a widespread dystopian worldview which internalizes the optimization imperative, eradicating even the most sacred personal vestiges of individual identity; there must arise another intelligibility. For me, then, *the* postmodern must itself become a widespread conception of “what is and what matters” in which we *dwell*. As a promise, it must, therefore *follow* the late modern, even if it is the case that many *events*, have already been postmodern.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Unfortunately, as we shall see in the final concluding section of this paper, it is not at all certain what this promise might *be like*, in any robust sense. Even the phenomenological speculation I give in this paper’s conclusion can speak only to breakdown, and not to the phenomenal nature of a world that is *not yet*. The fact that our access to the postmodern is limited definitely raises some difficult questions as regards the salvific narrative put forth by Heidegger and others. Simply put, how do we know that the postmodern will be better than the modern age of technological enframing?

Part II: Postmodernity, Polysemy, and Proliferation

The following section will provide a definition of the postmodern, toward which we have been working, as well as addressing the theory of truth at the heart of Heidegger's philosophy of art. This second discussion is of immense importance as we approach a discussion of the kind of world-collapse, which might lead to an awareness of the postmodern: in art, the shared world, and personal psychology. This is because it would be easy—given our more commonsense conception of truth—to dismiss any of these postmodern conditions as involving a kind of falsehood, the primary falsehood we acknowledge: not matching up with the world.

The phenomenology of the postmodern at this paper's conclusion will rely on these two sections, utterly. This is because the apprehension of all entities in terms of earthy proliferation is central to postmodern experience, on this account, and the fundamental truth of such intelligibility is not that of matching up with the world, but Heidegger's.

I have at least attempted to motivate the ameliorative account given here by describing enframing as a phenomenon. What should be apparent, at least, is that the consequences of such an intelligibility constitute some of the more repulsive phenomena of contemporary society—from still extant slavery, to sweatshops, and even the production of “cannon fodder” by world militaries. And, perhaps in very postmodern fashion, such a dire worldview makes the idea of experimentation very attractive.

I would add to this that the problem of nihilism seems intractable in the history of continental philosophy. I attribute this to the epochal nature of history. What Nietzsche saw as nihilism was the abjection and denigration of some values in order to preserve the Christian intelligibility. What Heidegger sees as Nietzsche's nihilism is the abjection and denigration of the meaning of entities in order to preserve the intelligibility of human willing. A non-epochal, or postmodern, intelligibility is at least less susceptible to charges of nihilism that take this form.

I) The Postmodern is not an Epoch: Abjection as the Reason for the Finitude of “Worldviews”

What really matters is that we open our eyes to the fact that the workliness of the work, the equipmentality of equipment, and the thingliness of the thing come nearer to us only when we think the being of beings... the path to the determination of the thingly reality of the work runs not from thing to work but from work to thing.^{57 58}

If we can now recognize “being as such” as the inexhaustible phenomenological reservoir that made it possible for “the history of metaphysics” to develop as a series of *different*, epoch-grounding understandings of the being of entities in a nonmetaphysical way...that means understanding “the being of entities” in terms of being as such...as being richer in meaning than we are capable of doing complete justice to.⁵⁹

On Thomson’s account “Heidegger’s defining hope for art...is that great works of art could manifest and thereby help usher in a new understanding of the being of entities, a literally “postmodern” understanding of what it means for an entity to be, a *new ontology* that would no longer understand entities either as modern objects to be controlled or as late-modern resources to be optimized.”⁶⁰ But this new conception of the being of entities—no matter how expansive and inclusive an intelligibility it becomes—is *not* an epoch. This is because the truth that painting reveals is “the unconcealedness of entities as entities. Truth is the truth of being,” and, as we have seen above, this means the truth is multiple, polysemic, and conceptually inexhaustible. If *the* truth of being—rather than merely *one* of its possible truths—comes to supplant the ontology of late-modern enframing, then this new conception does not abject any possibilities of being. Such an

⁵⁷ See Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art”, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 18.

This means that we can know what a thing only by understanding what a work of art is. The truth of the thing is its polysemic, earthy, being, its nature is poetic, disclosive.

⁵⁹ See Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, p. 185.

⁶⁰ See Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, p. 63.

exclusion of possibilities is only necessary when a *singular* interpretation cannot remain coherent or tenable if they are included.⁶¹ A polysemic, postmodern, ontology, open to the contingencies, to the eruption of the novel, and to the unbidden and unexpected—an ontology which is explicitly founded on these very contingencies, on the inexhaustibility of being, and of beings—needs not self-preserve by exclusion. The postmodern is not vulnerable to the kinds of crisis moments that have ended previous epochs—a vulnerability inherent to the *epoche*, to bracketing—and so, as it does not bracket it is not an epoch. It seems, for the same reasons, that the postmodern has no immanent, self-produced, end.

It seems possible, however, that the great work of art could provide us with a new understanding of being and of entities, which escapes late-modern enframing without ever being “truly postmodern”. Dreyfus and Kelly light upon a passage in *Moby Dick*, wherein this seems precisely to be occurring. The painting in this passage provides each man his own, unique, interpretation and meaning because it—like all works of art, and like all entities on Heidegger’s account—is rife with inchoate possibilities and meanings, it has its very own teeming nothingness.⁶² And each of these viewers takes part in a common misrecognition, they see *their* interpretation, over-against the others, as exclusively *true* of the work, rather than seeing that they have not touched the possible truths of the painting: that the truth of this painting is its offering up inexhaustibly many truths. It seems, nonetheless possible that any *one* such, singular, conception of being might supplant technological enframing. This might even seem *easier* for us, if we recall

⁶¹ Even a too narrow, but nonetheless plural, interpretation is inadequate, here.

⁶² See Dreyfus and Kelly, *All Things Shining*, p. 150.

that not everything can happen in intelligibility all at once.⁶³ The postmodern is, therefore, perhaps not intelligibility at all. A world wherein we would be bound by our very intelligibility to constant receptivity and attenuation of the teeming nothings of the entities around us is, at best, difficult to conceive psychologically or phenomenologically. At worst, it seems like the kinds of beings we are—beings that *do*, for whom the as-structure is necessary—might not be able to navigate it: to *do* anything. “...Absence of reflection belongs, to a very large extent, to the particular stages of accomplishing and being constantly active.”⁶⁴ There is something dizzying when we try to conceive of all the possibilities, the submerged meanings, potentials, and qualities, of even banal entities—entities with very small nothings. Sartre provides a kind of phenomenology of this illness in *Nausea*. The encroachment of the swirling, not-yet, of everyday entities on his protagonist incapacitates him. And we would, as postmodern *Dasein*, know that every time we took an entity to be a particular thing—any time we decided, despite the fact that the entity’s possibilities necessarily exceed our intentional conceptualizations, to *use* a tool, for instance—that we were foreclosing other, perhaps even unseen possibilities. This seems to increase, rather than assuage the anxiety of choice Dreyfus and Kelly think characterize contemporary nihilism. Not only does our interpretive choice have no god to guide it, it is always *explicitly* at the *expense* of at least one other possible meaning or interpretation.

There are two reasons I think a new *singular* interpretation of being will not be adequate or preferable to the postmodern as a promise against technological enframing. The first of these is that it seems any new, singular, interpretation could be consumed and

⁶³ See Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, p.9.

⁶⁴ See Heidegger, “Age of the World Picture,” *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 73.

integrated into this voracious ontotheology. The second is that the postmodern does give us “gods” by which to navigate. The *entities themselves* become the standard for our interpretive choices. Just as an authentic, resolute, decision is possible in death, an authentic interpretation of the being of a particular entity is only possible if we confront *its* possibilities. It is only when *Dasein* is confronted with the entire, dizzying, strata of its possibilities, the sources of their regrets, etc. in death, that it is capable of authenticity at all for Heidegger. In this way, when entities are allowed to *be* in terms of their possibilities, it seems that their authentic possibilities shine forth. They are not forced to conform to our singular interpretations, and so they can guide us toward a proper interaction with them. Interactions of this sort with the entities of our world allow for a collective entrance of all entities into an awareness that they “belong to the earth”.⁶⁵

II) Truth-as-Aletheia

Perhaps one of the most important elements of Heidegger’s philosophy of art is also one of its most terrifying for precisely the same reason. This is the connection he draws between the great work of art and socio-historical transformations, or the creation and demolition of worlds: revolution. From a vantage point wherein we might have many criticisms of the current socio-political order and its foundational system of meaning-making—the deification of the dollar, the personification of corporations, the general machines for valuating capital over human beings—any philosophy which seems to provide a non-violent means for not only producing alternative ideologies, but also instituting them globally at the expense of the old ideology, is a promising, even uplifting one. But, Heidegger’s talk of political transformation, here, grows out of his own

⁶⁵ See Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, p. 131.

engagement with an emergent new order, attempting exactly this kind of holistic globalization: national socialism. It is difficult, in this regard, to even want to say anything positive about Heidegger's reading of social-political history, or of its future. In fact, this explicitly non-violent account of the transformation of worlds in "Origin of the Work of Art" adds to Heidegger's Nazism two premises, which seem to excuse the violence of political transformation—even while de-necessitating it.

The first of these is that the founders of worlds respond to something that is *in fact there*, in being itself. The anti-Semitism, racism, homophobia, and conception of Aryan superiority in general, at the root of Nazism—insofar as Nazism was a world for a historical people—are not mere opinion, not arbitrary, and not chosen on the basis of the twisted and frail ego, nor the tortured narrative of a handful of powerful men. Just as the Greeks picked up on the hints and glimmers of being as such in the instigation of their world and the proliferation and eventual ossification of its guiding metaphysics, so too did the Third Reich pick up on something *actual*, in the proliferation by mass-murder of its world view. Being could justify any atrocity, so long as it is world-founding, on this account.⁶⁶

In response to this, I think it is necessary to look back to *Being and Time* for a moment. While Heidegger does biographically endorse a kind of populist movement, moving with the flow of an incomprehensibly large and homogenizing "they," he is not

⁶⁶ Thomson argues that, not only did Heidegger contest most of these notions, his participation in this emergent global power had the express purpose of taking philosophical and thus ideological control of the Nazi party. A Heideggerian Nazism, it seems, might be very much different, given his stance on technological homogenization, authenticity, and the denigration of *Dasein* into resource, etc. In fact, as I've pointed out here, I think it is only in Heidegger's theory of truth that we might find any possible justification for Nazism. It is important, therefore, to save *poiesis* and its truth from possibly justifying *anything* that has ever emerged in human history. To say that Nazism has a relationship to *truth*, in this sense, is not to justify it over-against any other interpretation of the rift structure, nor to morally approve it.

necessarily committed to a position wherein the successful proliferation of a worldview, nor the instigation of a coherent and global intelligibility on its basis evinces a *proper* response to being.⁶⁷ *Being and Time* provides an account wherein, even at the time of death—the time wherein we are most authentic—we might choose the very same life we had. This choice is only authentic because it is done only as a self-alone, at an unusual remove from our families and friends, from the laws that confine our acts and our lives, and the expectations that mold them. We could say that, even if the Nazis had succeeded in the proliferation of their worldview, if they managed to homogenize the human species to such a degree that there could be no ideological friction, no need for it, being a Nazi would still not be a necessarily authentic choice. This means, as we saw above, that Nazism would not necessarily be a *proper* response to one's own nothing—even if it is one possibility within it. That the possibility of the proliferation of a Nazi worldview is inchoate in being, then, does not seem to justify its tenets nor their application. Rather, this point becomes something far less sinister: Nazism was *possible* for humanity. This is undeniable, since it became *actual*.⁶⁸

I have put forward an account whereby the serial, “epochal”, emergence of worlds is explicable in part—or perhaps even primarily—by the inadequacy and resultant errors that inhere in every historical conception of being. While Heidegger's philosophy

⁶⁷ What “they” could be more homogenizing than the Nazis? While the “They” of *Being and Time* forces individual *Dasein* into inauthenticity with its approbations and disapprobation, its expectations and demands, and even what it thinks constitutes a viable existence, the Nazis look even to the genetic code and the narrative history of a people. The result is a “They” self that does not even manage to select its values from a set of options—its religion from many, its origin tales from many, its morality from many—even sexual selection, in a successful Nazism becomes a kind of non-selection due to the severe narrowing of the field of possibilities.

⁶⁸ I do not have any kind of grand theory as to why Heidegger was a Nazi. I'm also reluctant to simply acquit him. I think Thomson does some good work on this point. It would be deplorable if we simply ignored this abhorrent commitment because Heidegger was brilliant. At the same time, readings like his—and hopefully like mine—might salvage the ultimate good that is his philosophy from the wreckage of his disastrous political commitments.

might imply something parallel to the old adage “every stereotype has some basis in reality,” it is not committed to a kind of scientific verification process wherein this truth is taken up and validated through repetition. Heidegger is, therefore, certainly not committed to a stance wherein every response to the truth is *justified*: because, on his account, no *one* response is wholly in error (it could not have emerged if it was not within being) nor is it wholly without it (it cannot *capture* being).⁶⁹

⁶⁹ See Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art”, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 8.

Part III: Types of World-Transition—History, The Ego, Psychosis, Art, and Death

The possibilities that emerge within a world and disrupt it, that lead to world-collapse, and therefore to transitions between intelligibilities, always mark out the borders of these intelligibilities—the fringes of a world, the furthest reach and weakest grasp of its explanatory power. Heidegger’s account of epochal history indicates that the background, taken-for-granted structure of our experience—a tacit and often unacknowledged understanding of what is and what it means for something to be—have been, in every case, vulnerable to this kind of rupture and dissolution. And this is, on his account, no doubt due to the epochal holding-back of the inexhaustible possibilities of being. What his study of history provides, then, is a *hint* of this inexhaustible plurality of meanings. By demonstrating the inadequacy of all totalizing explanatory structures, Heidegger indicates that what it means for something to be is not totally comprehensible.

In this part, I will analyze a number of similar kinds of breakdown—from those at the socio-political level, to the disruption of individual egos and ideations—in order to demonstrate the relation each of these structures has to the limitations of some taken-for-granted explanatory power. What I hope to show, here, is that the dissolution of the ego has to do with the eruption of the polysemy of the self—a nothing that cannot be encapsulated in such a simplistic and totalizing construction, the emergence of delusions and other psychoses have a similar kinship with artistic *poiesis*, as described above, and even the secularized mystical experiences discussed by Dreyfus and Kelly allow a glimmer of the polysemy of being to reach us—but none of these breakdowns is enough to constitute a satisfactory *promise* against enframing. Though transitions between shared

worlds are fewer (Heidegger conceived of only four) and often more difficult to attain, only such a transition offers a real challenge to our dominant, nihilistic ontology.

I) “Whooshing-up” and Ancient Greece: Postmodern Events and Polysemic Worlds

For Dreyfus and Kelly, our “secular” age presents very few opportunities for meaning-making. Their account hinges on the possibility of some life-events intervening on our nihilism and presenting us with something sacred—if only for a moment—to which we can belong. From the account I have tried to motivate, here, this is an eruption of being, of its manifold possibilities and productive capacity for inciting meanings, not explained and anticipated by the mundane and taken-for-granted. But, as we shall see, I question whether these insular—though absolutely meaningful, perhaps made even more beautiful by their emergence within the pervasive nihilism of enframing—events are enough to constitute the Heideggerian promise against the proliferation of modern enframing. They are, to be sure, moments outside its grasp. As a result, they demonstrate the inadequacy of its conceptual structures to define and render everything intelligible in its terms.⁷⁰ But it seems that they allow us to recede back into lives of enframing, unscathed except for in our memories.

Dreyfus and Kelly also point out that it might be problematic to seek shining events out, since they are relatively rare. An attunement looking for this kind of gratification might lead to a dispositional disappointment that only fuels nihilism. To be clear, an attunement which seeks to *optimize* experiences of the sacred seems destined for failure on a number of registers. For Dreyfus and Kelly, the rarity of sacred happenings in our world might lead to a kind of frustration of such an attunement. They insist that the

⁷⁰ See Dreyfus and Kelly, *All Things Shining*, p. 192.

best attunement for a meaningful life is a kind of gratitude that sacred moments occur *at all*, rather than disappointment in their rarity. For my account, it seems that an attunement meant to root out and replicate sacred events is may be somewhat inevitable. And so, the amplified nihilism that such an attunement might present us with may also be inevitable. My reasons for this are two-fold. 1) While “shining moments” seem to challenge the non-contingent, taken-for-granted, stability of a reality, they do not destroy it and they certainly do not supplant it. As such, nihilistic *Dasein* must still experience them from within an existential orientation, a being-in-the-world, which has as its most basic foundation meaninglessness. As we have seen in our discussion of epochality, counterexamples and anomalous data have to do more than merely be observed to shake the foundations of their conceptual schema. 2) Memory fades to such an extent, our identities change to such an extent, that as life carries us away from the sacred might, we might grow isolated too much from our shining experiences for them to definitively change our lives. In fact, as the events of our lives fade into the horizon behind us, it becomes increasingly difficult for us to recapture the feeling that accompanied them, the orientation we had toward them, and the way that they revealed our past world to us. In this section, I will argue that if shining moments are to constitute a promise against enframing, they must force a crisis moment in the *world* nihilism founds, and thus shapes.

A third kind of concern with Dreyfus and Kelly’s account is that our intelligibility so radically informs all the possible concepts we can have. As we shall see with the deluded existential orientation, inhabiting a different world means affirming different possibilities and even adapting one’s entire logical apparatus to support these novel

conceptions. It seems then that it is possible to imagine a kind of wholehearted nihilist who sees her nihilism—her interpretation of all being as consisting of nothing more than resources awaiting optimization, and interprets herself as the author of this valuation, of all valuations—confirmed by everything else in her world, from the philosophy and science of her time, to the expectations of employers, etc. She may not infer from “whooshing up” in a shining moment any kind of meaning in the universe. She might experience the same sites of the sacred in much the same way as anyone, subjectively, without being convinced that there exists meaning outside herself for example. Rather, she might come away from—granted, moving—communal experiences merely surprised that *she* values community. What matters *to her* changes, but it is not obvious that she would be forced to affirm metaphysical possibilities like sources of meaning outside herself: especially given how radically untenable these metaphysical possibilities are within her sense-making structure. Such an experience might not reveal meanings inchoate in everyday phenomena, but might instead remain trapped within a subjectivistic and enframed generalization of value. It is hard to see how whooshing might escape the clutches of a dominant intelligibility which can so readily explain it without recourse to an abjected meaning that escapes it.

Examples of shining moments like the birth of a child, or being overtaken by nature’s beauty and power might avoid this line of criticism, since these are events which one has little control over, and which—if they are meaningful—might be meaningful *in themselves*, without the valuation of some subject. What the subject learns about herself in such a case is due to the bivalence of meaning-making; the fact that something about *Dasein* is revealed in this process hardly seems to indicate the narrowing of meaning-

making to the sovereign activity of subjects upon objects. As we shall see, these examples *do* differ from some of those Dreyfus and Kelly discuss. But they also harbor what I think is a possibly troubling similarity. As we continue on, I think it is important to attenuate a few concerns. 1) To what degree does a supposedly shining moment *actually* interrupt the taken-for-granted sense of what is and what matters? Especially as this is often an implacable sense of being, working, and navigating in a *shared* world, the utility of which should not be underestimated.⁷¹ 2) Is the shining moment parasitic on this taken-for-granted ontotheology? Does meaning-making *require* enframing, or even the greatest danger? And 3) is the shining moment merely an individual mystical experience, transmittable to no one? If so, how does it differ—in terms of Heidegger’s project—from the pathological cases of changed existential feeling we will be discussing in the next section of this paper?

Furthermore many of Dreyfus and Kelly’s examples are particularly vulnerable to this deflationary process whereby shining moments become completely explicable in the terms of nihilism. Sporting events are massively lucrative, and—most obviously in the case of boxing or football—this money is made *at the expense* of players’ longevity and health. In other words, there are some venues that might provide shining moments to some only by making others into resources to be optimized and—not only used but—*used up*. It would be easy to turn “whooshing up” into a commodity in this circumstance—a mere *experience* bought for the price of admission—when even the subjectivities, memories, and general functions of participants are also commodities. It is difficult to see how such a practice could be any closer to the “greatest danger.” Such an appetitive consumption of profundity is at the heart of Heidegger’s critique of aesthetics

⁷¹ Nor should the possible pathologization of the alternative.

in his philosophy of art. The denigration of the work of art from the role of world-founder to the source of intense emotional experiences—no matter how life-transforming—is the process by which the modern intellect has enframed the work of art and made even it mere resource. As we can see it is difficult—but perhaps necessary—to escape the dialectics of supply and demand, which so solidly ground our nihilistic age because nearly anything can be made into a reasonable *price*, and nearly any desire a reasonable commodity.

Dreyfus, Kelly, and Thomson all give accounts wherein meaning is possible, even from within the system of capitalist commodification described here. For Thomson, it is possible for us to attenuate the rift-structure, presented by works of art, in order to bear forth new meanings. This means that attending to art is capable of changing even our fundamental sense of what is and what matters: of giving rise to new worlds.⁷² Likewise, for Dreyfus and Kelly, it is possible that multiple kinds of occasions we encounter are sites of the sacred, which serve as counter examples to our pervasive nihilism, demonstrating that meaning inheres in something other than our valuations. But they give no account of world-transition. I do not think Dreyfus and Kelly's sites of meaningfulness are without hope, nor that they are themselves impotent to the challenge of enframing, merely because they do not *in fact* threaten the nihilistic economy—the world—from which they arise. Rather, the question is whether shining moments, or series of them bound together by the threads of one's memory—even *if* they result in *one* meaningful life, in a meaningless world—is a sufficient challenge to that enframing which Heidegger thinks is ultimately *dangerous*. And I think, for reasons which will be elucidated below, that the answer to this question is 'no.' In short, when our experiences

⁷² See Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*

in general are predicated on our being in a world which at base relegates a large portion of the human population to the ranks of resources, any *meaningful* experiences we have are fundamentally predicated on the enframing—the narrowing away of possibilities by optimization—of *Dasein*. The world we inhabit—which offers up certain opportunities for meaning-making, always-already demarcated by the possibilities that inhere within that intelligibility—is currently only possible if some people have been made “resources standing by to be optimized.”⁷³

Dreyfus and Kelly’s conception of contemporary nihilism is parallel to Heidegger’s concept of technological enframing. Both concepts identify as the locus of contemporary meaninglessness the immanence of all meaning to human valuation—things are not in themselves meaningful, but accrue meaning in relation to our aims, values, etc. Both accounts infer from the “death of god” a death of the kinds of meaning-making structures which dominated other eras. God as the author of commandments, the prescriptive force defining the good life, disappears as religion fades into unnecessary.⁷⁴ This phenomenon is hardly questionable. While religion still plays a major role in the construction of our social norms—even in a country founded on the freedom of religion—the very freedom that proliferates its institutions implies that it is no longer the sole source of these norms that other, *elected* institutions must intervene. In democratic societies, in particular, it seems obvious that we *choose* the sources of our conceptions of the good life, and of the right action. But why should this make life seem meaningless? Dreyfus and Kelly point out that for Nietzsche, the revelation that our values are chosen

⁷³ See Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, p. 56-57

Thomson here reminds us that this is the *greatest danger* for Heidegger in “The Question Concerning Technology.”

⁷⁴ Dreyfus, H. and Kelly, S., *All Things Shining*, (New York: Free Press, 2011) p. 6-7, 21.

is a joyful one: a kind of liberation which saves us from the tyranny of otherworldly values, preserves the importance of embodied life, and even opens up radically new opportunities for creating values and living new lives. They point out that this does not elate most people. Rather, it leads to a kind of uneasy uncertainty—given no external valuator, what *reason* do we have for even our most important decisions, those decisions that might even come to define us?⁷⁵ The multitude of choices we think enmesh with one another to form the narrative of our lives seems arbitrary, because there is no external standard for determining their worth.⁷⁶ Our lives, therefore seem pointlessly chosen, and likely inferior to ones with external sources of values and meaning—we can infer this, I suppose, from the failure of all of our choices, the persistence of regret, even if we are supposed Nietzscheans. Because this failure and regret, if done in accord with edicts from some external valuator have value and meaning external to their worldly results and their results *for us*. They are good actions, even if they do not accomplish their aims, because the source of all good *wants* them.

But I would add to this that it is not the merely terror that we are living the wrong life—arising from the absence of any definitive means of justifying our actions—that makes this kind of nihilism so unattractive. It is the absolute certainty of the inadequacy of our systems of valuation and our interpretations of being—that inadequacy responsible for the epochality of history on Heidegger's account—which necessitates a transcendence narrative for contemporary nihilism. Simply put, if our nihilism subordinates all entities,

⁷⁵ See Dreyfus and Kelly. *All Things Shining*, p. 12.

⁷⁶ We might think here of Descartes' skepticism regarding the creation of some test that might verify one is awake; the development of this test and its application may have been dreamed! Here, the same problem dwells. Any evaluation of our lives or choices is immanent to them, refers only to the same tapestry of self-given values that gave rise to them. As we shall see, Dreyfus, Kelly, Thomson, and Heidegger all seem to indicate that external valuation is possible with the right kind of attunement to *entities* and events, in their intrinsically meaningful presence.

including ourselves, to our values and needs, and if our conception of our values and needs is necessarily immanent to our sense of what *is* and what *matters*, Heidegger's conception of history gives us good reason to believe that this sense might be so radically flawed—might abject, ignore, and ultimately be ruptured by other possibilities—then our very conception of ourselves might be inadequate, and that we might subordinate ourselves to ill-conceived notions. We might subordinate ourselves to demands we do not actually need to meet, the entities of the earth to needs we do not have, etc.

But, even more dangerously, the nihilistic conception of being is not vulnerable to anomalous data the way other, totalizing, conceptions have been. When the abjected emerges into the nihilistic and ruptures it, when a “shining” moment intervenes on the meaningless, contemporary *Dasein* does not seem bound to acknowledge the presence of forces outside itself. As indicated above, contemporary, truly nihilistic *Dasein*, is able—is bound, bred—to collapse this meaningful event into its own meaning-making strictures. It might acknowledge that it had not yet realized how much it cared about team sports, communal events, the quality of coffee, etc. But it need not propose that the value of these things, their meaningfulness, inheres in the things themselves. If Nietzsche is the inspiration for our contemporary nihilism, it does not do to merely remain *open* to possible sites of meaning. Any feeling I have of meaningfulness, on Nietzsche's account, might as well come from me. We must have an attunement that responds to these sites of meaning without subjectivizing them: an attunement that is, therefore, outside the explanatory powers of *our* intelligibility (which *would* subjectivize them). After all, and Dreyfus and Kelly would agree, we conceive of everything as being under our control: but this means even our sudden, seemingly mystical, inhibitions.

This is why I think the best indications of a way of undermining contemporary nihilism in *All Things Shining* come not from Dreyfus and Kelly's discussion of contemporary phenomena of meaning-making—which provide specific, incisive and *useful* counterexamples of this world view for the nihilist to cope with—but from their discussion of the collapsed world of the ancient Greeks: the attunements of another *world* are necessary, here, as attunements that have were not produced by and have never been subjected to the ontotheology all this discussion of the postmodern is meant to escape. In the ancient Greek world, according to Dreyfus and Kelly, “the best life is to be in sync with the gods,”⁷⁷ the plural here is crucial. Though polytheism is a hallmark of the ancient Greek world, and such an observation may seem banal, Dreyfus and Kelly shed light on something usually unnoticed in the Greek world: that there are *multiple* sources of meaning for the ancient Greeks. Moreover, these sources of meaning might well be—and even often are—in tension with one another. It was possible for the Greeks to radically undermine the value-structure they had a week ago at the approach of another god.

Fidelity in our contemporary, monotheistic, scheme makes mere *hypocrisy* of these oscillations and ambivalences in valuation. Fidelity, here, or truthfulness—whether it is to one *god* and his specific dictates, or to one interpretation of being and its subsequent values—allows for little experimentation with other sources of meaning. This is why shining moments are necessarily rare from within a nihilistic *world*. It is also why they are in danger of showing up always-already conquered by the world from which they emerge: explained without reference to any sacred source. But, faithfulness is different for the polytheist. Alignment with a particular god—a particular source of

⁷⁷ See Dreyfus and Kelly, *All Thing Shining*, p. 60

meaningfulness—is equally meaningful—even virtuous—for the polytheist, even if it means dishonoring another source of meaning. Where having a family, supporting your lover, raising your animals or children, etc. might be in tension with pursuing your career, bettering your talents, procuring your legacy or even loving more, the ancient Greek polytheist needed not *choose* in any permanent way one over the other. The responsibility of prioritization did not lay in her decisions, but in the appearance of the various gods to her during her life. Even the choice of which projects most defined her came from a source outside her control.⁷⁸ The modern intuition that we must prioritize the various projects that structure our lives reflects the leveling effect of a monotheistic, monosemic, metaphysics, which demands we be *consistent*. As we shall see below, I think that nihilism can easily achieve this consistency. Many monotheisms can achieve this consistency. I think we need a contemporary promiscuity of meaning that allows for the proliferation of meanings that endures inconsistency, rather than mere demonstrations of the untenability of a totalizing nihilism through shining counterexamples.

My reasons for favoring this Greek notion over “whooshing-up” are two-fold. As I have demonstrated above, “whooshing up” seems vulnerable to the intelligibility of the nihilist. And while the moment of this sort of mystical, Dionysian, inhibition might be outside the reach of our control, while we cannot—and *do* not, in those moments, ordinarily attempt to manipulate or optimize this shining, our current intelligibility does form our narrative reflection upon these events. The second reason, however, is deeper and does not rely on the inescapability of our intelligibility; it is the periodic nature, the outright rarity, of these “shining” events in a nihilistic worldview. The moment when we realize that the meaningfulness of a particular play in a game enchained us to others, that

⁷⁸ See Dreyfus and Kelly, *All Things Shining* p. 60

we did not choose this communion, that we did not have control of the event, and that it arises, falls and fades from memory, regardless of what we *want*, we see counterexamples to our metaphysics of meaningless arbitrary control, but a sadness and emptiness might persist and *will* return. We were once alleviated of our nihilism, only to return to it. This is why one disciple in the closing parable of *All Things Shining* lives a life of regret: he seeks out the shining things, and finds very few.⁷⁹ Not all meaning bearers—all nothings—*shine*, some cast shadows.⁸⁰

On the other hand, Dreyfus and Kelly's description of a diversity of meaning-makers in the Greek life presents a worldview that could never be totalizing. No one god makes meaning, nor does a particular entity or type of entity. And gods approach and recede from people, fading in and out of meaning-making capacities within *many* lives—proliferating meaning. This promiscuity is a better candidate for escaping nihilism than isolable and infinitely internalizable stimuli. Just as the sciences might rationalize away or even repress certain anomalies; or, even more, just as we are infinitely capable of repressing those desires and suspicions that drive our psychologies context, so too are we capable of shaking off the shining sacred. I do not wish to take up the idea that we should be polytheists of the ancient Greek stripe, here. Heidegger, after all, indicates that this might be impossible; “world decay can never be undone.”⁸¹ I only mean to indicate that it might take something more than a meaningful counterexample—an example of

⁷⁹ See Dreyfus and Kelly, *All Thing Shining*, p. 120.

⁸⁰ Perhaps, even *all* shining casts shadows. It certainly does not seem possible—nor even desirable—to live in a world of pure light. Impossible because of the kinds of beings we are, because such an intelligibility would eradicate *us*: the very condition of possibility for an intelligibility at all. But what is meant here is that the most elucidating phenomena might well be those which mire us in meaninglessness and insignificance. Phenomena like existential death, which strips us of any ability to connect with the world, for instance, demonstrate the capacity for meaning-making, even in meaning's utter annihilation.

⁸¹ See Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art,” *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 20.

meaningfulness outside myself—to combat contemporary nihilism, and that this must be a *belief in*, rather than an *openness to* multiple sources of meaning. As we shall see, Thomson’s postmodern is more akin to this Greek notion, but possible without ontological time-travel.

II) Heidegger and Mood, Ratcliffe and Existential Feeling

Because ‘world’ is roughly the intelligibility which *Dasein* inhabits, changes in world are bivalent: simultaneously and coextensively effecting the psychological self-understanding of *Dasein* as well as the broader social-political, religious and institutional structures in which this understanding is mired. One valence of epochal shifts as Heidegger interprets them is the larger, external, scale. Epochal shifts might include paradigmatic changes in science, the emergence of new works of art and new possible meanings for these works, and even social and political change as an emergent intelligibility unearths yet unseen possibilities for *Dasein* in general. The other valence seems to be *Dasein*’s comportment to this world. A work of art, in setting up a world, provides the fundamental conceptual scaffolding on which all our interpretations of entities are possible, making some projects, values, identities, and futural investments possible, while excluding others. In demarcating what it means—what it could possibly mean—to be a human being, the world set forth by the work also sets forth a schema of possible comportments, attitudes, and other supposedly “internal” machinations with which *Dasein* might navigate this world. Heidegger calls these omnipresent states “states-of-mind” or “moods”, and though we know moods to shift and change, to be wildly contingent and often utterly misplaced, he thinks that they are nonetheless *integral* to

intelligibility; “Mood is a primordial kind of Being for *Dasein*, in which *Dasein* is disclosed to itself *prior to* all cognition and volition, and *beyond* their range of disclosure.”⁸²

There are a couple of important alterations in our generally shared notion of intelligibility, inchoate in Heidegger’s claims about the primacy of mood. First, it seems that cognition, volition, and our other various mental processes—generally considered to have a more reliable link to reality—are not only reliant upon and always founded by the presence of some mood, but Heidegger thinks mood is capable of disclosure *beyond* their scope. The boundaries of rational inquiry are not the boundaries of our possible encounters with the truth, because mood is capable of *aletheia* beyond these borders. For Heidegger, then, we are perpetually in various states that grant access to the truth—even those truths upon which the verification procedures of rational enquiry are grounded. Second, the most rudimentary phenomenology of mood will indicate its near constant vacillations. The irreconcilable differences between our various moods, taken together with their often rapid succession, seems to indicate that the truth they disclose is either inexhaustibly plural or ever-changing. Heidegger says that worldhood is “never the same from day to day,” in *Being and Time*, but taken with this account of world in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” we can see that the contingency of world here is itself almost dizzyingly polysemic.⁸³ World is subject to momentary change on the basis of mood (and my later discussion of Ratcliffe will make this all the more compelling), but it is also subject to epochal change. World results from the unveiling of certain possibilities of the earth, or of being, but it is also the revelation of lived significances that haunt the dying.

⁸² See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.175.

⁸³ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 177.

The contingency of the world, indicated here, has to do with its relation to the inexhaustible polysemy of the earth—and the individual nothings—which institute, constitute, and support it. As we shall see, this contingency of world might make psychological diagnosis difficult—or even undesirable—in the case of delusion.⁸⁴

Perhaps this is because moods *are* omnipresent—even the most everyday, level mood is nonetheless a mood, according to Heidegger. If mood is an unshakable component of human experience, and if we are the only kinds of being with a robust intelligibility, then mood—no matter how erratic—is *necessary* to intelligibility. The mistake we have made about mood is to relegate it to the status of one psychological phenomenon among many, allowing it to “sink to the level of accompanying phenomena.”⁸⁵

The erratic nature of mood is only a problem if we take ‘intelligible’ to mean something like ‘comprehensible’: if we take our understanding of the world, in this sense, to be wrapped up with something like a genuine representation of this world, wherein the *one* way, and that this stable reality elicits our *proper* reaction to actual states of affairs. This approximates the correspondence theory of truth—truth as *adequation*—against which Heidegger set his theory of truth as *aletheia*—the disclosure of possibilities, rather than the exposure or matching up of actualities.⁸⁶ A correspondence theory of truth, it seems, would favor the least affective mood, the levellest head, because the affects seem to skew our experience of raw facts. This is not to say, I suppose, that mood is not also of

⁸⁴ In fact, Heidegger thinks the positive character of the capacity for delusion is that delusions break down the world, making the ready-to-hand—or the easy, taken for granted way in which we normally navigate the world and our tools, our kind of lived muscle memory—show itself in its ever-changing worldhood. Delusion is, to some degree a good thing for Heidegger, because it has the power to demonstrate the contingency of even the most unnoticed, the most mundane, the most reliable, aspects of our intelligibility.

⁸⁵ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 178.

⁸⁶ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 260-261.

importance to such a view, rather the importance of mood within this theory of truth is reduced to producing a kind of skepticism regarding our interactions with the world, a reason to doubt our correct interpretation of events, etc. Our everyday language betrays such a popular assent to this correspondence metaphysics. We might dismiss someone in the case that some mood—taken as independent of the state of affairs—causes her to “overreact,” or “underreact.” We might even resent the encroachment of the other’s supposedly internal and private processes into a shared, worlded, experience.

For Heidegger, however, moods are a necessary fundament for any such interaction or interpretation; “... A state of mind not only discloses Dasein in its thrownness and its submission to that world... it is itself the existential kind of Being in which Dasein constantly surrenders itself to the ‘world’ and lets the ‘world’ matter to it.”⁸⁷ The attitude that submits our mood—and our reactions to our world—to the *appropriateness* discussed above fundamentally relies upon a metaphysics where mind and world stand in opposition, where ‘truth’ means adequation, and where only one mood—the objective one—has the appropriate connection to reality for any kind of verification. On Heidegger’s account, the affects have a much more complicated relationship with the truth, because the truth is not exhausted in *what is* in the world. Rather, the truth is, for Heidegger, that nothingness of possibilities, the earth. Mood, it seems, is capable of picking out certain inchoate hints of this truth, rather than merely presenting things as they are in some “objective” sense. “*Essentially a state-of-mind implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something*

⁸⁷ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 178.

that matters to us.”⁸⁸ Fear, for instance, possibilizes the fearfulness of some entities in the world, where before the threat might well have lain dormant.⁸⁹

Alterations in mood do not undermine our ability to see things as they are—they do not compromise our truthful interpretation of the world—on Heidegger’s account. Rather, they simply attenuate us to certain possibilities that *in fact* belong to the entities. Mood is one constitutive element of our being the world that allows entities to show up for us at all. This claim to veracity seems easily dismissed. If we apply even ancient examples purported to demonstrate the unreliability of the senses to mood, we can see that mood might lead us to *mistaken* interpretations. If we are in a state of anxiety, for instance, because we have been walking in a darkened, noisy wood, we might recoil at some shadow or other *objectively* innocuous entity, convinced for a fleeting moment that this entity harbors some threat against us—that it is a dangerous animal, or a lurking person. The mood responsible for this assessment of the situation is both *objectively causeless*—there seems to be no actual threat in the wood at all—and leads to a *false* interpretation of which entities *in fact* surround us. How can it be the case that the inert shadow in its own truth, as shadow, harbors the fearful? Should we really expand this entity’s *own* nothing to include even the foibles of our changing affects?

This question seems especially troubling in cases where we encounter seemingly inert entities as charged with *meaning*, so removed from their everyday nature: this meaning seems to come from us *alone* and not from entities around us, or from the world. It seems that this mood of mounting anxiety is environed by circumstances completely separate from the innocent entity—the inadequacy of our night-vision, the adrenaline-

⁸⁸ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 177.

⁸⁹ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 180.

bound, innate, machinations of our survival instinct, the echoes of childhood stories through our memories of childhood stories, our biological and cultural habituation away from the teeming, wild, nocturnal world—are solely to blame for the way a particular shadow raises the hair and accelerates the heart. Especially because, in most cases of such a fright, we would say we “*realize*” within seconds that the entity which first burdened us with the palpable presence of our mortality is *nothing more* than some inert object. Its frightening possibilities flee from it the second that a more *accurate* interpretation normally taken to mean—a less affective interpretation—prevails. In other words, the affective interpretation was *wrong* about the entity it perceived; the shadow had, after all, no threatening capacities.

I think it is important to note that Heidegger is not committed to affirming every cause of fear as an *actual* threat to life and limb. We must first understand how it is that the fearful capacity, or a power of sadness, or of joy, etc. might exist *at all*, in order to understand the relation of Heidegger’s moods to truth. It seems correct to say that even the most destructive force imaginable would not be *fearsome* in any robust sense if there were no entities capable of *fearing* it. Rather, its capacities would be relegated to those of destruction—of brute material change. Without some kind of mooded agency, no entity has the capacities associated with mood. It seems, then, that a capacity to end a *Dasein*’s life—a mortal capacity—and a capacity to remind one of one’s mortality and thus to *cause fear* are entirely separable. In fact, we might make the reverse argument, and note that a person living in the middle Ages could not fear *cancer*, though it certainly had the capacity to kill people of that epoch, and certainly most people feared their death during this time. The example above, then, does not show us that the shadow has less of a

capacity to *cause fear*, or that it is in itself somehow ontologically exempt from being fearsome. The *mistake* made is not that *Dasein* sees a fear-producing capacity in some entity which, in fact, has none. Rather, *Dasein* makes a mistake about *other* capacities the entity might have—the capacity to end a life, to disfigure, harm, maim, etc.—but this mistake demonstrates, at most, that we have *no reason* to fear an entity, not that it is not frightening.⁹⁰ An entity has the capacity to frighten *just because* it succeeds in frightening.

We might still think that this analysis is a little unsatisfactory. Perhaps it is the case that we are not afraid *of* the shadow at all. This question of intentionality plagues any discussion of the affects. What are our moods *about*?⁹¹ For Heidegger, moods seem to be *about* the world to some degree, because they are both omnipresent and necessary for our being in the world at all. But, affective states like fear, which seem to have *specific* objects, seem to be more about entities in the world than about the world in general. This intentional trajectory supports the claim above—that entities may be fearsome—but does not answer a perhaps more commonsense and certainly more psychoanalytical objection that our affective states are seldom *actually about* specific entities. Rather, there are foundational anxieties, drives, and schemas to which our specific, episodic, affective states might be reduced. Freud's brief essay on the uncanny presents one such argument, attaching some seemingly idiosyncratic and specific phobias

⁹⁰ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.180.

⁹¹ Here, I mirror the language Merleau-Ponty employs to discuss intentionality in *Phenomenology of Perception* rather than the "as-structure" of *Being and Time*, but we could just as easily say that we take the harmless shadow "as" a threat in this example. About-language is simply more appealing here because it doesn't seem to require us to attribute any kind of identity or threatening content to the shadow, which we encounter without these conscious processes in the phenomenology provided here. About-language gives us the opportunity to explore the fearful *orientation* toward the startling shadow without our having taken it *to be* anything at all.

to more general, formative, mental structures such as the fear of castration.⁹² We might think that a fear of death or of pain, which we carry with us as an innate, subconscious, foundation to all conscious thought and episodic affectivity, is actually what emerges in the example of the fearsome shadow, rather than some ontological possibility of the shadow *itself*.

The response to such an objection is two-fold. The first part of it is to absolutely assent to the claim that something about *Dasein* is *in fact* revealed by all the episodic affects and broader existential orientations I will be discussing in this paper. Affective life is *bivalently* disclosive, on Heidegger's account and my own, and so these accounts find no tension within the commonsense and psychoanalytic insight that there is an inward intentionality at the heart of our affects.⁹³ The second part of this response is, however, considerably more complicated. A psychologically deflationary account of the affects reduces them to one disclosive valence. But we might have good reason to think that these valences are in fact co-implicated. For instance, why would we develop a universal fear of death if death were not an ontologically extant possibility for us—awaiting us *in the world*? Is it not the case that even these most basic fears, operating at a generally subconscious level, tell us something about the *world*? And, further more, does the phenomenology of I have provided of a nocturnal startling really lead us to the conclusion that we flinched away from our own *mortality*? I think not. Without the inward disclosure, we cannot recognize our affects, this much is clear. But without the outward valence, it does not seem certain that we would even *have* episodic affects at

⁹²Freud, Sigmund, "The "Uncanny," (1919), p. 14.

⁹³ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 178.

all.⁹⁴ Certainly, we do not think that our emotional engagement with the world tells us nothing about other entities when we have *correctly* apprehended them, in terms of correspondence truth. We would not think it is an error to say that our love for another discloses what is loveable about them in some way—even if what is loveable about them has something to do with the most basic drives of our mind. This objection seems only to work when we make some *mistake* about what an entity *is*, an issue we have already dealt with at length.

But, what use are the facets of entities disclosed in our various moods? How much closer does recoiling at a shadow get us to an understanding of that entity? Obviously the persistence of mood is, for Heidegger, simply something we *must* deal with, regardless of whether it has any particular utility for the formation of coherent and truthful intelligibilities, or adequate understandings of entities. It is simply the case that, as the kind of being we are, we *do* navigate the world always-already mooded. But, I think there is an argument to be made—taking Heidegger’s discussions of *angst* and fear as a starting point—that mood is not only a *necessary* condition for the construction of intelligibilities (no matter how comprehensive or how inadequate) but that it is *one* way in which our worlds might become more sensitive to the “being of beings”, and thus approach the kind of postmodernity envisioned as a promise against technological enframing: a world, sensitive to the polysemy of entities, to their ontological status as inexhaustibly possible rich-nothings.

This means that, for Heidegger, part of the veracity of mood is the polysemy and changeability inherent in mood—an insight impossible within a correspondence theory. Though the contingency of affective life has traditionally been thought to make the

⁹⁴ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 182.

emotional judgment an unreliable one, this assessment of mood relies upon the presupposition that there is some *one* state of affairs, which must be understood in *one* correct and objective way. Any internal, mental, process which might remove us from an objective interpretation—one which might be verified by others with entirely different moods at the time, investments, histories, and perspectives—removes us from *the truth* of the matter. When truth is, however, taken to mean something more like the polysemy of possibility, when the earthy, obfuscated, and unconceptualizable is taken to be the origin of all possible loci of verification, then we see that the objective interpretation has no more attachment to the truth of a state of affairs than any other. In fact, when we have the opportunity to encounter an entity in a variety of moods, we have the opportunity to see it in a variety of ways, but little evidence that one interpretation is *truer* than another. Rather, on Heidegger's account and mine, our mood might bracket some possibilities *belonging* to an entity, allowing others to come forth. Each mood in which we encounter an entity does the same. If our faculty of memory is reliable, what we realize is not that we have never managed to have a true or accurate encounter with that entity, but that it is perhaps impossible to completely understand it: that it has many equally true interpretations.

Take the city in which you live. It might, at first, seem intimidating and threatening, an uncanny home to you, your pets, and the objects you own. After a while, this feeling fades into the emergence of a daily routine, the emergence of a new familiarity. Only after many years can it become the site of sudden waves of nostalgia, and a new sense of the uncanny. Can we say, in any robust sense, that any of these interpretations is *truer* than the last? I think not, and none of them corresponds in any

meaningful sense to the *actual* city. It seems more likely the case that each of these interpretations of one's environment tells them something about *it*, as well as something about the experiencing *Dasein*. Perhaps our inclination to deny the veracity of moods has also to do with their bivalent revealing. Mood might tell us something about entities other than ourselves, but it simultaneously discloses something about *Dasein*. If truth is adequation, this capacity of mood seems ancillary at best—detrimental at worst.

The outward valence of mood's disclosive capacities indicates that mood is responsible in part for how the world shows up for us, even if the mood itself is never presented as an object of our conscious reflection. Ratcliffe abandons 'mood' language in order to talk about this very kind of being-toward-the-world, which shows up as an object for thought only when it has changed in some way. This is because 'emotion' and 'mood' language tends to describe some *notable* mental phenomenon, rather than the kind of orientation toward the world which serves as a condition of possibility for the presence of that world, its entities and events. While Heidegger might say that the neutral every day *mood* that we generally inhabit—this most unnotable and average affect—is responsible at some fundamental level for the intelligibility we share, Ratcliffe will call this orientation toward the world an 'existential feeling'. The abandonment for usual affect-language like 'mood' and 'emotion' for 'existential feeling' language accomplishes two important aims. First, it draws an important distinction between noticed, episodic and protracted feelings, which—though they may shape our interpretations of the world and call forth a great number of possibilities within it—are not *necessary* backdrops for our being-in-the-world. Secondly, in calling these basic, unnoticed moods 'feelings' Ratcliffe reminds us that the mooded attunement necessary for our being in the world is *also* a

bodily orientation. Our embodiment is also central to the taken-for-granted, upon which all other aspects of intelligibility show up.

Before we move on to Ratcliffe's own discussion of changed existential feeling, I would like to propose that changed existential feeling might have at least two causes, only one of which does Ratcliffe address. Ratcliffe discusses what I will call 'intrinsic' changes in existential feeling, like those that occur in psychological illness. What I would like to suggest is that there are extrinsic causes of changed existential feeling, and that such changes are inevitable on the precipice of epochal world-collapse. After all, how could one not *feel* strange about a world that both offer up new possibilities—perhaps even once impossible possibilities—while abjecting those possibilities that once characterized the mundane and expected? This being the case, I think that Ratcliffe's discussions of intrinsic changes in existential feeling might give us a better idea of what it might be like to live at the precipice of epochal world-collapse as characterized by Heidegger. This discussion of changed existential feeling will lead us directly to a discussion of world collapse in art, the existential orientations of relic-*Daseins*, and mirror-stage misrecognition as it bears on the changing tide of social intelligibilities. New worlds and new possibilities make appropriate new existential feelings.

The essentially positive character of the capacity for delusion... it is precisely when we see the 'world' unsteadily and fitfully in accordance with our moods that the ready to hand shows itself in its specific worldhood, which is never the same from day to day.⁹⁵

Ratcliffe's discussion of the Capgras delusion—a condition wherein the patient is convinced that those closest to her have been replaced, that her family and friends are

⁹⁵ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 177.

imposters—demonstrates just how fundamental existential feeling is to intelligibility as a whole. Ratcliffe points out that analyses of delusions in general have historically taken them to be conditions wherein the patient affirms certain, false, propositional claims, regardless of any reasonable evidence to the contrary. Delusions are taken to be incredibly stubborn *beliefs* in most of the literature coming from clinical psychology, presupposing truth as adequation.⁹⁶ This means that a person may have a particular delusion without any change to her other beliefs or to her general belief-forming process. Rather, a *particular kind of content* arises and persists in the delusional patient, despite the otherwise normal function of her other cognitive capacities.⁹⁷ Part of the illness, therefore, becomes the isolation of this proposition “my mother has been replaced with a robot” from these cognitive faculties. As discussed above, Heideggerian ‘mood’ calls into question the kind of verification which makes this thought a delusion, in the first place. While the proposition is false in terms of a correspondence theory of truth, this does not mean that it is incapable of revealing something about the world, and about *Dasein* more generally.⁹⁸ For instance, the false belief in Capgras delusion seems to at least indicate that a person’s having all the same attributes, memories, know-how, etc. does not necessarily constitute a personal identity—a good imposter would have these too—and so

⁹⁶ See Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 50.

⁹⁷ See Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being*, p. 142-145.

⁹⁸ See Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being*, p.156-157.

Ratcliffe, like Heidegger understands persons in terms of their possibilities. The different world the delusional person inhabits—like the different historical epochs Heidegger discusses—offer up novel possibilities, inconceivable in the previously inhabited (non-pathological) world, but at the expense of some of the possibilities the old world offered. As a result, the Capgras patient seems cut-off from a great deal of the interpersonal possibilities that once constituted her world. The relationships which once offered the largest set of these interpersonal possibilities are the ones that cause them the most obsessive distress, because they are the ones most obviously lacking, because these relationships once constituted such a great portion of their world and self-understanding—of the patient’s possibilities—where the possibilities of strangers were at no point really, meaningfully accessible to them.

the delusion perhaps indicates what philosophers already know: that personal identity and our *Mitsein* are immensely complicated issues. Ratcliffe's analysis gives us at least one possible mode of such a delusion's revealing. If we take into account that existential feeling is fundamentally necessary for the emergence of imposters—or any other entities—within a patient's world, we have to admit that a person with Capgras delusion does not share *our* world. Simply put, we ordinarily know that our loved ones have not been replaced because such a possibility is not *provided for* by the world—the intelligibility and logic—we ordinarily inhabit.

Ratcliffe points out that if something in our existential feeling changes such that this possibility arises for us at all, then our intelligibility as a whole has changed. We now inhabit another world with different possibilities. We now inhabit a world with a novel *logic*.⁹⁹ It is not the case that patients suffering from Capgras delusion maintain some *belief* which is not permeable to contrary evidence, while all of their other beliefs remain logically founded. Rather, the world which fosters the possibility of these imposters is an intelligibility unto itself—wrapping contrary evidence (she remembers some private conversation, way back in your past) into affirmations of that delusional possibility (the force that replaced her has been watching all along, of course they would program her to know stuff like this, they don't want me to catch them).¹⁰⁰ The delusional belief is just as permeable to evidence as any other belief, but the delusional person inhabits an intelligibility wherein justification for a certain class of beliefs is changed. Delusional logic is not an abyss or a lack, but its own *separate logic*, emerging organically from the *separate world*—and embodied relation to that world—the patient now occupies.

⁹⁹ See Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being*, p.162-163.

¹⁰⁰ See Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being*, p.162.

But, why should we believe that the Capgras patient inhabits a *different world*, rather than thinking that there is some *particular* defect in their thought-processes? Does it not seem that the content of the delusion is fairly specific, perhaps too specific to arise from an entirely altered existential position, from an entirely different intelligibility? It seems odd to think that the patient inhabits an entirely separate world from the rest of us in cases where she continues to perform normally in her professional life, daily activities, etc., wherein the only affect of her delusions is focused on a few people very close to her. Ratcliffe argues that conceptions of delusion which take experience to be a kind of input system, separate from but fundamental to the formation of beliefs about the world, fail to recognize the taken-for-granted existential orientation, which operates as the necessary backdrop for all experience.¹⁰¹ As a result, these conceptions of belief formation fall prey to the very same questions I've raised here. If experience were fundamental to belief, why wouldn't the delusional patient's experience of all other people lead them to the conclusion that *everyone* they encounter is an imposter? Why would one kind of within-world input suffer diminished truth-value, while the others remain unchanged? We would have to conclude that it is not a failure of the patient to *experience* the right way, but that there is something wrong with a very particular kind of belief formation, which seems to undermine the connections drawn between experience and belief.¹⁰² Ratcliffe's explanation is not self-undermining in this way. Part of being in a world is perceiving its *possibilities*. What we take by and large to be *impossible* is predicated on the way we take our world to be, and how we find ourselves in it. My belief that I cannot fly to the sun is just as reliant upon this backdrop as is my conviction that my spouse is flesh-and-

¹⁰¹ See Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being*, p. 51.

¹⁰² See Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being*, p. 50-52.

blood, continuous with himself, etc. Were I able, all of the sudden, to leap from this chair and fly past the boundaries of our atmosphere, I would inhabit a different world—a world where this is possible—merely because a world *is its possibilities and impossibilities*.

It seems, then, that the definition of intelligibilities we have set out here allows for no kind of certainty. It seems, once again, that anything might be *true* in so far as it is *possible*, and that even the most pathological alterations of mood and existential feeling might have some kind of truth. But, I do not think it is obvious that we are committed at this point to saying that the Capgras patient's imposters "really are" robotic spies. Rather, we are committed to acknowledging that any intelligibility is a miasma of possibility, that some possibilities must be abjected in order for others to structure our experience, and that even our best reasoning is *on the basis* of this epochal and intrapersonal bracketing. The intelligibility we inhabit is vulnerable to intrinsic alterations of our attunement, and to extrinsic changes of discovery. In my conclusion, I will address the possibility that even pathological attunements can be disclosive of certain, *real*, possibilities of our shared world, without drastically undermining the veracity of this shared world, and try to conceive of living in an intelligibility without this bracketing.

III) Mirror-Stage Misrecognition of The “Human” in Art: The Triumph of Religion and God as Ego

The subject presumed to know, that basic myth of Western culture... can only be God Himself: a reflection in which the “knowledge” of consciousness contemplates itself. A phantom potency produced by the narcissistic, self-inflating spell of the mirror.¹⁰³

Lacan’s *The Triumph of Religion* gives us yet another account of the ways in which we protect ourselves from the real. God, like the ego, and like the “myth” of existential transcendent authenticity, becomes a protective barrier between human beings and the real: a barrier without which we would face a proliferation of the psychological ailments that encounters with the real potentiate. Religion will triumph over the ever growing sovereignty science has over the truth, because this dominance of the scientific gives human beings no evidence that there is any *meaning* to existence. “... Meaning is forever a fiction... psychoanalysis has taught us that.”¹⁰⁴

This meaninglessness is likely an expression of the Real: likely true, but not a revelation that Lacan thinks we—as a species, as symbolically constituted subjects—are likely to accept. Because the Real science and psychoanalysis deal with—one that it not inherently meaningful, but rather contingent and meaningless—is not a reality, no matter its truth, human beings may comfortably inhabit, religion remains viable, and even is capable of thriving even when it is at odds with science. Religion begins with the presupposition that the Real is inherently *meaningful*. Science has, in a sense, given a

¹⁰³ Shoshana Felman, *Writing and Madness*, (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1978), p.121.

¹⁰⁴ See Felman, *Writing and Madness*, p. 120.

boon to religion, on Lacan's account. It has plumbed observed phenomena to their depths and found no *telos*, no meaning. If "religion has always been all about giving meaning to things that previously were natural," then we can infer that the natural is inherently without meaning for Lacan and that religion is perhaps *not natural*.¹⁰⁵ Science can only reveal an ontology, which is driven without purpose, a meaningless foundation for the phenomena we experience and the lives we lead. Religion allows us to protect ourselves against this encroaching nihilism—by calling upon the ultimate, celestial, meaning-maker. This is why religion is "invincible". It is capable of making meaning where there is none, and for Lacan this is humanity's desperate need.¹⁰⁶

Lacan notes, in "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function" that mirror stage phenomena also characterize humanity's encounters with works of art; "This gestalt is also replete with the correspondences that unite the *I* with the statue onto which man projects himself, the phantoms that dominate him and the automaton with which the world of his own making tend to achieve fruition in an ambiguous relation." Our identification with works of art, and the place we accord ourselves in the world, is parallel to the misrecognition that characterizes the mirror stage, reifying the ego as both permanent and inescapable but at the same time alienating.¹⁰⁷ Lacan's mention of statues alongside phantoms and automatons makes this all the more clear—the work of art, as it functions for us in aesthetic experience, does not function *as* work of art, but rather as an inert *semblance*, or reproduction—or reflection—of an *actual, objective* entity.

Because the real is such a site of negative affect and even pathological disorders of the mind, a brief encounter with it is responsible for the existence of psychoanalysis in

¹⁰⁵ See Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁶ See Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁷ See Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function", *Ecrits*, p. 76-77.

our world on Lacan's account. "For a little while, people were able to perceive what the intrusion of the real is. The analyst remains there. He is a symptom."¹⁰⁸ But, where analysis has *failed* to cure the lasting neuroses of an age discontented by its encounter with the real—failed to make meaning out of meaninglessness and so assuage the anxieties of humanity—religion will be necessary to cure it, by "drowning the symptom in meaning". Psychoanalysis may have a difficult time surviving the religious proliferation of meanings because it is linked to the real as the site of the very disorders it is intended to treat.¹⁰⁹

There is, again, a seeming parallel here between Lacan and Heidegger. Heidegger thinks that when the meanings that founded a world run out, when they cease to meaningfully ground and make intelligible the lives of the *Dasein* that refer to them—whether due to scientific discovery, the historical intervention of different ideas from different cultures, or the initially limited scope and possibility of these structures of intelligibility—the new conception of being that supplants it is a new "god".¹¹⁰ Even if this god is immanent to the world, material, even explicitly human in origin, it is a god nonetheless. Why? Because it does precisely what Lacan thinks Christianity does: makes everything coherent, intelligible, and meaningful to us. The only difference, here, is again ontological. Every new god has an equal ontological status to the last, on Heidegger's

¹⁰⁸ See Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, p. 67.

¹⁰⁹ See Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, p. 67.

For Lacan, the survival of psychoanalysis is as a kind of alternative treatment for the contemporary ailment. As such, the future of psychoanalysis is a "limping along" "at the margins" of science and religion, an alternative to either medication or conversion, as they are prescribed within these more dominant paradigms. Analysis, because it involves—to some degree—interpretation (even interpretation which might be meaningful in some novel way) provides a kind of answer for the meaning-addicted who find no solace in religion, for instance, but who cannot abide the utter and certain nihilism of the sciences (perhaps especially when then are applied to the meaning-making center of human experience—the mind.)

¹¹⁰ See Heidegger, "Age of the World Picture," *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 85.

account. Each picks up on Being, at least in part. But, for Lacan, meaning making anesthetizes us to the real: protects us from the disease of an encounter with it. Gods are not partial truths, but truths just the same, for Lacan, as they are for Heidegger. Rather, gods are contingent, frail, reifications of equally contingent and frail structures of intelligibility. It is this very frailty of meaning-making structures that makes psychoanalysis possible on Lacan's account. Analysis leads to the kinds of encounter with the Real that breakdown these structures. The difference, however, between analysis and existential death seems to be that the analyst is not interested in replacing old meanings—resolute authenticity does not replace the inauthentic—rather, the analysand experience undergoes a kind of long-term crucible in therapy meant to remove the enchanted, the sacred, and other vestiges of the intrinsically meaningful.

At the heart of each of these accounts is misrecognition. But, for Heidegger, this misrecognition is not *necessary* as it is for Lacan. It is merely a historical *fact* that all of the gods to this point have failed to bring us into a complete encounter with being, that worlds have been metaphysical. For Heidegger, “Metaphysics grounds and age in that, through a particular conception of beings and through a particular apprehension of truth, it provides that age with the ground of its essential shape.”¹¹¹ Because all metaphysics have, to this point, been misrecognitions, all ages have suffered rupturing by the real. But, Heidegger does however think it is possible for our encounters with everyday entities to reveal what is most real, for us to construct our very conceptions of these entities in terms of this only momentarily abjected basis of all existence. And that this might happen in our encounter with the great work of art, if our comportment is just right. Since “art is history in its essential sense: it is the ground of history,” for Heidegger, we

¹¹¹ See Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture” *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 57.

need only encounter a work of art which reveals the earth phenomenon, as inexhaustible, in order to construct a new intelligibility or a new age which objects nothing, which possibilizes entities, and integrates the supramundane realm of Being-as-such with the everyday.¹¹²

For Lacan, such an experience of the real as a whole would necessitate the violation of a *law*. Or, rather, that this law change.¹¹³ It is a matter of law—in the scientific sense—that the real always escapes our conceptualization, haunts us, and most importantly creates a neurotic desire for the imaginary. Given the nature of Heidegger’s earth, it is hard to imagine what it might be like to live in this “postmodern” intelligibility, wherein everything shows up to us in terms of its possibilities, wherein choosing one interaction with an entity perspicuously precludes a whole constellation of other possible interactions, wherein any particular interpretation closes off a swirling, teeming, mass of others, all equally deserving of our attention. Even if the real were as integral to our conceptualizations as it is on Heidegger’s account, we can see how being constantly exposed to it may be difficult for us: may produce a kind of Sartrean nausea, or even Heideggerian anxiety, from which we would desperately like to flee into a monosemic conceptualization. Whether the real is noumenal, scientific, or integrated inchoately into experience—teeming with possibilities we might encounter, bound to objectivity and calculation, or completely impossible—we can see why Lacan thinks we must first *learn* to live with the real: why human beings will have to undergo a

¹¹² See Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 49.

¹¹³ See Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, p.81-82.

transformative process (and education of any kind is certainly transformative) in order to withstand even the progress of science.¹¹⁴

It seems like this Heideggerian account of the artwork as a god—as an inaugurator of intelligibilities—might be subordinated to the account of misrecognition that we have put forth throughout this paper. Because the work seems to *mean* something to us, it comes to resemble us. Perhaps we simply identify with the apparent meaning in the work, since we are inherently meaning-makers—the only meaning-makers, on Lacan’s account. If we misrecognize ourselves—even the very meaning of our lives—in the work of art, then the god is like the ego. It is impossible for us to have an intelligibility without it, but it is ultimately an incomplete construction. We will see in the next section what this might mean for the individual work of art, its role in society, and the way it fundamentally forms a kind of collective ego.

IV) The Hunger Artist: Boredom, The Real, and Truth

Franz Kafka’s short story “The Hunger Artist” begins with an account of the decline of an artist’s career. The art of starvation, we are told at the story’s onset, no longer has an audience. Different art forms have been deemed more relevant, more culturally viable, and the pale and withering torment of expressive anorexia has come—if not to disgust, at least—to bore every possible patron.¹¹⁵ Kafka says that this change in public opinion has led to a different world, one from the vantage of which once enthralled spectators now

¹¹⁴ See Felman, *Writing and Madness*, p. 125.

In *The Triumph of Religion*, Lacan thinks that modern sciences treat the real as neither noumenal, nor bound to experience (phenomenological.) The epistemology of modern science grants knowledge of sometimes even unobservable phenomena, unchaining the Real from experience without denying epistemological access.

¹¹⁵ See Kafka, “The Hunger Artist,” *Franz Kafka, The Complete Stories*, p.273

“fail(ed) to understand themselves.”¹¹⁶ The value of the hunger artist’s work is incomprehensible, unintelligible, baffling, after the onset of a new world, and this is because the truth that his fasting set forth, insofar as it set forth some truth, has decayed. The aesthetic experience that once came with watching his performances—a self-understanding, perhaps as art so often provides—decays, becomes inaccessible, and this is because these performances organized an irrevocably decayed world.

It is hard to find any real-world examples of this kind of change in the public perception of art *forms*. Certainly particular techniques, instantiations, and mediums move in and out of the cultural spotlight as our general sensibilities change, but it is seldom the case that *painting itself*, or *music generally*, etc. come to be deemed illegitimate or irrelevant modes of expression. It is not the case, in the context of this story that other, artistic, uses of the human body have come to supplant the art of starvation, either. Perhaps, following Heidegger, we could say that it is not the medium, nor even the form of art which has become passé at the onset of Kafka’s story, but the truth his protagonist’s malnutrition once expressed. Perhaps he has lived and worked on the precipice of a new *relevant truth*, a new misrecognition of our humanity, which no longer has the room—no matter how small—to accommodate him.

Let us return to this attunement of *boredom*, with which spectators now confront the hunger artist. Before the aesthetic sensibilities of his time turned against him, the hunger artist produced trauma and admiration. He was tempted with food—an act of legitimating sadism, to be sure—but much more an act of desperation on the part of the spectator. If the hunger artist eats, we might think, then he is no hunger artist at all.

¹¹⁶ See Kafka, “The Hunger Artist,” *Franz Kafka, The Complete Stories*, p.273

Whatever facets of the real we might be able to read in the contours of his protruding bones might be forgotten. For Lacan and Heidegger alike, the eruption of the real into everyday experience is a traumatic event. Heidegger first calls such a phenomenon ‘death’, the very phenomenon at the heart of our most persistent and basic attunement of *angst*—dread.¹¹⁷ This same rupturing of the mundane by the supramundane, by the fundamental ontological abyss of pure possibility is later credited with the annihilation of intelligibilities and the inauguration of new worlds. Confrontation with the earth is apocalyptic. For Lacan, analysts are themselves *symptoms* of our having contact with the real, truth events are so powerfully traumatic that they require the global emergence of healers of the subjectivity and the eventual triumph of god over the fundamental *meaninglessness* of a reality faithfully and scientifically presented. No matter how we have, to this point, conceived of ourselves or of our world, we cannot handle *the truth*: our entire concepts and the explanatory power they have over the real are ultimately vulnerable to the real. We could see why both thinkers put forth an account by which we avoid such a *radical* unstructuring of the concepts by which we navigate the world: in *fleeing* into inauthenticity, for Heidegger, and in the formation and policing of the ego, and the eventual triumph of the imaginary in religion for Lacan. If the hunger artist’s work was once true, then we have good reason to put some meat on his bones—to obfuscate what he unveils.

The recession of this desperation, this negation, of the hunger artist’s work into boredom seems to indicate that the truth in his sinews has somehow become less *real*—a law that has changed, that it has lost its status as a law, perhaps. The spectator no longer has the reflexive impulse to protect herself from the work, because the work is no longer

¹¹⁷ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 307.

true in such a damaging way. It no longer ruptures the everyday with something that cannot be reconciled with it, cannot be taken up into it and understood in its terms. Instead, the work has been completely absorbed into the everyday. This is, after all, the very character of *boredom*: the confrontation with something so mundane that it not only fails to interest, but that we actually become *uncomfortable* when we are forced to pay attention to it. The hunger artist finds himself in a world where he no longer expresses a truth, which terrifies. Rather, he is in a world where he expresses something as common—and therefore as seductive, illusory, and *false*—as an ad slogan.¹¹⁸

For Heidegger, as we have seen, this picture looks much different. Because all truth is a revealing of something which actually is, out of the inexhaustibility of Being, Heidegger could not say that the hunger artist suddenly disseminates falsehoods. Rather, because the Heideggerian “real”—earth—*is* representable is in fact represented *ad infinitum* in every entity, the hunger artist still expresses a *truth*, but it is no longer the truth that founds his world. His world has collapsed.

What is important to attenuate here, however, is the similarity between the psychoanalytic and the existentialist account. Namely, the imaginary/world has realized the *inadequacy* of something it once held to be valuable: something it once held to be *true*, *beautiful*, and *relevant* to human life. On both accounts, it might be fair to say that the “god” read in the hunger artist’s suffering—that construct of our collective ego—was ruptured by some substantive, real, facet of our subjectivity. When, in the moments before he dies—shriveled, and long forgotten in his cage—the hunger artist reveals that he has merely dedicated himself to his craft because he never found any food that he enjoyed, we can see the possible dangers of identifying with a work of art. Perhaps, as

¹¹⁸ See Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, p.82.

Heidegger would have it, the work still reveals something and attenuating the intention of the artist only lessens this power. But, we might be persuaded by the petulantly childish refusal of one man to eat, or by even more insidious machinations, to conceive of the human in a radical new way if we are not careful with art: or, if we do not recognize the difference between great art and good art. Society undergoes identity crises of this kind all of the time, and what is at stake ends up being our very conception of what it means to be human: who *counts*.

VI) Non-Epochal Postmodern: The Postmodern that Has Happened

Too Little Promise for the Danger?

Only when the completion of the modern age affirms the ruthlessness of its own greatness is future history being prepared.¹¹⁹

...Human reflection can ponder the fact that all saving power must be of a higher essence that what is endangered, though at the same time kindred to it.¹²⁰

As we have seen, there is a problem with conceiving the postmodern as an epoch. This is because the postmodern is defined by an openness to the contingencies which epochal understandings of being foreclose, and which eventually rupture that understanding of being, which depends upon this foreclosure. A postmodern attunement can accommodate revelations of even the most unexpected possibilities of being or of entities because no *singular* interpretation or explanatory schema lies at the basis of its experience. As such, the postmodern does not arise from the abjection of certain possibilities in order to

¹¹⁹ See Heidegger, "Age of the World Picture", *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 85.

¹²⁰ See Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 33-34.

maintain the coherence of this kind of schema. Even though the possibilities with which it is confronted are inexhaustible and, therefore, impossible to anticipate, the eruption of the novel and the unexpected into the postmodern consciousness does not constitute a threat to it as an intelligibility. The postmodern does not produce its own crisis moments by abjecting some possibilities and embracing others, and as such it is not an epoch. But, does this mean that it cannot nonetheless become the world that supplants enframing? I want to put forth an account that says it *can* be a world, and that this is the only way the postmodern really constitutes a promise against global enframing.

Postmodern openness has a kinship with every *poietic* act.¹²¹ The artist is attuned to the polysemy of possibilities in their material, to the possible interpretations of what is and what matters that might be born forth in the work. All artistic acts are postmodern. But this means that the postmodern has already happened, countless times. And, Dreyfus, Kelly, and Thomson are right to point to these truly postmodern moments, as they fall within the modern and the ancient: to indicate that the postmodern is, in fact, atemporal, that it is not predicated on the emergence and fall of the modern, as its consequence. And that, even if it does not efface the metaphysics of this age, it nonetheless erupts into it, its abjected feature, completely incomprehensible within our mechanisms of comprehending, nonsensical within our structure of sense-making, capable of wresting us—for a moment, at the very least—from the understanding of what is and what matters, which holds us. I am not sure, however, that this intermittent, passing, postmodern is enough to constitute the “promise” that is the “other side” of technological enframing.¹²²

Looking again to the history of science I have provided, here, it seems that anomalous

¹²¹ See Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, p.190.

¹²² See Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 28.

data might persist for years within any particular scientific paradigm, and merely be discarded or ignored in order to preserve the intelligibility they challenge.¹²³ It is not until such a moment that some interpretation of this discarded data emerges, and redirects the eyes of all these scientists to another explanatory power that a new paradigm emerges—or, more importantly, that the old one begins to suffer scrutiny.

If technological enframing is the worldview that takes all entities to be nothing more than meaningless resources awaiting optimization, then it radically denies that there could be inherent meaning in *anything at all*.¹²⁴ This being said, Dreyfus and Kelly indicate some possible examples of events—immanent to a worldview of technological enframing and occurring within it every day—that stand in tension with this intelligibility. The shining moments to which they refer meaningfully push back against technological enframing, by presenting us, for a moment, with a palpable, intense, sense of meaning that exceeds optimization. These are the sites of what they call the ‘sacred’ in a ‘secular’ world. These moments help some have meaningful lives *in spite* of their world, but it seems that moments of poiesis might allow entirely new constellations of intelligibility to arise—such that meaningful lives might become the most obvious possibilities rather than the most remote, might sync with the world rather than being in tension with it. While the examples Dreyfus and Kelly point to in their book allow for *any* meaning at all to erupt into a nihilist worldview, Heidegger thinks that responsiveness to the earth is at the heart of inaugurating new worlds. Arguably, this would mean that, on the Heideggerian account, “whooshing up” must have the capacity

¹²³ Kuhn, Thomas, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) p. 54.

¹²⁴ See Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, p. 56-57

to do more than remind us that there is in fact *something* meaningful in the world—a world it seems we could nonetheless continue to navigate and accept, a world of nihilistic optimization and inherent meaninglessness adorned with mere *exceptions*. Rather, the power of such events, in so far as they are *aletheic, poietic* happenings, is the power to found worlds. Since we cannot—and would not like to—go back to ancient Greece, understanding the emergence of a postmodern *world* will require more than merely attenuating ancient Greek *aletheia*.¹²⁵ Rather, we must turn our attention to the meanings disclosed in shining moments—contemporary moments—and how we might transform our individual whooshing-up into the sustainable foundations of a new world.

It seems that when the danger is as great as an *epoch* of technological enframing—when it constitutes the dissolution of all values and meaning into utter meaninglessness—that the promise must rival it in scope to be any kind of promise at all. There have been, no doubt, moments throughout human history wherein the postmodern has shown through. The very moment of artistic creation, the opportunity to found worlds, and even every breakdown of an old world view, or existential death are just some of the innumerable examples of individual and collective *Dasein* responding to their confrontations with the nothing. The inauguration and death of each epoch could be seen as a postmodern event. Even technological enframing is borne of a postmodern occurrence. But, each of these is also, obviously finite. As we saw above, the postmodern cannot be an epoch, precisely because it does not provide for the creation of singular

¹²⁵ It seems that attenuating the ancient Greek world, for Heidegger, has very specific purpose. This genealogical account of being renders a theory of truth which can ground epochality, attenuating the contingency of being's showing up for us allows for epochal time. This simultaneously hints at the contingency of all totalizing conceptions of being—including the modern, nihilistic ones. This is important because, without demonstrating the frailty of historical realities, and the similarity of our own to them, it seems almost impossible to think ourselves *through* or *out of a truth*, especially the one which grounds every other subordinate conception and perception of our age.

interpretations, of sovereign and solitary structures of meaning. But this does not mean that it cannot be a revolutionary, new, interpretation of being which seizes *Dasein* just as totalizingly, just as universally, as has any previous epochal understanding. In fact, it seems that this is necessary if we want to conceive of the postmodern as any kind of *promise* at all. Perhaps the postmodern does not need the modern to come about and to predicate and anticipate it, because postmodern events have characterized every significant shift between epochs. But, this does not preclude it from a more revolutionary role—one which undermines the modern and supplants it—even if postmodernity's atemporality makes this chronology merely coincidental.

Part III: Conclusions

Conclusion I) Breakdown and Polysemy: The Visionary vs. The Shaman

I am disinclined to say that the world-transition that characterizes the deluded mind is *the same* as the world-transition inaugurated by the industrial revolution. Perhaps the distinctions I draw, here, will come across as arbitrary—or at least too reliant on (a likely shared) intuition that there are relevant differences between changes of existential orientation, felt by everyone with whom we share the world, and those that separate us from these others. While I think that we have good evidence to embrace delusional states as “worlds,” as Ratcliffe does—and this means, even, to attribute to them a *poietic* relation to truth—I think that their limited scope is nonetheless a *meaningful* difference between them and the other kinds of world discussed in this paper. But, how are delusional worlds impoverished? And, more importantly, are any of the other proposed ends-of-nihilism I have addressed suffer the same privation?

The most obvious privation of the delusional world is community. That so few others *share* the deluded world is a significant difference between it and other worlds. In fact, for Heidegger, solitude is constitutive of *death*, because worlds—and *Dasein* as thrown into world—are fundamentally and constitutively, communal. As I have indicated above, the insular, somewhat mystical, experiences of meaning described by Dreyfus and Kelly seem to find tension with the shared world, and while they do not *exclude* community in the same way as delusion, they do not *necessarily* gather community. The same thing might be said of the change in existential orientation that results from psychoanalysis. Because the meaningfulness of a life-of-the-shining-moment might

persist *in spite* of the community—just as naïve religiosity persists in spite of the analysand’s disenchantment—these phenomena might not be sufficient to supplant enframing. But, this does not mean that it does not have a kind of diminished world-founding capacity? I think not.

In each case—delusion, shamanic sporting events, and therapeutic cynicism—the individual *Dasein* remains social, even insofar as we might say they now inhabit a different world. Their changed orientation cannot remain completely private, in this sense. The world-founding power of these personal world transitions should not, however, be taken as a kind of prosthelytizing. Instead, we should wonder how it is that one’s living differently might affect the others with whom they live. Insofar as each of these changed existential orientations constitutes its own world, it brings forth possibilities that may have gone unnoticed in mundane experience. These changes in personal world, then, at the very least interrupt the mundane, and inject it with novel possibilities. This is what Heidegger calls the “positive essential power” of the delusion.

What is questionable, I think, is whether any of these is sufficient to radically undermine and thus inaugurate a transition from the more global problems of enframing and nihilism. As I have argued before, the promise that allows only for intermittent, meaningful experiences—predicated on and even dependent upon the continued vitality of the very worst instantiations of enframing—is a rather anemic one. We can see immediately that delusion, because it arises as an *illness* will have no such power, and I think I have given reason that Dreyfus’ and Kelly’s mysticism might also be reabsorbed. But what about the revelations of psychoanalysis and aesthetics?

I will deal with aesthetics throughout the next two sections, but for now I would like to briefly mention psychoanalysis in its possible relations to nihilism. On one hand it seems psychoanalysis would be a fruitless place to look for any kind of answer to the problem of nihilism. In fact, it seems that it would be a farce to refer to nihilism as a “problem” in the psychoanalytic context, at all. The purpose of analysis, on Lacan’s account, after all, is for the analysand to bear the break down of their meaning-making structures. But, here we find an ambivalence in Lacan. Psychoanalysis depends, for its very survival, upon the persistence of a kind of patient who can neither embrace religion, nor stand the utterly meaningless picture of reality presented by the hard sciences. I am not entirely sure what to make of this ambivalence, other than to say that psychoanalysis, as a practice of breakdown—a *science* of disrupting and destructing certain structures of intelligibility—might very well have a widespread power for *world collapse*. The question remains whether this world collapsing capacity is useful against nihilism. On Dreyfus’ and Kelly’s definition of nihilism, I think not. Psychoanalysis seems unlikely to revive the sacred and inherently meaningful. But, in terms of enframing—especially as the greatest danger—psychoanalysis may present a challenge to our contemporary world. Why? Because enframing is a kind of psychopathy. It maps onto psychopathy almost perfectly, in fact, as the aggrandizement of the “human spirit” and “human will” above all others, the manipulation of others to fulfill that will, etc. Enframing may look like a sickness from the psychoanalytic perspective, and even the clinical psychology perspective, while nihilism more generally might not.

Conclusion II) Attunement, Fugues, Paranoia, and Derridian Polyphony

At the end of *All Things Shining*, Dreyfus and Kelly present a parable of sorts that seems to demonstrate the way in which these individual, shining, moments, might expand beyond their finite and limited scope. Their account is something like a kind of spiritualism, a mysticism, a virtue, cultivated over the course of a lifetime. Individual people might overcome the dominant metaphysics of nihilism that characterize our age by cultivating an openness to these shining events: a kind of habituations. The solution, in the end, is dispositional. We might, in this attunement of openness, still find those moments of meaninglessness outnumber those that shine, but if we are properly attuned to and grateful for those moments which shine, we cannot help but think that life is itself, taken as a whole, meaningful.¹²⁶ We cannot avoid the conclusion, on the basis of these isolated, and even rare, shining moments, that life *itself* is worthwhile, so long as we appreciate these moments in the right way. But, *which* attunement potentiates this openness to the unbidden, to the nothing, to possibilities? Might it allow us to inaugurate a world of meaning in place of this one? Dreyfus and Kelly seem to think that a spirit of experimentation and adventure is best. That we have to *try* a great number of things before we find the ones that suit us best. But this means also that we must be resilient to failure, to frustration, and even to the *brutality* of certain pursuits. We have to be willing to drop things, rather than trying to master them, when they do not work for us.¹²⁷ The combination of the openness of an experimental attunement with the measuredly realistic attunements of resilience and resignation seems a bit difficult to maintain. It is generally very difficult, disappointing, unrewarding and even brutalizing to begin to learn many of

¹²⁶ See Dreyfus and Kelly, *All Things Shining*, p.224.

¹²⁷ See Dreyfus and Kelly, *All Things Shining*, p. 219.

the skills that will ultimately give a life meaning. The first months—even years—that one plays an instrument, for instance, consists of sitting alone in a room, listening to terrible sounds. How does one *know* this is not for them, that eventually creating beautiful music is not possible or is not worth it? And, why should we prefer this collection of moods to others? It seems that all human attunements may be *aletheic*. Does not an attunement of love draw us to others, or one of aversion warn us that certain pursuits will not be meaningful to us? Do anxiety, passion, and even boredom fail to drive us into new activities, and new relationships? Postmodernist literature itself seems to indicate that even disorders of attunement are *alethic* in a potentially interesting, poietic, and postmodern way. But, here, what is revealed might shine, but does not necessitate our gratitude. *Openness* to the nothing is not itself sufficient for the persistence of meaning against the meaninglessness, sadness, and anxiety of technological enframing.

Thomas Pynchon's novel *The Crying of Lot 49* might be called a paranoiac treasure hunt, wherein a number of seemingly innocuous happenings and entities are contorted into the traces of conspiracy.¹²⁸ The attunement of paranoia in this context allows an entire field of possibilities to come forth for the protagonist. Menacing and harrowing possibilities inchoate in the seemingly innocuous history of something as mundane as the U.S postal service, possibilities which drive her toward an adventure: a radical break from the mundane, Tupperware party-ridden, everydayness of her life. She experiences the very kind of shining event which drives a fissure between the taken-for-granted and the supramundane, and much of this is due to the attunement of paranoia which she inhabits. Such attunements—supposed ailments—might be problematic prescriptions for the postmodern, because they favor some possibilities over others—the

¹²⁸ Pynchon, Thomas, *The Crying of Lot 49*, (New York: Perennial Classics, 1965).

paranoid attunement reveals the menacing possibilities of entities, for instance. It is nonetheless important to note that even the most pathological of dispositions might well possibilize mundane phenomena and problematize intelligibility we live from day to day. Even if we might think that the paranoid suffer from a breakdown in their ability to interpret the *real*, confronting the real on the account we have put forth here—on the postmodern account—is confronting *nothing*, confronting *possibility*, it does not seem that the paranoid merely pick up on *impossible* things, but rather that they have a particular sensitivity to possibilities which are not—and may never be—actual. Things shine forth in a particular way, on the basis of our attunements. They, perhaps only miss postmodern polysemy because of the clinical and pathological background from which they grow. The possibilities seen by a deluded protagonist are explicitly *unreal*—reality *is not*, is other than, these possibilities.

As we have seen, however, it might be better to think of the schizophrenic, the paranoid, and the delusional as inhabiting *worlds* wherein the content of their delusions is supported by every one of their observations and cognitive faculties.¹²⁹ The Capgras patient is deemed delusional, not because they have no share in the deductive and inductive processes within which non-pathological engagements within the world occur, but because the possibilities that show up for them—their world—are not possibilities that can arise within, and so be affirmed and denied by the logic of our *shared world*. The revolutionary artist must be permeable to abjected possibilities, to interpretations—not only of what is meaningful, but of what *is*—which do not arise in our shared world. Inchoate in this openness is the epochal breakdown of the world they have inhabited, and so—in at least some register—the attunement of the revolutionary artist is not that much

¹²⁹ See Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being*, p. 162-163.

different than that of the deluded, the schizophrenic, or the paranoid. The artists that inaugurated modernity did so at the expense of a shared world, one which presumed the existence and value of the unseen, the immaterial, the permanent and the religious over the corporeal, the scientifically evaluable and measurable, and the fleeting. The previous world could not accommodate a great number of entities, because these entities are only visible from the modern ontotheology—especially in the case of our scientifically pursuant fundamental, material *ontology*. The inaugurators of a postmodern epoch, too, will usher in a world which cannot be accommodated by the old. And this epoch seems not only to require the inclusion of *new entities* into intelligibility, but to force the *nothings* of entities with which we are already familiar into it. The possibilities that world-inaugurating artists must usher in are not measurably *less strange* than those that appear in delusions, and we might even think that an artist will inhabit a new incommensurably different field of possibilities long before other *Dasein* join her. The difference is, perhaps, that Capgras does not have some capacity, some unaccounted-for power, to gather a “historical people.”¹³⁰

I think that Thomson’s conception of the philosophical fugue and Derrida’s polyphonic argumentation throughout *Truth in Painting*, provide the best possible attunements for the postmodern. Because the fugue reiterates, reinterprets, and eventually amplifies its *core* structure, these polyphonic conceptions further assuage the concerns we might have regarding making basic, intentional choices within a postmodern framework. An openness to many possible interpretations of a thing, hearing them all simultaneously, amplifies and clarifies those at its core, those possibilities which most deeply and meaningfully belong to it. But how do we remedy our tone-deafness? How do

¹³⁰ See Heidegger “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 46.

we cure our aversion to the dissonance inherent in the tension between earth and world? Heidegger thinks a new work of art might accomplish such an end. But the persistence of enframing in the wake of both the baroque and of jazz seems to indicate that this kind of explicit exposure to the cacophony of the rift structure *has* alone produced no cure—only fleeting indications of the promise. Nehamas seems to imply that we could recognize that we love, are attracted to, find beautiful, that which is objectively *ugly*—that we *live* this tension. I think that if the postmodern promise is the other side of the danger of technological enframing, then the attunement to polyphony needed to transcend the danger is immanent to it. Perhaps the proliferation of voices throughout the internet, transplanted into one ear via Bluetooth while the other ear absorbs the world, in the persistent presence of music in our every environment, etc. is already breeding in us a postmodern capacity, which needs only the right works to which to respond.

Capitalizing on contemporary cacophony does seem like a possibly promising route toward postmodernity—not only because Heidegger conceives of this promise as immanent to the *danger* that this cacophony represents—but because the dissonance and proliferation of voices at play in this cacophony is laden with the kinds of tension Heidegger thinks are at the heart of all great, world inaugurating works of art. While we are immersed in supposedly meaningful information, an earthy incomprehensibility arises, while each voice carries with it—ideas, concepts, data—something comprehensible, the simultaneity of these speeches might evolve a kind of overall incomprehensibility. The rift-structure here emerges as something concrete, worlded, characteristic of our age. Postmodernist authors take the contemporary psyche to be paranoid, schizophrenic, pathologically inclined to rooting out significations within this

background of incomprehensibility. Derrida wields this proliferation of voice in order to proliferate significance and insignificance without ever having to leave behind the “truth in painting.” Heidegger attempts a fugue, from which we might wrest some consistent and abiding harmony. Possiblizing works such as these, I think, might do the work Heidegger calls “the promise,” so long as we recognize our world in the noise, rather than abjecting or pathologizing it.

Conclusion III) Phenomenological Difficulties of Nothingness-As-World, or Does the Postmodern Require *Dasein* to Evolve?

If constant activity and scientific progress have created a “human being of quite another stamp”, then we can expect dwelling in another world to effect *what* we are, what the human is.¹³¹

The question remains open; what might it be like to be a postmodern *Dasein*? The temptation here is to do a kind of speculative phenomenology, one that conceives of the experiences we *may* have only by subtracting those that would not be possible in the postmodern. This means that phenomenology cannot give us a very robust picture of the postmodern because it is—as a technique—descriptive, and the postmodern—conceived as a *world*, as I have argued it should be—is not-yet, in such a way that it precludes this kind of description. What follows, then, are two very important phenomenological difficulties when it comes to conceiving the “promise” of Heidegger’s thought: difficulties that seem to indicate that *Dasein* might be fundamentally and essentially different in this postmodern landscape.

¹³¹ See Heidegger, “Age of the World Picture”, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 63.

We have seen how different worlds—because they are merely complexes of different possibilities which call on *Dasein*, and which encode the appropriateness of our responses—might necessitate unique moods and existential feelings. And so, as “Age of the World Picture” has it, a new epoch evolves a new *Dasein*, a new community of *Dasein*, like an evolutionary pressure.¹³² And surely, it is not too difficult to see how the emergence of a postmodern world—one wherein the being of entities is apprehended as their inexhaustible possibility—might demand from *Dasein*, yet untapped powers of perception. The thing about epochs, we could say, is that they are *convenient*; in bracketing off these nothings, they allow for monosemic perception and apprehension of entities in terms of our projects. We never find ourselves hindered by those possibilities of the objects we use, for instance, which are done no tribute in our using them. But, as we have also seen, this is where the greatest danger lays: when it becomes possible to apprehend even other *Dasein* in terms of goals, the possibilities we abject seem somehow more meaningful than those of the hammer, for instance. *This* ontological omission seems somehow *depraved*. But, given that no object should appear to us as entirely inert and monosemic—purely *for use*—in the postmodern, I wonder what criteria we might have for making any decisions about entities in this world, what reasons we might have for taking a thing to be a *particular* entity, of a *particular kind*, and *for* some purpose. If projects are not possible in the postmodern, then it seems *Dasein*, on Heidegger’s account, would also be impossible. How do we save our kind of being from the proliferation of nothings that might meet us in a non-epochal world?

Furthermore, it seems that *Dasein* might have a difficult time *dying* in a Heideggerian sense, within a postmodern intelligibility. When pressed upon by the

¹³² See Heidegger, “Age of the World Picture,” *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 70-72.

nothings of entities in such a perspicuous way, it does not seem likely that *Dasein* would have the kind of as-structure necessary to form the chains of signification that breakdown in existential death. Rather, the always-already-open *Dasein* may have such a hard time taking its tools *as* tools, and taking itself *as* its projects, that no such world collapse would proceed from the breakdown of equipment. A phenomenology of a postmodern landscape, from the perspective of the kinds of beings we are might be doubly impossible, both because different beings might inhabit this landscape, and because it is difficult to see how we might describe the not-yet. But I think that there are two phenomenological modes for exploring world-transition, and this means at the very least that phenomenology might provide us with some of the indications, existential feelings, and harbingers of such a revolutionary transition.

There are two, equally necessary, modes of pursuing this phenomenology. Ratcliffe and Pynchon have given one: that is the phenomenology of being-in-the-world's breakdown, from a subjective and perhaps pathological perspective. This phenomenology ends with a subject who might readily accept her new world, especially if it is shared. The second I will attempt to provide—with the help of Kafka—is a phenomenology of world-transition from the perspective of the unafflicted, the reticent, those relics still living as *Dasein* of a previous world.

What Kafka's account of world transition shows us is, I think, the way in which a world fades when the works that once gathered its people begin to fail to gather. We are told in the beginning that we no longer live in the hunger artist's world, but when we get a glimpse into that world we see only the recognition he received, the admiration of a

people.¹³³ The dissipating interest in his performance indeed renders him down-an-out, but it also gives him the opportunity to fast longer than he has ever been allowed, to press his work forward into its most impressive instantiation, and thus to disappear into the long irrelevant art form. And, perhaps, it is in his last words only that we see his becoming aware of a transition between worlds—when at the height of his virtuosity, he undermines the entire work to admit that he had simply never found a food he liked. Is it really only a basic matter of taste which has led the hunger artist to his now shriveled, waning, state? Or does his artwork appear in its newfound meaninglessness—an artifact of a world that could only sustain its significance for a time, before another world—with its own meanings to sustain—supplanted it?

I think either interpretation is true enough to the text. But the latter is more fruitful ground for the kind of phenomenology we are attempting, here. It seems that the hunger artist dies in the very Heideggerian sense we have discussed throughout this paper, but that he is left with no opportunity to authentically reprise his roll as a professional anorexic. He must, it seems, either fade away with his world—decay irrevocably—and perhaps this is what enframers are forced to do in the postmodern. But if the hunger artist could live, given the postmodern landscape—the Sartrean nausea of it—how might he choose another identification, another set of possibilities, or another project? The nothingness of the postmodern seems to offer few definitive selection criteria between our possibilities and those of the objects around us, but one thing seems at least somewhat certain, the hunger artist *must* die if he chooses to stay in his cage: to ride out the end of his world to its most extreme conclusion. Being-with other *Dasein* seems

¹³³ See Kafka, “The Hunger Artist,” Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, N. Glatzer, ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1971) p. 268.

necessary for any dwelling in a new intelligibility. And so, perhaps, the postmodern arises only intersubjectively, communally. Perhaps attunements of togetherness are necessary conditions for the setting forth of worlds.