

LIFE AS ART FROM NIETZSCHE TO FOUCAULT:
LIFE, AESTHETICS, AND THE TASK OF THINKING

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Claremont Graduate University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate Faculty of the School of Religion

Claremont, California

2009

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We, the undersigned, certify that we have read this dissertation of Zachary Simpson and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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“Life as Art from Nietzsche to Foucault” presents a constructive argument for how one may construct one’s life through aesthetics. The study begins with an examination of dandyism, which gives a negative point of reference for framing the artful life. From there, Friedrich Nietzsche’s exploration of a series of ideal types is examined, revealing the ideal life to be one which playfully blends the critical spirit of science with the illusory spirit of art to create a self which is liberated and affirmative. These lines of argument are pursued in the three parts which follow, beginning with an examination of the “negative” dimension of the artful life in Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse which reveals the necessity of resistance and the possibility for an artful society/individual. This is placed in tension with the “positive” dimension of the artful life, articulated by Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Luc Marion. Each contributes to the development of “embodied poetic thinking,” a concept which signifies the potential for affirming immanence through the various bodily modalities and forms of thought. The work of Marion also shows the possibility for revelation in the artful life. These two moments are concretized by the ethics of Albert Camus and Michel Foucault, who collectively show the ways in which one can deploy the aesthetic in everyday practices directed towards the production of self. Seen through these three loci, life as art provides a means for creating a life which is resistant and affirmative, forging a liberated space into which one may continually deploy the aesthetic to create new selves which give meaning to the world.

Acknowledgments

This project, owing both to its long gestation time and the amount of work required for its completion, accumulated innumerable debts which will likely never be fully repaid.

Without my friends, mentors, and parents, and their unending love, support, and humor, this project would not have been possible. Though insufficient, I can only thank the following people for their companionship and support in the years which preceded and surrounded my work on life as art:

Tad Beckman, with whom the idea for life as art was born in countless conversations and in the living example he has given. There is hardly a page in what follows which Tad has not influenced in some way.

Philip Clayton, whose tutelage, mentorship, and friendship have been invaluable. Philip has pushed me to become a better writer, scholar, and professional, and, most importantly, has shown me on a daily basis how to be a better person.

My mother, Pam Simpson, whose unending love and support have allowed me to see that life itself could be artful.

My father, Gary Simpson, who showed me that the world was more complicated than we allowed, and that truth is what matters.

My friends: Shaun Spreacker, for his humor and loyalty; Ben O'Donnell, for laughing at my jokes; Keith Basham, for teaching me; Johan Almenberg, for a fortuitous friendship; Anné Griebel, for simply being a friend; Mike Tepner, for the workouts; Paul Manning, Brent Voorhees, Richard Miller, Abby Parish, my family, Minute Maid Ball, and many others, whose humor and love made this project a joy and a privilege.

Many other conversation partners were called upon during this project. Roland Faber gave valuable comments during the planning stages of the dissertation. Jason McMartin, as always, gave invaluable feedback on my various ramblings. Lindsay MacDonald continually pushed me to see the value in living poetically. Conversations with Owen Ware helped frame the dissertation in its initial stages. And the mentorship of both Eleanor Sullivan and Alan Hawkins planted the seeds of speculation which took root in this project.

Though she did not directly oversee any of the work which follows, this project could not have been completed without the generosity and time allowed by Sarah Coakley.

Financial assistance for completion of my dissertation was given by Harvard University and Claremont Graduate University, to whom I am incredibly thankful.

Finally, my partner and co-life artist, Kenzie, who gave this project meaning, shape, and what little beauty it may have. Your patience, love, and intellect were a guide to every word I wrote. May we both create together.

Preface

The light shined down harshly on her face, rising through a small crack in the half-drawn curtains across the room. She could see small puffs of pink and lavender through the window, highlighted by the dawning sun. Her head resisted its own weight, and, with a moan, she began to pull herself out of bed. The air in the room was warm and stale, though the wind danced through a set of mini-blinds on the east end of the room. Taking in a deep breath, she lifted herself off the bed, and, in consecutive movements, pulled on a pair of Lee Jeans, a slightly undersized bra, and a plain red t-shirt from Walgreens. Once her t-shirt landed on her shoulders, she pulled her long, jet black hair through the back of the collar and let the hair fall over her shoulders and teasingly touch her waist.

She moved quickly across the room, and, taking a small leather pouch from above the sink, opened the door to greet the cool morning air. The intense red of Navaho sandstone and the Kayenta formation stood to the north, a small hogback that framed the small canyon in which she lived. Dew sat still on the early morning sage and three small lambs lowed in the nearby sheep pin. White gourd blossoms emerged from the red soil beneath, and, looking with a smile, it reminded her of the undifferentiated first world and the insect people that inhabited it. The sandstone and river bottom to the south of her were traces of the great flood which had subsided only with the warming rays of the sun, which stood low in the eastern horizon. It was only then that the world was ready for her people, who had wandered the desert looking for their new land.

Her morning prayers began with her hand, stiff and arthritic, fumbling within the leather pouch for a small handful of white corn meal. The meal was rubbed gently

between her fingers as she faced east, greeting the sun and letting it infiltrate her body.

“May there be harmony before me...” her eyes winced slightly as the sun’s radiance came into full view over the horizon. The warming rays reached her, and, for a moment, her prayer was interrupted with a feeling of kinship for Changing Woman and her erotic congress with the sun’s rays.

The prayer continued. To the west, *“May there be harmony behind me...”* as she stared wistfully at the dry canyon that wound its way into Kaibito creek and near the chapter house at Toadlena, where the Girl’s School stood like a grave. The soft tones of her Navaho slipped into the expanse of the desert sky, and the pollen drifted away as a warm summer breeze caught her hand as it motioned above her head. *“May there be harmony above me...”* her hand gestured above to greet the sky as if to draw it towards the earth. Some of Coyote’s stars still stood out in the bright early morning light. Her hand finally motioned towards the earth. *“May there be harmony below me...”* Small tracks from meadowlarks and pack rats dotted the red sand below her, her bare feet a light brown amidst a sea of browns, pinks, and reds too numerous to put into words.

“It is finished...”

“It is finished...”

“It is finished...”

“It is finished.”

She took a deep breath and felt herself whole and happy. *Hozho*, as her grandfather called it. Peace, happiness, harmony. She stood for a moment, motionless, and let the morning air surround her. A bullfrog began to croak in the nearby pond, and, awakened from her reverie, she slipped the leather corn meal *jiish* back into her pocket.

A small and dirty Buick sat before her as she made her way up the path towards her home. It had been a dry year, and the Buick was caked in a light red film that would come off only with the hard driving male rains of the late summer. She measured her steps into the house, one of the last fabricated BIA homes from the 1950s left on the rez. Having failed to re-locate many Navahos into reservation housing in the 1930s and 40s, the BIA had undertaken an effort to make housing befitting that of a Navaho, Crow, or Sioux. Hence the home here was built in the shape of a *hoogan*, though with wood siding and a pitched tar paper roof. Many had used their new BIA homes as sheep pens or as storage, but Lucy's father had decided to live in the house, despite the taboos. "We need to change with the times," she remembered him saying as she opened the screen door into the house. As she placed the *jiish* above the sink and began to feel the hot air in the house, however, she found herself longing for the open air brush shelters of her youth.

The sink kicked on with a start as it began to draw water from the cistern outside. As dishes were taken from one side of the sink, washed, and placed on the other side on an old dish towel, her eyes wandered across the landscape that lay in front of the window. A raven found himself hectoring a nest of larks in a cluster of junipers about thirty feet in front of the octagonal home. Screeches and pips went back and forth as the birds seemed to be negotiating their way through an impasse. Lucy chuckled and thought of her husband, who lay in the bed a few feet away, his chest heaving with deep sleep. Raven and Lark would achieve harmony, just as she had with him. "*As different as we are, you and I...*" she remembered the words of her marriage ceremony and the long life of children, happiness, and work it had brought. *Sa'ah naaghai bik'eh hozho*. The words had sealed their marriage and cemented the beautiful life they were to live together.

Somehow they had reached a middle place, a balance between his fire and her ice, his radiance and her pragmatism. And, later, between his struggle for something better and her demands for peace.

The dishes done, she glanced around the room and thought about turning on the television to see what was happening in worlds far apart from the one she inhabited between the canyons near Kayenta. She had been to the places described on the news, beginning with the red brick schoolhouse near Toadlena. Marched in a line of dark brown girls, their hair braided and dressed in long white frocks, Lucy Begay tried to remember what the interior of the schoolhouse looked like. Despite spending the better part of her life in the boarding school trying to un-learn her own language and the names of plants, animals, and mountains, the earliest memories were always what returned first. That was followed by junior college in Phoenix and work as a hotel clerk in Williams. And, when she was old enough, Lucy returned home, where her grandfather stood at the road and listened for her approach in a TNM&O bus. When she stepped off the bus, he smiled, his eyes watering and his round face wizened, and, in broken English, greeted her: “Welcome home.”

But she was not home. Despite the power of memory, she had forgotten much and lost even more. Where her parents and grandparents had raised sheep, spun their own rugs, and grown what little other food they needed, Lucy purchased canned vegetables and forgot Navaho words all too often. She had to work in town, and thus a car was needed. And her children, even more separated from their history, had gone willingly to *biligaana* schools and watched *Sesame Street* every morning. Even though she had tried to forget the teachings of the boarding school, she often found herself—as she did now—

sympathizing with the Jews, perennially cast out of their own desert land. Cut adrift between her own language, her land, her memories, and the reality of Wal-Marts and canned stew, Lucy had tried to find a middle place again between the past and the present. Taught to believe in time as something that begins and ends, not something that repeats itself, Lucy had tried to find harmony in a world with no end and no beginning.

After packing a simple lunch of peaches, a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, and two hard-boiled eggs, she began to brush her hair. Since her childhood, when her mother would prop her up on her knee and lovingly tease out dodgy strands, Lucy had always felt her hair connected her to something greater than herself. As little girls in the boarding school she would tie other girls' hair into a single, unbroken braid. And, one summer while home from the boarding school and after her first menses, Lucy had undergone her *kinaalda*, the second and third nights of which her hair was washed in yucca suds and allowed to dry in the desert air as she ran, as did Changing Woman, across the moonlit summer grazing place of her parents. As her hands wove through her still-black hair, she remembered the sensation of the *hataali* massaging the yucca slowly into her scalp. It was a sensation she had tried to re-create daily with her children as they sat smiling in the bathtub, waiting for their hair to be washed. "Look, Mama, my hair is clean now," they would smile and exclaim through dark brown eyes and plump naked bodies.

Brushed and clean, her hair was held in place with a simple sterling silver clip dotted with pieces of polished turquoise. She looked at her watch, and, with a sigh, began collecting her things. A pair of glasses, her lunch, a blue vest, and a large clip-on nametag which read, "Welcome to Safeway! I am...LUCILLE." Her husband's breathing had slowed in the corner, and she listened for a moment before pivoting to turn and open the

door. The larks and the raven had reached their peace, the wind came from the west, where the *yeibichai* held guard over San Francisco peak, and the sheep bleated longingly in their pen. The world seemed to vibrate and her eyelids flickered for a moment. All was in balance, and, standing in the middle of the room, Lucy tried to feel what her ancestors must have felt.

Letting the moment pass, she checked her watch and moved swiftly out the door. She let herself into the car and slumped into the front seat, igniting the Buick's old motor and waiting for the customary screech of the loose fan belt. The dry ground made short crunching noises as the car backed up the drive, finding its way onto the extension road above. Having straightened the car, Lucy reached over and turned on the radio, just as the morning news began. "Good morning. It is currently 73-degrees in Phoenix. In today's news..." Her mind turned again to her children, and their children, driving in the early morning traffic of Phoenix, wondering if they, too, saw the sun rise this morning.

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Chapter 1: The Path Ahead

I: Introduction

Beginning in the Romantic period of the 19th century, a form of philosophical speculation arose which attempted to apply aesthetic criterion to living, thinking, and acting in an historical climate which found itself at the crossroads between feudalism, the rise of nation-states, the decline of the centralized European Church, and the onset of nationalist and democratic social movements alike. Instead of applying religious, scientific, or economic criterion to one's life, this movement relied upon aesthetic criteria to frame modes of being which were intended to achieve a sense of beauty, decadence, separation from a burgeoning democratic mass, or recovering a nascent orientation to nature. While the form which such speculation took varied considerably, a unique form of discourse was crafted in the 19th century: the potential for seeing and transforming one's life into a work of art.

Shortly preceding this movement was an explosion of discourses on aesthetics and the nature of the beautiful. Gottlieb Baumgarten's use of the term "aesthetics" in 1750¹ brought the term into the philosophical lexicon, followed shortly by Kant's publication of the seminal Third Critique. Shortly after were aesthetic treatises and letters published by Schiller, Schelling, Fichte, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and even Kierkegaard's notorious negative assessment of "the aesthetic" in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. While each sought to analyze the nature of the beautiful, the historical exigency of art, the role of the aesthetic, etc., as a group they belie a more general observation: in the late 18th and early 19th century, especially in German idealism, the "aesthetic" increasingly became a locus of philosophical concern alongside epistemology,

metaphysics, and the role of science. It is not as if art and aesthetics had not been analyzed or even discussed in the previous literature; to be sure, the aesthetic as a subject of philosophical speculation had been a fruitful occupation of the Greeks, Romans, and, to a lesser extent, medieval Christianity and Islam. However, there is an intensification of discourses on the aesthetic in the late-modern period which attempt to further clarify the role of the aesthetic and its relation to the other sciences (*Wissenschaften*). This intensification is historically embedded alongside attempts to see the artistic and the aesthetic in terms tantamount to the religious, the therapeutic, or the existential.

These early forays into aesthetics, alongside a conscious effort to recover the aesthetic traditions of the Greeks, Romans, Christian ascetics, and especially aristocratic elites of the Renaissance and Early Modern periods, were channeled into an array of discourses which attempted to apply aesthetic criterion to how one lived and thought. What would it mean to reconfigure life in terms of the considerations embodied in theoretical discussions of art or the nature of the artist? In response to such questions, this strange amalgam of Idealism, decadence, a sense of the post-religious, and a pre-industrial and democratic consciousness gave rise to a lineage, or a number of *lineages*, which sought to create forms of life which were self-regulating, beautified, romantic, heraldic, tragic, or guardedly religious. Chief among such figures are the Romanticists, such as Schiller, and the visionary painting of Caspar David Friedrich; neo-Romantics and dandies like Barbey d'Aurevilly and Charles Baudelaire; the "existentialists," Nietzsche, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Camus; literary figures like Oscar Wilde and James Joyce; artists such as Andy Warhol, Salvador Dali, and Paul Cezanne; and critical theorists and deconstructionists as varied as Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Gilles

Deleuze, Georges Bataille, Michel Foucault, and Jean-Luc Marion. All can be united under the broad umbrella of bringing aesthetic speculation and criterion to bear on the problems of living, believing, seeing, and acting in a world wrought with contradictions and conflict.

Yet the variety of positions or expositors that can be united under a philosophical lineage is no indication of its strength. While such aesthetic speculation is no doubt historically and culturally significant, it does not signify a unified philosophical undertaking, much less a coherent position. Schiller's *Aesthetic Education of Man* is clearly opposed to Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus; Baudelaire's elitism and blasé attitude cannot be collapsed into Adorno's *Minima Moralia* and his pleas for justice after the Holocaust; and Warhol's affirmation of pop culture is inimical to Nietzsche's polemics against herd morality. The concerted move towards art and aesthetics after Kant may signify a crisis in many social forums, or possibly an attempt to analyze the aesthetic and bring it under the purview of a number of distinct philosophical programs, but it does not univocally point the way towards a distinct position on what it may mean to think and live aesthetically in the post-industrial age.

There is something wholly unique in such thinking, however, and one should not take its generalized incoherence as a cue for its dismissal. For, contrary to other forms of existential speculation which took religious, cultural, economic, scientific, or biological norms as the foundation upon which one would judge how one lived and thought, aesthetes used a highly subjective and often contentious medium—art—as the chief source and metaphor for existential theorization. While religion, science, and even the political-economic spheres often have either historical, cultural, or universal phenomena as their

basis, and thereby can appeal to something more than a subjective apprehension, art, as has been largely defined since Kant, is often broadly construed as subjective, individual, and even incommunicable. Thus the turn to art and aesthetics as a potential fount of ethical wisdom is symptomatic of a general trend towards individualization, but also shows tendencies towards autonomy and resistance. Such a trend is confirmed by the work of thinkers as varied as Baudelaire and Nietzsche, both of whom espouse a return to pseudo-aristocratic values and an increased reliance on the self as a source of artistic interest and adoration. And, in their wake, thinkers as varied as Joyce, Oscar Wilde, Henry James, Camus, Foucault, and others saw aesthetics as a means by which one problematized and responded to the crises of the present.

Given the plurality of voices which seek to claim an aesthetic theory of living and thinking, the task in this study is not to give an overview of the various movements which have claimed art and the aesthetic as their inspiration since Kant. Noting the variety of competing voices, such a discussion could only be bibliographic in nature. Nor is it to even normatively designate what *the* “genuine” aesthetic or ethical position may be: given both the nature of art itself and the historical exigencies which have given rise to aesthetic theorization, such a move would be unjustifiable. Rather, the task here is to examine a subset of aesthetic lineages originating in the 19th century and to delineate a distinct and internally coherent constructive position which uses aesthetic criterion as the chief resource for envisioning how one lives and thinks, while recognizing both its historical and philosophical limitations. This position will come to be known as “life as art.” In the pages that follow, life as art will be seen as a way of envisioning how one lives and thinks which is responsive to the manifold crises in Western advanced society

by proposing forms of action which are both resistant and affirmative in their scope and implementation. Though grounded in the historical-philosophical traditions of the past and a strict adherence to acknowledging and modifying the present, life as art will emerge as a way in which we can live and create into the future.

II: Antecedents

The concepts which will be inscribed within “life as art” are not entirely new. Since the pre-Socratics, philosophers of the West² have attempted to use art and aesthetics as a means by which they framed the conduct of life and thinking, though one may not be inclined to call such positions “life as art.” For example, partially as a reaction against Plato’s strident stand against the artists, Aristotle framed his ethics largely within a cognitive and aesthetic framework which allowed for harmony, flexibility, and context-oriented thinking. In both the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle formulates a notion of ethical conduct which attempts to find a harmonious balance between opposing and situationally dependent extremes. “Thus we see that an expert in any field avoids excess and deficiency, but seeks the median and chooses it—not the median of the object but the median relative to us.”³ At the end of the *Ethics*, Aristotle’s ethical ideal comes to approximate philosophical asceticism, as the ethical subject optimally blends *theoria* and right action in a life devoted to contemplation of the workings of the universe and God.⁴ While Aristotle’s ethics bear some similarity to the Platonic ideal (at least for the philosopher, not the citizen-warrior depicted in *The Republic*), it differs greatly in the degree to which Aristotle relies on an aesthetic sense—harmony, moderation, and balance—in order to qualify right action and the *telos* of practical wisdom (*phronesis*). In

this sense, all action for Aristotle, especially that of the ascetic philosopher, can be considered as a form of artistry. “[W]e acquire [the virtues] by first having put them into action, and the same is also true of the arts [*techne*]. For the things which we have to learn before we can do them we learn by doing: men become builders by building houses, and harpists by playing the harp.”⁵

After Aristotle, the twin streams of Aristotelian and Platonic thought reach an important crossroads in Neoplatonism, especially in the figures of Plotinus and his student, Porphyry. For, while Plotinus largely envisions an ascetic religious and ethical ideal driven towards contemplation of the One, there is the attendant notion that ethical action in *The Enneads* is largely related to the conceptual and metaphorical notion of “overflow,” wherein a mystically unified subject acts rightly through his contact with the One. This is to be achieved by an ascetic attention to diet, relationships, and religious practice itself, a set of virtues which Plotinus calls “purificatory” virtues.⁶ For the Neoplatonists, one fashions oneself—as an artist does to a work of art—in order to achieve harmony with the universe.

This tradition of self-purification and, to a lesser extent, self-fashioning (as in Aristotle’s *techne*), was continued in early Christendom and Greco-Roman philosophy. By combining both neo-Aristotelian and Neoplatonic thought, the twin concepts of aesthetic harmony and mystical asceticism were creatively melded in the thought of Cynics, Stoics, early Christian ascetics and martyrs, and early Church theologians, such as Augustine, who would have a tremendous impact on the formulation of the virtues and the aesthetic for nearly a thousand years thereafter. Aristotle’s virtues would be appropriated anew by Muslim scholars, heavily influencing the work of Averroes and

Avicenna, and subsequently in Christendom by Aquinas, whose conception of both the theological and civic virtues were deeply influenced by Aristotle's conception of *phronesis* and the rational adjudication of right action based on aesthetic guidelines.

Similarly, Neoplatonic asceticism, along with its "negative" theological orientation and emphasis on self-purification, would persistently reappear in Christian philosophy until the Enlightenment, finding expositors in figures as varied as Pseudo-Dionysius, Marsilio Ficino, Jacob Boehme, and other medieval Christian ascetics.

But it is with the Enlightenment and modernism, and the advent of "critique" as a valid form of philosophical speculation, that discourses on the aesthetic, thinking, and ethics are revived with redoubled intensity. There, traditional discourses on self-fashioning, situational reasoning, and the purificatory virtues were combined with new insights into the nature of reason and its relationship to aesthetics. In modernism, Descartes, Leibniz, Malebranche, Berkeley, Locke, Hume, and others sought to clarify the role of thinking and its relation to truth and God. And with Baumgarten, Lessing, and, finally, Kant, the critical method which had been consistently applied to the faculty of reason came to be applied to aesthetics, which, in its broadest sense, included the appreciation and judgment of both artworks and natural beauty. Thereafter, Hegel would see art as participatory in the dialectical process, providing humans and history with a mimetic image of itself that was to be sublated (*aufgehoben*) by the religious and philosophical orders of existence.

Through Kant and his philosophical heirs, the Idealist and post-Idealist period evinces a continuation and intensification of discourses since the pre-Socratics which linked aesthetics, thinking, and acting into a loose triad. In Aristotle, this takes the form

of a careful and rational blending of practical and theoretical wisdom, and the conduct of life which balances intellectual and bodily pursuits in accordance with the aesthetic value of *sophrosyne* (moderate virtue). For Neoplatonists such as Plotinus and Porphyry, as well as medieval Christian ascetics, life is to be conducted in accordance with a series of strictures, rules, and disciplines designed to achieve a contemplative union with God (or the One). But in Kant this relation between living, thinking, and aesthetics is formalized, as aesthetic judgment is seen as the lynchpin of his epistemological and moral master works, holding together the findings of the understanding (as explored in *The Critique of Pure Reason*) and of moral reason (*The Critique of Practical Reason*). In the instances of the sublime and the beautiful, respectively, aesthetic speculation can lead to either a regulative move towards the immense (as in the First Critique), or, in the instance of the beautiful, to a disinterested judgment demanding universal assent (as in ideal moral judgments). Genius, as a faculty and a category of a ideal artistic production, is seen as clarifying and intensifying the imaginative process within which contemplation (seen as the free play of the mind) and beauty are ideally exemplified. By assimilating and transcending the lineage which lay before him, Kant formally made aesthetics tantamount to the more philosophically traditional fields of epistemology and ethics, and introduced the category of “genius” into the philosophical lexicon. This formalization indelibly linked thinking, the aesthetic, and how one acts in ways which would be formative to those pursuing a theory of life as art.

Like Fichte in epistemology, Schiller’s work on the aesthetic education of humans can be seen as a clarification of Kant’s project. In Schiller, not only are aesthetics central to the critique of human mental faculties and the delineation of the proper domains of

understanding, judgment, and reason (as in Kant), but, more strongly, aesthetics are the means by which human mental, moral, and civic capacities are groomed and perfected. Coincidentally, this is also the point of polemical interest for Kierkegaard's Climacus, as the rational, democratic, and moral perfectibility typified by the aesthetic are to be transcended in the name of faith. Kierkegaard, contrary to Kant, Schiller, Hegel, and others, rejects the loose identification of thinking, living, and the aesthetic in the name of a way of being which is fundamentally irrational and trans-moral (as the case of Abraham and Isaac shows in *Fear and Trembling*).

The linkage between living, thinking, and the aesthetic is continued—and perhaps culminated—in Hegel, where the dialectical separation of art and artist as separate fields is linked with both a cognitive and an historic progression of *Geist*. Hegel's most pivotal contribution to life as art is to see the aesthetic as inherently linked with a rational and historical progression in which the work of art and the artist are seen as separate dialectical fields to be mediated by a rational principle. Hegel ostensibly formalizes the connection between thinking and aesthetics in a way which proves decisive for the analyses that follow.

It is therefore with the tradition traced here, culminating in Kant and Hegel, that life as art may begin to be seen as a coherent philosophical conception. Considered historically, life as art can be said to merge Kant's formal linkage of thinking, the aesthetic, and acting, with the Hegelian recognition that the work of art and the artist are to be mediated by rationality. If one is to use aesthetic insights as the means by which one frames the terms for living, then the work of Kant and Hegel makes clear that such reflection must *in principle* be constrained by an account of how one thinks and acts. It

must also clarify the nature of the work of art. Life as art thus hangs on the ability to construct meaningful and coherent syntheses of epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics.

In a negative sense, the demand that accounts of aesthetics be linked to epistemology may reveal a fundamental weakness in aesthetic reflection or works of art themselves: they may be incapable of existing on their own as separate fields of discourse. More positively, however, this constant pairing signals both an historical, and possibly intrinsic, relationship between thinking and the aesthetic which lies at the heart of life as art. As in Aristotle, Plotinus, and Schiller, the development of an artful life depends on the constructive deployment of aesthetics through processes of deliberation which may themselves be influenced by aesthetic accounts. And, as in Kant, Schiller, Hegel, and, negatively, Kierkegaard, how one acts is also reciprocally influenced by accounts of both thinking and aesthetics. If life as art is to remain in communication with its historical forebears, it must therefore do so not only by applying aesthetic insights into how one lives, but, additionally, by constantly clarifying the relationship between rationality, aesthetics, and ethics. The artful life is only viable philosophically inasmuch as it is a concerted effort to both problematize and systematize how one thinks, acts, and senses the world.

This study therefore proceeds based on the historical-philosophical recognition that thinking, acting, and aesthetics form a core theoretical basis for any coherent theory of life as art. It is the working hypothesis of what follows that constructive proposals for life as art are reciprocally dependent upon accounts of both aesthetics and thinking. Furthermore, the dependence between aesthetics and thinking is always mediated, either implicitly or explicitly, through the allegiance to a common object of epistemological or

aesthetic reflection. In critical theory (see chapter three), for example, both aesthetics and thinking, practiced normatively, are to bring forth forms of particularity. The same can be said of Being in the work of phenomenology (see chapter four). Yet this mediating term is often implicit and can only be said to be a useful heuristic, for, as the following chapters show, aesthetics and thinking are often used *conjointly* as part of the greater project of re-fashioning the terms under which one thinks and acts. Thus, while each of the following analyses begins with the hypothesis that aesthetics and thinking are separate fields united by a common object, what is revealed is actually a more nuanced and often ambiguous relationship between thinking and the aesthetic such that both are either conjoined or so intertwined as to be indissociable. Life as art, as will become evident, operates by continuously intensifying the relationship between thinking and aesthetics and the ways in which both can be brought to bear on the problems of acting and seeing.

The relationship between art and thinking is only one historical axis of reflection which culminates in life as art. Another, and equally vital, dimension to life as art is the historical and religious situation in Western Europe which gives rise to the following lineages. The works of Kant, Hegel, and the Idealists were fomented within the struggles of nascent nation-states and the emergence of parliamentary democracies in Western Europe. This period of consolidation gave way to colonial expansion, Victorianism, and the horrors of two World Wars and the Holocaust. In their wake, the Cold War was marked by an increase in the role of government in the lives of individuals and the expansion of technology, which brought the prospect of ecocide and nuclear annihilation. These developments were alongside, or correlative with, the decline of the role of the

Church in Western Europe and the loss of traditional modes of material and religious existence. Even before Nietzsche's proclamation of the Death of God, the moral, cosmological, and religious anchors for Western culture of the preceding 1500 years were being eroded or simply replaced. In short, between war, the expansion of technology, and the shifting dynamics of traditional forms of belief and acting, a number of crises were becoming manifest in Western society. Something had been lost.

It is into this historical, cultural, and religious lacuna that life as art has consistently situated itself. Whereas with the Greeks, Romans, and other cultures which used aesthetic reflection to inform modes of thought and conduct⁷ the artful life was a live cultural option often adopted by elites, religious figures, or aesthetes, life as art as it has emerged in Western European society is neither prevalent nor a part of dominant ways of framing how one lives and thinks. Instead, life as art is consistently formulated as a *response*, if not a rejection, of dominant forms of living and thinking. To this end, figures such as Nietzsche and Baudelaire reject the burgeoning democracies of 19th century Europe, while in the 20th century Adorno, Heidegger, Marcuse, Camus, Merleau-Ponty, and Foucault each reject the ways in which humans, the earth, and Being itself have been violated and oppressed by world war, genocide, and more subtle tactics of normalization and oppression. If life as art is to meaningfully craft forms of living and thinking in the present, it must present live options for resistance and autonomy from dominant modes of living, governing, and believing.

Thus, in addition to elucidating the relationship between aesthetics and thinking and their commitment to particular objects of reflection, the analyses which follow will examine the ways in which life as art is consistently formulated as a rejection of, and

form of resistance to, dominant or administered realities. These are not separate analyses, however: the relationship between thinking and aesthetics and the constructive proposals which emerge from such a relationship should *in itself* be a form of resistance and response. That is, a response to the contemporary situation should be embedded within the philosophical examination of the nature of art as well as how one should think. Taken together, they should propose forms of living, being, and thinking which are not only “aesthetic,” but are equally capable of formulating alternative modes of existence in relation to the realities of the present.

There is a second dimension to the historical situation in which life as art is born. Contemporaneous with the injustices and horrors of the past two hundred years is the loss of traditional forms of assigning mean and significance to one’s life. Nietzsche’s “Death of God” is no doubt instructive in this regard, as it names the vacuum opened up in contemporary European society. The erosion of the Christian churches, the dissemination, globalization, and homogenization of beliefs and ways of life, the existential questions raised by world war and genocide, and the proliferation of new forms of identity construction and manipulation: each point to the manifold loss of meaningful structures and narratives for framing how one lives and dies.

To be sure, life as art does not pose itself as *the* solution, much less as any “solution” to the loss of meaning and the positive sensation of alienation and anxiety in contemporary society. Yet, as before, life as art is a *response* to the manifold processes of alienation, indifference, nihilism, and objectification in contemporary society. It does so not only through resistance, however; positively, it attempts to find ways to assign meaning and significance to everyday life without seeking external sanction or

justification. Life as art does so by founding practices and modes of thought which are affirmative and revelatory in nature: meaning is (re)discovered by constructing ways of thinking and being which allow for forms of gratitude, blessing, and an openness to the world traditionally reserved for the religious. In doing so, life as art can be seen as a therapeutic operation in which forms of meaning are restored and integrated into a coherent way of living and thinking.

In addition to being a form of resistance, then, life as art should also be seen as a way in which meaning can be re-awakened in contemporary Western life. The examination that follows will attempt to trace these two distinct and yet complementary threads within life as art: the demand for resistance and the affirmation of the immanent. In short, life as art will be seen as a multi-faceted concept which links theories of aesthetics and thinking in order to formulate ways of living and thinking which are both negative and positive in their deployment. These twin dimensions are constantly informed by the creative, autonomous, particularistic, ontological, and solidary functions of the work of art and aesthetics. Forged within and through the historical-philosophical work of the Greeks, Idealists, and Romantics, and against the historical developments of the last two-hundred years, life as art becomes a way to construct a life which is both resistant and affirmative, creating autonomy and meaning in everyday life.

III: The Path Ahead

In the following pages I aim to mount a constructive argument for life as art along the lines indicated above. By tracing the dual development of theories of aesthetics and thinking through a series of contemporary philosophical and literary lineages, I formulate

a coherent concept of life as art which is resistant, affirmative, and integrated in its deployment. Each of the following analyses will contribute to an internally coherent position which aims to construct one's life along aesthetic guidelines.

This examination begins in the First Excursus through an analysis of the Dandyistic thinkers of the 19th and 20th centuries. Dandyism, largely crafted as a response to the loss of aristocratic and religious values in France and England in the late 19th century, saw its task as literally creating the self into a work of art. The dandy was to be a “surface” for the display of beauty by means of an aristocratic aesthetics—indifference, physical and moral perfection, attention to behavior, diet, and action. In short, the dandy was a modern ascetic crafted along aesthetic lines. The dandy, however, is presented here as a dangerous—though always live—option within life as art, as he not only attempts to construct his life aesthetically, but, in a more literal sense, attempts to make himself into a work of art. Thus dandyism initiates the investigation into life as art by helping to raise a careful distinction between *art* and *aesthetics*, between becoming a literal work of art and living one's life through the *essence* of the work of art. The following chapters follow the latter line of argument: life as art is an attempt to make one's life aesthetic, *not* a work of art itself.

With this necessary qualification in hand, I turn to the work of Nietzsche, who provides a guiding framework for the analyses which are to follow. By introducing a series of “ideal types”⁸ throughout his work, Nietzsche creates the fundamental language for life as art. The ideal type is one who blends science (*Wissenschaft*) and art (*Kunst*) playfully in order to create a life which is affirmative, honest, and liberated. Science, as a form of thinking, is seen as resistant and deconstructive, freeing one from the strictures of

herd morality and tradition; art is seen as the careful deployment of illusion which allows one to affirm the past, future, and present. The artful life is therefore seen as one which “dances” between science and art, renunciation and affirmation, in order to create an ideal self (or *selves*).

The work of Nietzsche is instructive in a dual sense. First, it is a potent example of how one may live artfully by conjoining thinking and aesthetics in order to create a self which is both resistant and revelatory. Secondly, and more important for my analysis, it provides the fundamental architectonic for the analyses which are to follow. If, as is presumed here, the language, concepts, and guiding metaphors of Nietzsche are resonant in the idea of life as art thereafter, then one can investigate life as art *through* the central intuitions of Nietzsche; indeed, one must do so. The themes explored after Nietzsche, and, indeed, the whole of life as art, should therefore be seen as Nietzschean in inspiration, though contemporary in content.

The first conceptual extension of Nietzsche’s thematics is found in the work of critical theory and examined in chapter three. The work of Adorno and Marcuse shows the ways in which an account of art and aesthetics can be used to reinforce patterns of negative thinking which have as their aim the arousal of particularity and resistance to administered reality. Just as art is negative, so too is thinking. Art serves to reinforce the normative nature of thinking, helping to engender a dissonance between a mutilated reality and a metaphysically ideal unreality. In doing so, art also has a positive function: it may help create a constructive image for a world in which humans are ultimately reconciled with themselves and others.

It is into this space that the work of Marcuse, in particular, is instructive. Not only does Marcuse largely adopt Adorno's aesthetics of negativity, but, largely because of his Marxism, he also adopts a theory of aesthetics-as-sensuality which informs a more positive utopian vision of society in which physical, emotional, and spiritual needs are met through the minimization of domination and repression. In his later works, this concept comes to be known as "the individual/society as a work of art," in which a constructed social reality or individual life comes to mirror the negative and positive dimensions of a work of art. The artful life is therefore one which not only "thinks" in a particular fashion, but is also one which aims to create more just and pleasurable forms of life.

The work of critical theory is contrasted with the Second Excursus and chapter four, where Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Marion are seen as collectively formulating a concept of embodied openness to the happening of Being, or, in the case of Marion, revelation. The work of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, in particular, reveals a deep affinity between poetry and thinking such that the two terms can effectively be conjoined into "poetic thinking," a form of thinking which is in the service of Being and its happening. To this is added Merleau-Ponty's seminal account of the body in the role of perception, a critical addendum which allows for the formulation of *embodied poetic thinking*, a term which signifies the role of the body, through its various modalities, in remaining open to the possibilities for the emergence of Being.

An openness to Being implies a commitment to the appearance of Being through immanence, an affirmation of the possibility that Being arises in the sphere of the visible. It is in this sense that the work of phenomenology can be seen as a form of affirmation.

And if, as Marion admits, one allows for the possibility of such an experience to exceed the structures of conscious reflection, then it is also in this sense that phenomenology opens itself up to the possibility of revelation. As such, the conjunction of art and thinking into a particular way of being opens itself up to the affirmation of the immanent and a rediscovery of a form of religious consciousness.

Taken together, the work of critical theory and phenomenology will show the ways in which art and thinking can be assimilated or conjoined in the name of negativity and Being, an artful life or an affirmation of the world. And, in the Kantian sense of linking the understanding (as thinking) with an ethics (as an artful life), they also form the dual moments of *aesthetic judgment* in life as art. While critical theory and phenomenology should be seen as separate fields with distinct objects of aesthetic reflection, they can also be seen collectively as discourses which link normative concepts of thinking with an ethics intended to create artful forms of living, seeing, and experiencing the world *through* the essence of the work of art. Inasmuch as art and aesthetics act in a role similar to the imagination in Kant's Third Critique, they are given in the following as a form of aesthetic judgment, wherein art and aesthetics are used to clarify the role of thinking⁹ and its relationship to possible forms of action. The work of critical theory, with its emphasis on negativity, is given as the *negative* dimension of aesthetic judgment, while phenomenology, with its attention on affirmation and Being, is given as the *positive* dimension of aesthetic judgment.

Just as the work of chapters three and four can be seen as constituting aesthetic judgment in life as art, the thought of Camus and Foucault in chapter five is given as the *aesthetic ethics* in life as art. That is, Camus and Foucault provide a synthetic framework

showing the ways in which aesthetic judgment can be actualized in daily life. For Camus, this takes the form of a strategic conception of thinking and a creative conception of the work of art. These facets of the aesthetic and thinking are borne out in a series of character studies by Camus, wherein a number of ideal types manifest the aesthetic characteristics of creativity, solidarity, autonomy, and perfectionism in their daily lives. Similarly, Foucault's aesthetic ethics operates through a constant problematization of the present and its possible sites of resistance, and offers possible modes of self-construction through the various modalities of daily life. Taken together, the aesthetic ethics given by Camus and Foucault formulates the techniques and modes of thought required to construct a self, or many selves, devoted to living an artful life.

Through the formulation of aesthetic judgment and ethics, life as art will be seen as a unified movement devoted to the fabrication of a self which is both resistant and affirmative. The artful life is one wherein acts of resistance and affirmation, negativity and positivity, are concretized through the various modalities of lived existence. Creating an artful life depends on the ability to attend with care to the daily practices of maintaining and sacralizing the body, mind, earth, and others while also crafting a space for their realization.

Life as art is dependent on many moments—the failure of certain modes of discourse and the rise of aesthetics, the formulation of forms of judgment which link aesthetics and thinking, and the practice of an aesthetic way of life—but my aim in the following is to show the ways in which life as art can be seen as a unified conception which links the best aesthetic insights with ways of living which create liberated and meaningful lives. The artful life effectively distills the disparate historical and

philosophical lineages from which it is born by creating a self which is greater than the sum of its parts. While anchored to the past, life as art is best conceived as a mode of living, thinking, and seeing which is loyal to the future and affirmative of the present.

Endnotes

¹ Reginald Snell, "Introduction," in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters*, trans., Reginald Snell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 5.

² It is not my goal here to be exhaustive in the depiction of life as art from both Eastern and Western philosophical and cultural lineages. One could easily find parallel sources in both Eastern and unmentioned Western philosophies which could fall within the larger conceptual resources of aesthetic theorization as it applies to living and thinking. For example, see Herbert Fingarette's *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1972) for an interesting interpretation of the role of ritual and harmony in Confucian social, familial, and political undertakings.

³ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans., Martin Ostwald (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Publishing, 1977), 42 [1106b (5)].

⁴ See the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 293-4 [1178b (20)–1179a (10)]. One should also note here Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, trans., Hugh Lawson-Tancred (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), where the balance between bodily pursuits and the intellectual life swings towards contemplation, as God, envisioned as *nous noetikos*—"the thought that itself thinks"—is seen as that toward which all beings aspire: "The intrinsic object of thought is what is intrinsically best, and the intrinsic object of absolute thought is the absolutely best. And in apprehending its object thought thinks itself. . . . It is accordingly the object, rather than the thought, that is the divine element that thinking is believed to possess. Hence too the supreme pleasure and excellence of contemplation. If then God's well-being is forever what ours is at moments, then it is a fit object of wonder, and the more so if it is even greater." (374, [*Lambda* 7]).

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 34 [1103a (30)].

⁶ For further discussion on this distinction, see Plotinus, *The Enneads*, (I.2.1), Dominic O'Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 42, and Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus: The Simplicity of Vision*, trans., Arnold Davidson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 69f.

⁷ Of particular relevance here would be many Native American tribes of North America, as well as other Indigenous peoples around the world.

⁸ For example, the tragic poet, free spirit, philosopher of the future, Zarathustra, Dionysian artist, and *übermensch*.

⁹ Art and aesthetics thus act as a form of critique.

First Excursus

Dandyism and Life *is* Art

Who among us has not dreamt, in his ambitious days, of the miracle of a poetic prose? It would have to be musical without rhythm and rhyme, supple and resistant enough to adapt itself to the lyrical strings of the soul, the wave of motions of dreaming, the shocks of consciousness. This ideal, which can turn into an *idée fixe*, will grip especially those who are at home in the giant cities and the web of their numberless interconnecting relationships.

– Charles Baudelaire, as Quoted by Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*

The concept of life as art as it has been introduced to this point presents an interesting possibility: the construction of a life along artistic lines. While the discussion hereafter will center primarily on the lines of philosophical speculation arising from Nietzsche and continuing through Foucault, this formulation should not be seen as a singular phenomenon. Other variants of life as art have arisen historically, many of them producing coherent and valid modes of existentializing a keen awareness of art and the aesthetic.

While it is not the task of this study to present the various strains of life as art since the early 19th century, it will be instructive to provide one historical example of a valid form of life as art, that of “dandyism” and its various proponents in France and England in the 1800s. Dandyism provides a vital touchstone for an examination of life as art, as it presents not only an interesting means of examining the aesthetic impulse, but also shows the potential perils of any aestheticization of how one lives. Arguably, what Nietzsche, Foucault, and others achieve in their commitment to the aesthetic, political, and thinking, dandyism similarly reaches through a blasé attitude and feigned ennui. It thus poses as a tempting—and yet misguided—lure within life as art.

While generally attributed to Charles Baudelaire, dandyism is a minor historical phenomenon which can trace itself to European aristocratic mores of the 17th and 18th centuries. For the next two-hundred years, it made periodic appearances as both a code of social conduct and as a subject of philosophical scrutiny in figures such as Barbey D'Aurevilly, Charles Baudelaire, and Oscar Wilde. In each instance, it was a mode of self-presentation which sought to create a sense of superiority in the dandy himself, an effect which was to be achieved through scrupulous attention to appearance, dress, conduct, sexual exploits, intellectual affairs, and standing within society. Barbey D'Aurevilly, biographer of the 19th century English dandy George Brummell, unifies these various fields under a theory of dandyism which seeks to transform one's life:

Dandyism is social, human and intellectual. It is not a suit of clothes, walking about by itself! . . . It is the particular way of wearing these clothes which constitutes Dandyism. One may be a dandy in creased clothes. . . . Dandyism is a complete theory of life. . . it is a way of existing.¹

Dandyism not only sought to be transformative of one's appearance; it sought to alter one's entire existence. As a mode of reflection on the self, dandyism sought to present itself as a complete existential perspective from which one is to view the self in relation to the world. And, given the emphasis on externality and appearance, the self was to be seen as a created artifact, a work of art. Reflecting on Baudelaire's form of dandyism, Ellen Moers offers this insight:

Like so many men of the nineteenth century, Baudelaire organized the profound with the trivial by means of a construct that was both ideal and pose. . . . No detail of Baudelaire's existence was too trivial to be scrutinized in the light of principle; no principle too profound to be expressed in habit and gesture. In this sense, for him as for his numerous followers among the "aesthetes," *life and art were one*.²

The melding of life and art were to be achieved in the consummate artistic figure, the dandy, who saw himself as “an artifact to created *ex nihilo*.”³

The dandy became a mode of self-presentation which modeled itself on the work of art and the artist. Yet dandyism did not deliberately attempt to take its cues from the art-world or from aesthetic theory: the dandy himself was to be a work of art, judged on his own terms, apart from the criteria one applies to works of art. Thus, themes of the dandy as self-subsistent and self-creating come to the fore: “the purpose of life is to produce culture, a coherent, unified culture in which self is sustained and nourished and irresolution pacified.”⁴ Or, “The dandy. . . stands on an isolated pedestal of self. . . The dandy has neither obligations nor attachments. . . The dandy’s achievement is simply to be himself.”⁵ As the dandy is conceived as a work of art in his own right, apart from other works of art, the criterion by which he is judged are his own. The dandy is artist, the work of art, and art-critic. The dandy stands or falls on whether or not he has lived up to his self-same criteria for presentation and if he achieves the desired effect from his viewing audience.

“Effect,” of course, was precisely what the dandy sought to achieve. The meticulous attention to self-presentation and unity of appearance which defined the dandy were formed through rites and customs formulated to achieve maximum effect for a potential viewer. Here, the dandy-as-showman becomes a resonant motif:

. . . to see the world, to be at the very centre of the world, and yet to be unseen of the world, such are some of the minor pleasures of those independent, intense and impartial spirits [dandies] who do not lend themselves easily to linguistic definitions. . . . He, the lover of life, may also be compared to a mirror as vast as this crowd; to a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which with every one of its movements presents a pattern of life, in all its multiplicity, and the flowing grace of all the elements that go to compose life. It is an ego athirst for the non-

ego, and reflecting it at every moment in energies more vivid than life itself, always inconstant and fleeting.⁶

Grace and the play of images on a reflective surface are the marks of the dandy, who has so mastered presentation and appearance such that the crowd sees in the dandy images of his own choosing with redoubled intensity and energy. This image is a common one in dandyistic thinking, and is reflected triumphantly in Oscar Wilde's description of the dandy Dorian Gray:

Yes, the lad was premature. He was gathering his harvest while it was yet spring. The pulse and passion of his youth were in him, but he was becoming self-conscious. It was delightful to watch him. With his beautiful face, and his beautiful soul, he was a thing to wonder at. It was no matter how it all ended, or was destined to end. He was like one of those gracious figures in a pageant or a play, whose joys seem to be remote from one, but whose sorrows stir one's sense of beauty, and whose wounds are like red roses.⁷

Gray's graceful and "beautiful soul" were an idealization of the form to be attained by the self-conscious dandy. While the effect of such presentation was primarily aimed at self-adulation and even narcissism, one cannot underestimate the fact that the reflective surface of the dandy was also an ideal medium for the apprehension of beauty, delicacy, and a sense of the youthful.

Despite the internal dynamics of the dandy, the core motivation of the dandy remains his desire to be a multi-faceted medium of presentation and appearance. In his foundational essay, "The Painter of the Modern Life," devoted to the graphic artist Constantin Guys, Baudelaire describes the dandy as "a man of the whole world, a man who understands the world and the mysterious and legitimate reasons behind all its customs."⁸ At other times, Baudelaire refers to the dandy as "the scholar."⁹ Both themes pale in comparison, however, to the most repetitive tenet in dandyistic literature, that of

detachment and indifference. Here, the scholarly man of the world effectively coalesces into a form of coldness which marks one who, as a work of art, is the showpiece of aristocratic formality and the display of intellectual, social, and cultural detachment.

[F]or the word “dandy” implies a quintessence of character and a subtle understanding of all the moral mechanisms of this world; but, from another aspect, the dandy aspires to cold detachment. . . . The dandy is blasé, or affects to be, as a matter of policy and class attitude.¹⁰

Reflecting on an entire tradition of indifference and “blasé” behavior, Moers posits the dandy as a “creature perfect in externals and careless of anything below the surface, a man dedicated solely to his own perfection through a ritual of taste.”¹¹ As Moers notes, indifference and detachment serve to reinforce the superiority and social standing of the dandy himself at the expense of the viewer. By playing on given aristocratic formulae for conduct and emphasizing them for effect, the dandy effectively creates an impression upon the viewer that the dandy is, in fact, superior and worthy of reverence. It is only as a work of art that the dandy receives or attains value—the dandy’s worth is measured only inasmuch as the dandy can create the vivid impression of aristocratic, intellectual, and social grace.

The potency of such effects is persistently reinforced and re-integrated into the dandy himself by a painstaking attention to detail tantamount to asceticism. Here, the overarching goal of beauty takes primacy over the individual himself:

Dandyism, which is an institution outside the law, has a rigorous code of laws that all its subjects are strictly bound by, however ardent and independent their individual characters may be. . . . These beings have no other status but that of cultivating the idea of beauty in their own persons, of satisfying their passions, of feeling and thinking.¹²

Dandyism has its own self-subsistent code of conduct, and can only be judged on its own terms. These terms, as Baudelaire and others make clear, are chiefly to achieve beauty

and, secondarily, pleasure through the display of appearance. In this way, dandyism and its singular sacrifice begins to approximate a type of narcissistic asceticism, where “one is also required to display a Spartan ability to suffer—‘the proud satisfaction of never oneself being astonished.’”¹³

It is likely for this reason that dandyism is often equated with a type of monasticism, a theme which permeates Barbey d’Aurevilly and Baudelaire. Monastics provide the ideal image—and possibly foil—for the dandy attentive to the development of self and the production of an artistic existence.

Thus the dandy’s ritual of the toilette, even his addiction to the dangers and rigours of sport, can be seen as a form of dedication to control: “une gymnastique propre à fortifier la volonté et à discipliner l’âme.” The dandy doctrine of elegance and originality is as demanding as the most rigorous monastic rule.¹⁴

Or, in the words of Eugene Sue, “dandyism is a ‘kind of brotherhood whose rules. . . must be as strictly observed as those of the Trappist order.’”¹⁵ Of course, there are salient differences between the dandy and the monk. Yet the image of the monk still provides an instructive foil and ideal for the dandy. For, in the figure of the monk, one sees a powerful instance of discipline and self-abnegation for the sake of a higher purpose. While dandyism clearly denies the teleology of monasticism, it does attempt to maintain the pose of self-regulation and control, where the self is the medium of a higher ideal (in this case, an artistic one). The monastic/ascetic ideal therefore becomes both a touchstone and a foil for the dandy.

The invocation of the monastic image is important in one other respect, as dandyism was clearly invoked as an alternative mode of existence in relation to the religious. Or, rather, dandyism was seen as the historical consequence of the failure of

common religion, and, thus, in the wake of such failure, the dandy himself was to become the ballast of a new cult of the self. Baudelaire states: ““In truth, I was not completely wrong in considering dandyism a kind of religion.””¹⁶ The attention to self, the spiritualization of detail, the utter sacralization of the everyday—all are hallmarks of the dandy, who imposes a type of religious order on artistic virtues. Bernard Howells adds: “If dandyism looms large in the *Journaux intimes* [by Baudelaire], that is because it is linked with the collapse of all these forms of belief and takes on the status of an alternative solipsistic myth, tragic in its colouring.”¹⁷ Opposing this view is Richard Pine, who does not see the dandy as merely, like Nietzsche some thirty years later, “discovering” the death of God and supplanting it with an alternative ritual, but, rather, performing the sacrifice himself in the name of artistic concerns. “To kill god, to build a cathedral, to enthrone oneself as god, is the *agon* and anagnorisis of the modern artist.”¹⁸ In one instance, the dandy finds God in tatters and declares himself God; in another, the dandy and aesthete performs the deed himself. What is unmistakable, however, is that dandyism is intertwined with the breach created by the secularization of France in the 19th century and the intellectual Death of God. The dandy figures as a potent ideal-type who symbolizes both God’s death at the hands of aestheticism and intellectualism, as well as an alternative form of self-production in its wake.

One should not be too hasty in proclaiming the Death of God as the sole cause for dandyism, however. In another, equally poignant sense, the rise of dandyism as an aristocratic code of self-conduct came about in direct relation to the nascent democratic movements in 19th century Europe and the attendant loss of distinction amongst the

landed and wealthy classes. For figures such as Baudelaire (and later, Nietzsche), the rise of democracy signaled the end of a nearly mythic European heroism:

But, alas! the rising tide of democracy, which spreads everywhere and reduces everything to the same level, is daily carrying away these last champions [dandies] of human pride, and submerging, in the waters of oblivion, the last traces of these remarkable myrmidons.¹⁹

At other times, Baudelaire sees dandyism as symbolizing “the last flicker of heroism in decadent ages.”²⁰ What is clear from these statements, and many others in figures like d’Aurevilly and Beerbohm, is that dandyism is consistently conceived as a dual movement in response to democracy: a movement to recover a lost aristocratic heroism, and a simultaneous renunciation of the masses which are implicated in the democratic social order.

These two motivations—the rejection of democracy and the decay of traditional European religion—form the guiding impetus behind dandyistic tracts of the post-Romantic period. Umberto Eco summarizes the point well:

Confronted with the oppressiveness of the industrial world, the expansion of the metropolis swarming with immense anonymous crowds, the appearance of new classes whose urgent needs certainly did not include aesthetics, and offended by the form of the new machines that stressed the pure functionality of new materials, artists felt that their ideals were threatened and saw the democratic ideas that were gradually making headway as inimical. Thus they decided to make themselves “different.”²¹

The dandy thus does not have to feign indifference: it is a cultural attitude borne of a genuine despise of all that is common.

It is in this sense that dandyists often see the dandy as not only an effete cultural impresario, but as a replacement type for the religious or new democratic figure:

Baudelaire is the product of an age which had witnessed the collapse of established guidelines to truth and morality. It was a period when the

leadership traditionally provided by monarchy, aristocracy, and the church was spiritually bankrupt. Art had begun to take over the functions these elements had once fulfilled, it became both religion and political creed.²²

“Art,” and the artistic functions of the dandy as a reflective aesthetic surface, are the generic concepts which are seen as replacing or usurping the traditional role of religion and aristocracy in European society. In summarizing this aspect of dandyistic writing, Howells avers, “What emerges here is a portrait of Baudelaire as a death-of-God, death-of-history and death-of-self writer in whom metaphysical tragedy is masked by the persistence of religious references.”²³ Thus, these religious references constitute “Baudelaire’s awareness of art as a replacement for what has been lost.”²⁴ To be sure, “art” has a decisive meaning in Baudelaire, namely that which is presented *par excellence* by the dandy himself, as a living work of art. In short, Baudelaire and other dandyistic writers not only saw the dandy as a presentative surface for the portrayal and production of beauty, but as a critical solution to the problems presented by 19th century European democracy and (the failure of) religion. The dandy served the dual function of heralding in a new age in which art and the aesthetic effectively supplanted the democratic and the religious, as well as recalling a previous era in which social decadence and self-presentation held a significant role in European social and political custom.

The move to see the dandy as a replacement type for the religious is fully contiguous with another movement: the development of the dandy as an extension of the Kantian notion of “genius,” whereby the heroic dandy not only takes on the qualities of a lost religion, but of the gifted artist. Baudelaire makes clear the relationship between the dandy and genius:

He had also, drawn from within himself much more than derived from his long experience of society—from himself, that is his genius, and from the knowledge of his genius—a self-confidence, a wonderful ease of manner, and with them a politeness that emitted, like a prism, every shade from the most cordial bonhomie to the most irreproachable brush-off.²⁵

Baudelaire's employment of "genius" takes on a more aristocratic air—one simply has genius or does not. Whether a question of inheritance or not, however, "genius" in the mind of the dandy is not merely the ability to transform the common into the aesthetic, to give free play to the imagination. It is also the capacity for the new, an ability to remain original, to constantly present novel presentational appearances which arouse interest. Barbey d'Aurevilly is said to have mastered the art of originality,²⁶ and, as Baudelaire remarks, such originality is always in the service of expression: "But genius is no more than childhood recaptured at will, childhood equipped now with man's physical means to express itself, and with the analytical mind that enables it to bring order into the sum of experience, involuntarily amassed."²⁷ Genius is the means by which the dandy "recaptures" the lost amazement of childhood and allows him a new interpretation—and expression—of the world. The dandy's usurpation of the religious is crowned in his ability to engender new masks and appearances which call upon, and awaken, a unique experience of the world.

One should not read too much into the invocation of genius as a recurrent trope in dandyistic texts, however. For, just as the genius-dandy is intent on originality for the sake of recovery, such a device is predicated on the understanding that the world stands in constant need of human modification and beautification. Such an aesthetics is oriented towards "perfection,"²⁸ a human gloss on an imperfect natural world. As Baudelaire states: "Everything that is beautiful and noble is the product of reason and calculation."²⁹

Or: “There was no Beauty that was not the work of artifice; only that which was artificial could be beautiful.”³⁰ Beauty, in dandyistic writings of the time, was consistently equated with artifice and human creation. All were, according to the aesthetic ideal, called into the service of perfecting that which was given as imperfect.

It is therefore unsurprising that, if the dandy is seen as an artist of presentation and appearance, he is also the preeminent surface of perfection and artistic development. Stanton captures the point well: “A symbol of modernity, ‘the transitory, the ephemeral, the contingent,’ the self-as-art is the ‘tittilating envelope’ which alone makes the ‘divine *gâteau*’ of absolute beauty digestible on earth.”³¹ To Baudelaire, the dandy becomes the “painter-poet,”³² a title which no doubt captures both the unity between artist and work of art, but also the visual and evocative aspect of the dandy’s task. The painter-poet operates so as to infuse the everyday material of existence with beauty. Costume, diet, presentation, and gestures are readily translated into the media with which the dandy works, helping him to achieve one with his art:

The dandy is equated with the artist: society thus ought to pay him tribute. Brummell is indeed the archetype of all artists, for his art was one with his life. His achievements in costume and manner were living masterpieces. . . .³³

The idea of beauty that man creates for himself affects his whole attire, ruffles or stiffens his coat, gives curves or straight lines to his gestures and even, in process of time, subtly penetrates the very features of his face. Man comes in the end to look like the ideal image of himself.³⁴

The dandy can only mediate perfection, heroism, and genius if the dandy *himself* is the work of art.

This identity between artist and art emerges as the first true concept of “life as art” in the West. Its central conception is based on the realization that perfection,

rebellion against democracy, the supplanting of the religious, and genius, can only be expressed in a figure who is constantly in the process of changing his appearance and initiating an aesthetic response from viewers. Aesthetically, this means that art cannot be evoked on its own as *l'art pour l'art*; rather, the artistic processes of production and display are to be applied to life itself. Only then can the dandy achieve his true goal to be a “living work of art”: “The dandy who incarnates ‘the principle of the elegant life. . . a sublime concept of order and harmony, whose purpose is to infuse poetry into material things,’ emerges as a living work of art.”³⁵ Or, in the words of Eco: “the dandy. . . saw this ideal as the cult of his own public life, to be ‘worked’ and modeled like a work of art in order to transform it into a triumphant example of Beauty. Life was not to be dedicated to art, art was to be applied to life. Life as Art.”³⁶

Life as art for the dandy therefore means the application of methods of artistry, and the norms of art itself, to one’s own life. Yet dandyism argues for more than the application of aesthetics to one’s life: for dandyism, life was not to be *as* art; rather, life was positively identified with art itself. In a positive sense, this enforced an austere attention to the details of one’s life, an asceticism of appearance, diet, manners, and relationships that showed tremendous self-discipline and an astute awareness of self-formation after the Death of God. It also voiced, if only implicitly, the realization that art was historically and aesthetically insufficient in itself; with the dandy, art was to be used, along with thinking, for the production of a self whose goals were both aesthetic and political.

Yet dandyism also holds within it a pernicious side, one which speaks to the negative possibilities within life as art in general. For, just as art for the dandy is seen as

production and display, the life of the dandy can tend towards an extreme artificiality. As Oscar Wilde states, “The first duty of life is to be as artificial as possible.”³⁷ For Wilde, this meant the ever-present need to create, and live through, various masks.³⁸ But these masks were not merely alternative identities that required different attitudes and dispositions (as we will see with Nietzsche in the following chapter, and with aesthetic ethics in chapter five), they were a means of creating a sense of superiority and distance. As Stanton states, this “artificial” self was “designed to exact recognition of superiority through an elaborate strategy of seduction.”³⁹ Baudelaire firmly agrees with Wilde’s conception, consistently speaking of the benefits of “aristocratic habits”⁴⁰ and idealizing the role of the “superior man.”⁴¹ Presentation was not only in the service of beauty-as-perfection, but was also explicitly intended to create a reaction of inferiority within a viewer. The dandy was to be superior in all respects, and his appearance was an outward display of his standing. “In these sophisticated contests, the self, transformed into a system of signs that includes body, gesture, adornment, manners, and speech, gears its strategy to the captivation of others and to the imposition of its superiority.”⁴²

Just as the dandy aims to create a sense of superiority, he simultaneously feeds the “cult of the ego”⁴³ which lies at the heart of dandyism itself. The dandyistic impulse is wholly inward. “[T]he dandy was self-possessed in total indifference to the mass of humanity in his path.”⁴⁴ Indeed, the self-construction of the dandy employed a form of functional solipsism, a disregard for the presence, much less the value, of others, in anything other than their being possible subjects for the dandy’s artistry. As Bernard Howells states, “The ‘esthetique de l’individualisme’ is therefore always prone to the slide into the kind of irrationalism and narcissism that dispenses with the need to

communicate at all.”⁴⁵ And, to be sure, the “narcissistic” impulse of the dandy is also a form of moral quietism and inaction. “Wilde placed the critic, as elsewhere he placed the dandy, among the elect who exist to be somebody but to do nothing. Art is his refuge against action, for it is ‘through Art, and through Art only, that we can shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual existence.’”⁴⁶ Here, it is the narcissicism of the dandy which merges with a sense of superiority to form a wholly passive moral ideal: the dandy’s purpose, above all, is to be a dandy. The dandy’s aesthetic ideal renounces any need for participation, whether it be political, social, or otherwise.

As a viable and historically coherent articulation of life as art, dandyism therefore presents one of the chief dangers inherent to the aestheticization of life. While it reveals an emerging identity between self and art as well as a rigorous self-discipline that demands the regulation of impulses and one’s daily life, dandyism also represents the most tempting—and yet most dangerous—aspect of life as art: the conversion of the self into a work of art. To a large extent, this danger is owing to a particular deficit in the aesthetics which inform dandyism: an aesthetics built on aristocratic virtues and a perfectionism of taste can only be quietistic or aristocratic. Furthermore, the account of thinking in dandyism is also impoverished, as thinking is only in the service of an aesthetic ideal which seeks to create sensations of shock and inferiority within a viewer. The dandyistic life is artful, but the artistic and epistemic reflection it employs is limited in both scope and sophistication.

Arguably, this is in principle owing to the identity that dandyism creates between the artist and the work of art. In dandyism, life and thinking do not emulate the *essence* of the work of art; they *are* art. In doing so, art can only be seen as a form of presentation,

appearance, and perfectionism, just as thinking can only be seen as the strategic presentation of effects on the surface of the self. That is, the impoverished aesthetics and epistemology of dandyism is symptomatic of a larger flaw: the equation of life with a work of art. The air of superiority and indifference assumed by dandies is a direct consequence of the identity drawn between artist and the work of art.

From these reflections it is clear that any productive concept of life as art must distinguish the artist and the work of art. There must be an intrinsic autonomy for both the work of art and the life-artist. This desideratum preserves the critical and non-assimilated function of art while at the same time allowing for a richer conception of the artist. It is in this sense that dandyism can be cast as a foil for the reflections which are to follow: while dandyism represents a viable form of “life as art,” it fails to provide philosophically or ethically adequate norms for how one is to live, see, and think. This deficit will be corrected in the coming pages, where the life-artist lives according to the essential features of a work of art. Yet, as will also be shown, the spectre of dandyism remains a live option within life as art, and the artful life can only be lived and thought by continually returning to its shadow, if only to see what it may become.

In the following chapter I turn to Friedrich Nietzsche, who provides a radical vision for the life-artist, one which constructively pushes life as art past the Victorian ideals of the dandy, and towards a more tenable concept of how one lives and thinks negatively and affirmatively.

[A]s reflections and determinants of the codes and values of their particular epochs, both [the honnete homme and dandy] emerge as variants of an aristocratic impulse that has persistently haunted the human imagination.⁴⁷

Endnotes

¹ J.A. Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Of Dandyism and of George Brummell*, trans., D. Ainslie (Dent Publishing, 1897), 20.

² Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), 274, emphasis added.

³ Donna C Stanton, *The Aristocrat as Art: A Study of the Honnete Homme and the Dandy in Seventeenth and Nineteenth Century French Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 43.

⁴ Bernard Howells, *Baudelaire: Individualism, Dandyism, and the Philosophy of History* (Oxford: LEGENDA Publishing, 1996), 25.

⁵ Moers, 17.

⁶ Charles Baudelaire, *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans., P.E. Charvet (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 400.

⁷ As quoted in Umberto Eco and Girolamo de Michelle, *History of Beauty*, trans., Alastair McEwen, ed., Umberto Eco (New York: Rizzoli, 2004), 335.

⁸ Baudelaire, 396-7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 381.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 399.

¹¹ Moers, 13.

¹² Baudelaire, 419.

¹³ Richard Pine, *The Dandy and the Herald: Manners, Mind and Morals from Brummell to Durrell* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 20.

¹⁴ Moers, 282.

¹⁵ As quoted in Stanton, 195.

¹⁶ As quoted in Stanton, 216. Also see his quotation of Vigny on page 213, where Vigny states that "Art is the modern religion, the modern spiritual belief."

¹⁷ Howells, xix.

¹⁸ Pine, 62.

¹⁹ Baudelaire, 422.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 421.

²¹ Eco, 329-30.

²² A. de Jonge, *Baudelaire, Prince of Clouds* (Paddington Press, 1976), 89, as quoted in Pine, 60.

²³ Howells, xxviii.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Baudelaire, 377. Also see 368 and 376, especially, in relation to Delacroix's genius.

²⁶ See Stanton, 149.

²⁷ Baudelaire, 398.

²⁸ See Baudelaire, 365-6, where he asserts: "A good picture, faithful and worthy of the dreams that gave it birth, must be created like a world. Just as the creation, as we see it, is the result of several creations, the earlier ones always being completed by the later, so a harmonically fashioned picture consists of a series of superimposed pictures, each fresh surface giving added reality to the dream, and raising it by one degree towards perfection."

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 425. Also see 369 and 426.

³⁰ Eco, 340.

³¹ Stanton, 182.

³² Baudelaire, 367.

³³ Moers, 263.

³⁴ Baudelaire, 391.

³⁵ Stanton, 155.

³⁶ Eco, 334.

³⁷ As quoted by Ellen Moers, 301.

³⁸ For Wilde on masks, see Pine, 51ff and 73.

³⁹ Stanton, 30.

⁴⁰ Baudelaire, 374.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 387.

⁴² Stanton, 7.

⁴³ Baudelaire, 420.

⁴⁴ Stanton, 86.

⁴⁵ Howells, xvii.

⁴⁶ Moers, 302.

⁴⁷ Stanton, 217.

Chapter 2: Nietzsche's Ideal Types

Life consists of rare, isolated moments of the greatest significance, and of innumerable many intervals, during which at best the silhouettes of those moments hover about us. Love, springtime, every beautiful melody, mountains, the moon, the sea—all these speak completely to the heart but once, if in fact they ever do get a chance to speak completely. For many men do not have these moments at all, and are themselves intervals and intermissions in the symphony of real life.

– Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human all too Human*

I: Introduction

Just as the preceding excursus showed the ways in which dandyism provides a foil for life as art, the following chapter is intended to positively frame the constructive arguments put forth in chapters three through five. In what follows, the fundamental language for life as art will be given through Nietzsche's work on a series of character studies and the ways in which each character playfully blends art, science, and practices of self-formation in the service of both liberation and affirmation. In doing so, Nietzsche's work provides the basis for the forms of aesthetic judgment and ethics which are to follow, wherein the foundational motifs of thinking, art, and self-formation are deepened and given philosophical coherence.

This chapter therefore assumes a tremendous continuity between the work of Nietzsche and his forebears, while also advocating the originality of Nietzsche's thought. As in the German Idealists and dandyism, Nietzsche uses art and aesthetics as a means of envisioning a synthesis between how one thinks and how one lives. Yet, in marked contrast to the dandyists or the German Idealists, and owing to his post-theistic and postmodern orientation, Nietzsche sees the self as a material to be produced, molded, and crafted along aesthetic lines—not as a stable subject.¹ Thus one cannot have, as in Schiller, an aesthetic “faculty” which one cultivates to the end of moral and civil perfection. Nor,

as in dandyism, can one become identical with a work of art: if there is no stable self, then the self is always in the process of being molded and created such that identity between one's character and the work of art is a regulative ideal at best. Thus the ends and methods for Nietzsche's ideal life are radically altered with respect to the tradition which precedes him. As Degenaar observes, the ideal life is one which emulates the work of art, but does not seek identity with art itself:

[E]ach person should become an artist—a poet of his own life—in creating his life by not remaining in the foreground but building into life the liberating distance of perspective, by structuring it in a personal way, by telling a story about himself.²

Literature is here the metaphor for life-creation, but it could just as easily be tragedy, music, or even literature. Contrary to Baudelaire and others, the imperative in the ideal life is for autonomy and self-fashioning along aesthetic lines. If there is to be life as art after Nietzsche and the death of the subject, then it must do so through practices of self-formation and a deeper understanding of the nature of the work of art.

Given the preliminary observation that Nietzsche's formulation of the ideal life necessarily turns on the question(s) of aesthetics, the self, and an account of thinking, it will remain the task of this chapter to clarify Nietzsche's normative conception of life and its complex entanglement with aesthetics and thinking. This will proceed by examining previous interpretations of Nietzsche's turn to life as art, clarifying the problems in those interpretations, and providing an interpretive framework which allows for a more faithful interpretation of Nietzsche's own thoughts on life as art. Once used as a means to decipher Nietzsche's own texts, this interpretative framework will show that life as art receives a rich and constructive treatment in Nietzsche, one which points the way to critical theory, phenomenology, and beyond.

II: The Hermeneutic to be Employed

Nehamas and Barker: An Initial Attempt at Life as Art

Despite my insistence that Nietzsche be seen as the forerunner of life as art, only a small cadre of philosophers have seen Nietzsche in such a manner, and even fewer in terms which allow for a positive appreciation of Nietzsche's supposed aesthetic project. Of these, Alexander Nehamas and Stephen Barker are likely the most formidable theorists who see Nietzsche articulating something akin to life as art. As Nehamas states in his *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*: "Nietzsche, I argue, looks at the world in general as if it were a sort of artwork; in particular, he looks at it as if it were a literary text."³ And, interpreting Nietzsche through the lens of what he calls "autoaesthetics," the self-conscious molding of one's life along aesthetic lines, Stephen Barker adds: "Among the radical, revolutionary, and astonishing things Nietzsche has to say to us and to our age, none is more astonishing than his commentary on the aestheticizing of the self-reflexive force."⁴ For both Nehamas and Barker, the aestheticizing of the self is the central concept throughout Nietzsche's work, and it is the interpretive key to unraveling his thoughts on the eternal recurrence, the meaning of the "gay science," and the will to power.

What underlies such an interpretation is the claim that Nietzsche's hermeneutics of the self is wholly open-ended; that is, one is always in the process of self-creation given that life is a series of indeterminate interpretive horizons. Cut adrift from substantivalism and the traditional conception of the self, the Nietzschean subject is set free for the project of self-creation. This requires, as Barker notes, an unending process of metaphor-selection, strategic concept formation, and, above all, self-production:

Nietzsche acknowledges that the aestheticizing of life entails its artful, stylish disappropriation, a free fall into metaphor and un-self-ness. Autoaesthetics, the artful and chimerical fabrication of the (un)self, means development of strategies of self-mastery, power over one's art and production, a convergence with self at the *locus* of the creation (and interpretation) of art. . . ⁵

If one is to consider a metaphorical self-understanding as critical to interpreting Nietzsche's project, then one must also be able to argue for a privileged store of metaphors. For Nehamas, Barker, and others, the primary reserve of such metaphors is aesthetic. "Nietzsche—and especially Nehamas' Nietzsche—teaches self-CREATION, ethics as aesthetics. . . ."⁶ Moreover, Nehamas and Barker alike make it clear where they believe Nietzsche's preference lay: "The first central characteristic of Nietzsche's view, then, is that it assimilates the ideal person to an ideal literary character and the ideal life to an ideal story."⁷ "The figures Nietzsche brings to our attention here are products of their own literature, these 'born enemies of logic and straight lines.' They are not *historical* but *literary*, as we have seen in others. . . ."⁸ Nehamas, Barker, and others contend that the aesthetic life is tantamount to a literary existence in Nietzsche's writing. One can only live artfully, or "autoaesthetically," if one actively engages in the process of understanding one's life through the process of writing.

For Nehamas and Barker, this interpretive move allows for a set of conclusions to be drawn which have tremendous consequences for their understanding of life as art. First, if a literary text is the primary metaphor for the aesthetic life, then our lives assume the open-ended nature of literary texts. "Our 'text' is being composed as we read it, and our readings are new parts of it that will give rise to further ones in the future. . . . Our text, even though it will someday come to an end, is still and forever incomplete."⁹ The

aesthetic life is *processive*, constantly in flux as it attempts to mold life along literary lines.

Secondly, the interpretive preference for literature has the effect of forging a narrative unity to one's life. This involves a process of whittling and selection, whereby the life-author chooses those elements which become essential to "plot" formation. "To engage in any activity, and in particular in any inquiry, we must inevitably be selective. We must bring some things into the foreground and distance others into the background."¹⁰ This also has the effect, as Nehamas makes clear in his analysis of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, of forging a coherence to one's life, wherein those patterns, characters, and settings one chooses come to have aesthetic and existential value: "Ideally, absolutely everything a character does is equally essential to it; characters are supposed to be constructed so that their every feature supports and is supported by every other."¹¹ Narrative self-formation is thus character-formation in the literary sense of the term: one is involved in the process of creating one's own character through the process of dispensing with and creating a series of settings and relationships.

These two considerations flow into the third consequence of the framing life-as-literature, in which Nehamas and others come to see Nietzsche as portraying himself as the primary "character" within his study of the aesthetic life. Using *Ecce Homo*, *The Will to Power*, and a number of Nietzsche's other self-referential writings as source material, Nehamas sees Nietzsche's writings as themselves an example of how one constructs the literary life. "Nietzsche exemplifies through his own writings one way in which one individual may have succeeded in fashioning itself. . . . This individual is none other than Nietzsche himself, who is a caricature of his own texts. . . ."¹² Nietzsche is the ideal

character portrayed throughout his writings, from the Dionysian tragedian in the early writings, to the philosopher of the future in the later writings. For Nehamas and many others, this renders hermeneutics equivalent to biography for Nietzsche, as Nietzsche's literary project comes to be seen itself as a practice in self-formation. Nehamas, a scholar of Ancient Greek philosophy, therefore states:

The content of his works, however, remains a set of philosophical views: the literary character who has made of these views a way of life and who urges others to make a way of life out of views of their own—views which. . . he cannot and will not supply for them. Nietzsche wanted to be, and was, the Plato of his own Socrates.¹³

Nehamas' claim to Nietzsche-as-self-biographer does not simply hang on *Ecce Homo*, though it does take its primary cues from Nietzsche's own attempts at self-reflection. In addition to other, more direct material, Nehamas and others see Nietzsche's frequent use of the first-person plural pronoun "we" (*wir*) as an indication that Nietzsche consistently thought of himself as the ideal literary character of his own works. As Robert Solomon observes, "unlike most philosophers—who rarely employ a first person (singular) pronoun—Nietzsche's writings abound in self-reference and self-glorification, often reminding us that HIS judgments, HIS insights, HIS perspectives, are all very much his own."¹⁴ And, therefore, one can see Nietzsche's advocacy of the "philosopher of the future" as self-referential: "Thus the 'Philosopher of the Future' is the exemplary figure of Nietzsche himself who constantly re-creates and discovers himself as an exemplar of the kind of philosopher he hopes to become, and who he hopes others will pick up on."¹⁵

If anything, the move to see Nietzsche as portraying himself throughout his writings, especially in his novel constructions of ideal persona such as the philosopher of the future, has had the effect of deferring a reading of Nietzsche's work to an analysis of

Nietzsche himself.¹⁶ Nietzsche, like the dandies before him, is seen as identical with his art. Given this identification and Nehamas' judgment of Nietzsche as "a miserable little man,"¹⁷ commentators can claim that "Nietzsche's own moral view, then, is banal, vague, inconsistent with his view on knowledge, and perhaps even internally incoherent,"¹⁸ since Nietzsche *himself* failed to adequately demonstrate the ideal life. Nehamas' equation of Nietzsche's philosophical work with his own biography effectively cuts short any productive analysis of Nietzsche's work in terms other than the biographical. Through this limited interpretation, Nietzsche's normative project, like the dandy's, is doomed to fail because it attempts to create an equivalence between the ideal life and the work of art. Indeed, by reducing Nietzsche's often polyvalent discourses on the ideal life to the biographical, Nehamas and others have foisted a restrictive interpretive framework on Nietzsche which constrains his vision for life as art.

What is needed, then, is a way of viewing Nietzsche's intuitions on life as art and self-formation without equating the artist and the work of art, a framework in which art remains an autonomous feature of the ideal life, *not* the material of the self to be produced. In the following pages I propose an interpretation of Nietzsche's work which remains loyal to his abiding impulse to aestheticize life without seeing the aesthetic as textual or Nietzsche himself. Through this model, Nietzsche's work will be seen as metaphorical and consistently deferring any direct identity between the artist and the work of art.

Deleuze, Kofman, and Beyond

The readings of Nehamas and Barker are significant inasmuch as they clearly see Nietzsche advocating the construction of life along aesthetic lines. Interpreted in this fashion, key Nietzschean concepts, such as the will to power, eternal recurrence, and others can be seen as tools subsumed under the more general project of self-formation. Both works fail critically, however, inasmuch as they view Nietzsche—whose most extensive work on aesthetics was in Greek tragedy—as relying upon a narrow (literary) aesthetic model for self-formation, making himself the center of his own work on “character” formation. Arguably, this misses the larger employment by Nietzsche of “character” as a *philosophical* (not a literary) concept. As Robert Solomon again notes: “My objection [to Nehamas]. . . is that life gets sacrificed to literature and not nearly enough gets said about the real world implications of Nietzsche’s thought. . . ”¹⁹

Instead of viewing Nietzsche’s often ambiguous proclamations on the ideal life as solely literary constructions, I propose employing the interpretive method of Sarah Kofman and Gilles Deleuze, who see Nietzsche’s deployment of metaphor and the creation of alternative identities as part of a greater effort to clarify a normative philosophy which does not yet exist. The work of Kofman and Deleuze argues that metaphors and images are multiplied, cross-referenced, and often contradictory in Nietzsche’s philosophy. Instead of specifying a precise literary, artistic, or logical aim, then, each “concept is referred to [another] metaphor,”²⁰ allowing for metaphors to become ways of envisioning other associated concepts. This is, as Kofman states, an “artistic model”²¹ of interpretation, wherein concepts are made to live within metaphors, and the process of metaphor-formation is in constant flux. Nietzsche’s use of metaphor is not a product of a literary or biographical impulse; it is part of a consistent attempt to

articulate a philosophy which does not yet have antecedents and may be logically contradictory.

This interpretation is extended in the thought of Deleuze, who sees Nietzsche forming his concepts through “conceptual personae.” In Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *What is Philosophy?*, conceptual personae are metaphorical figures in whom a philosophy is exemplified. In most philosophies, the person who is to be exemplified in philosophy is usually implicit. But, “in Nietzsche, the conceptual personae involved never remain implicit. . . . [C]onceptual personae, in Nietzsche and elsewhere, are not mythical personifications of historical persons or literary or novelistic heroes. Nietzsche’s Dionysus is no more the mythical Dionysus than Plato’s Socrates is the historical Socrates.”²² Contrary to a more mythic reading of Nietzsche, Deleuze sees Nietzsche’s Dionysus, the “philosophers of the future,” and other figures as deliberate attempts to conceptualize a philosophy as it is lived. Conceptual personae provide a canvas upon which Nietzsche’s philosophy may be given texture and form.

Presocratics, Romans, Jews, Christ, Antichrist, Julius Caesar, Borgia, Zarathustra—collective or individual, these proper names that come and go in Nietzsche’s texts are neither signifiers nor signified. Rather, they are designations of intensity inscribed upon a body that could be the earth or a book. . . . There is a kind of nomadism, a perpetual displacement in the intensities designated by proper names, intensities that interpenetrate one another at the same time that they are lived, experienced, by a single body.²³

Conceptual personae are the embodiment upon which Nietzsche’s philosophy lives according to Deleuze; they are interdependent and yet self-referential and individual. Like Kofman’s conception of Nietzschean metaphor, they refer to one another while also referring to concepts.

Nietzsche's use of conceptual personae is not just a means of multiplying metaphors and creating new conceptual identities, however. It is a means of multiplying and refining the intensity of a philosophical concept through its concrete embodiment: "Intensity can be experienced, then, only in connection with its mobile inscription in a body and under the shifting exterior of a proper name, and therefore the proper name is always a mask, a mask that masks its agent."²⁴ Each successive persona is a looking glass into the way in which a concept may be lived and "inscribed" within a body. Yet these personae are, rightly, considered as "masks." The process of production is also one of dissimulation and deferral, where each image of the persona gives rise to a new experience that forces a re-evaluation of the previous one. As Kofman states: "Nietzsche's originality lies in his accumulating metaphors and substituting them for each other, attaching a totally new figure to a stereotyped image, thus provoking a revaluation of traditional metaphors at the same time as ridiculing them."²⁵

Deleuze and Kofman therefore draw attention to the multiplicity of metaphors and conceptual personae which proliferate in Nietzsche's writing. Each persona attempts to draw the reader into an intense experience of a concept or an embodied reality. Indeed, as Hicks and Rosenberg state, Nietzsche may be seen as creating his philosophy through such personae, not only by creating positive identities, but through the creation of foils and false identities:

One of the most striking features of Nietzsche's philosophical writings is his extensive use of figures or figurative embodiments of various forms of wisdom, culture, and ways of life. . . . Indeed, one is hard pressed to think of any other philosopher who has so extensively and systematically used literary and poetic figures in his writings.²⁶

Of course, as Deleuze and Kofman point out, such figures are not merely “literary and poetic,” but fictional as well, created by Nietzsche for the purpose of envisioning a philosophy which has *not yet* had exemplars.

Nietzsche’s own self-assessments agree with this interpretation. As early as his unpublished *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*, Nietzsche proclaims:

What therefore is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms: in short a sum of human relations which became poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned, and after long usage seem to a nation fixed, canonic and binding; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they *are* illusions. . . .²⁷

Nietzsche’s statement is here descriptive, explaining the ways in which “truths” are seen as metaphors for a set of unstable relations which defy precise linguistic equivalence. Yet it is precisely this process of metaphor-formation, doubling, and intensification which Nietzsche sees as prescriptive for his own project. And as he admits in *Ecce Homo*, these metaphors may be persona as well: “I merely avail myself of the person as of a strong magnifying glass that allows one to make visible a general but creeping and elusive calamity.”²⁸ Here the metaphor, or “magnifying glass” which allows insight into a concept or situation is the person, or what he later refers to as a “type.”²⁹ These types should be seen as typifications of a way of life, a conceptual persona: “Great men, like great epochs, are explosive material in whom tremendous energy has been accumulated; their prerequisite has always been, historically and physiologically, that a protracted assembling, accumulating, economizing and preserving has preceded them.”³⁰ Thus recurrent figures like David Strauss, Wagner, Schopenhauer, Jesus, and Socrates receive critical attention from Nietzsche not because they are, in themselves, worthy of

Nietzsche's polemical efforts; rather, they are typifications of a way of being, embodiments of a set of concepts and values.

Such figures may also be the manifestation of values, orders of rank, and thinking expressed in their highest form. In a tone of reverence, Nietzsche describes Goethe thus:

[H]e disciplined himself to a whole, he *created* himself. . . .Goethe conceived of a strong, highly cultured human being, skilled in all physical accomplishments, who, keeping himself in check and having reverence for himself, dares to allow himself the whole compass and wealth of naturalness, who is strong enough for this freedom. . . .A spirit thus *emancipated* stands in the midst of the universe with a joyful and trusting fatalism, in the *faith* that only what is separate and individual may be rejected, that in the totality everything is redeemed and affirmed—*he no longer denies*. . . But such a faith is the highest of all possible faiths: I have baptized it with the name *Dionysos*. —³¹

Goethe not only comes to represent the nadir of self-formation, heartiness, and freedom, but is, critically, an exemplification of the Nietzschean-Dionysian ideal. For Nietzsche, Goethe has been interpretively transformed into a curious amalgam of a world-historical figure and a conceptual persona for Nietzsche's highest ideal. Nietzsche's normative ideal is manifest through the persona of "Goethe," a figure who is equal parts historical and fictional.

Nietzsche's use of historical figures, however, though they have received the most attention from scholars, arguably represent the minority of Nietzsche's attempts at formulating conceptual personae. His most numerous conceptualizations actually lie in the construction of what I will hereafter call "ideal types," fictionalized conceptual personae who represent an ideal embodiment of a concept, a horizon of philosophical and artistic promise. Although it will remain the task of the balance of this chapter to establish the identity of such figures, the role of ideal types should be seen as central to an interpretation of Nietzsche's work. As Philip Pothen states:

Artists [themselves an ideal type] are ciphers for the underlying forces at work through them, in the same way that those who have a vested interest in interpreting the same forces in terms of religion and morality—the philosopher, the saint, the ascetic, the priest—can be understood in terms of those same, albeit differently configured, forces.³²

Similarly, Hicks and Rosenberg argue that an understanding of Nietzsche's construction and employment of ideal figures is "essential for the proper understanding of his direction and development, both intellectually and effectively."³³ Given Nietzsche's consistent use of metaphor and, in particular, the use of historical and ideal types as a means of expressing and crafting his own philosophy, an interpretation of Nietzsche's conception of the ideal life turns on his characterization of the ideal type. If the ideal type is seen as a conceptual persona, an embodiment of a particular way of living and being, then an examination of the ideal type should open up Nietzsche's insights into life as art without seeing Nietzsche himself as the *dramatis persona*.

Through an examination of the ideal type, then, a means for exploring Nietzsche's constructive conception of life as art has now been prepared. By combining the central intuition of Nehamas and Barker with respect to the role of aesthetics and self-formation in Nietzsche's work with the metaphorical work of Kofman and Deleuze, we can begin to see the ways in which Nietzsche funnels his intuitions on the ideal life through a series of ideal types. If Nietzsche does envision an aesthetic synthesis of art and thinking, negation and affirmation, it will be done through the creation and characterization of an ideal type, a site for the expression of a particular way of life.

With this hermeneutical basis in hand, the balance of this chapter will look at the role of ideal types in Nietzsche's work from his earliest writings (from *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* to *Untimely Meditations*) to his "positivistic phase" (*Human*,

All Too Human and *Dawn*) to his “middle works” (*Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*) to his later works (from *Beyond Good and Evil* to his descent into madness, including the *Will to Power*). The following pages will show a proliferation of ideal types in each phase of Nietzsche’s work who are consistently seen as using both art and “thinking” for the critical task of creating a life which is affirmative, self-consciously deceptive, and unerringly creative.

III: Nietzsche’s Ideal Types

Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks—Untimely Meditations

Any attempt to examine Nietzsche’s insights into his aesthetics, and therefore life as art, must begin with an interpretation of his first published work, *The Birth of Tragedy*.

There, and in the work immediately following its publication, Nietzsche lays the foundation for his views on life as art through his assessment of the characterization and interplay between the Apollinian and Dionysian components of Greek tragedy and its development into the normative role of philosophy and the tragic artist.

The Birth of Tragedy is principally hailed as Nietzsche’s exaltation of the Dionysian element of pre-Socratic tragedy. Yet *The Birth of Tragedy* is also significant for its assessment of the Apollinian element of early Greek tragedy, which Nietzsche often paradoxically describes as “dream-like,” “individuating” (the *principium individuationis*), “rational,” and “perfecting.” In a sense, it is all of these. The dream-like status of the Apollinian³⁴ allows a tragic audience to be transported into a perfected realm opened up through the rational elements of tragedy itself. As John Sallis states, “In Apollinian images the everyday originals, the things of the everyday, are perfected—that

is, in the Apollinian state there is a gleam of perfection, of higher truth.”³⁵ The Apollinian creates an aesthetic space wherein the world comes to be perfected, beautified, and “veiled”³⁶ in such a way that the viewer is transported to an alternative reality. As such, the feeling associated with its reception is often described by Nietzsche as intoxication (*Rausch*), one in which the viewer is transported to an alternative consciousness of the tragic space being created. This is, to be sure, a process of self-deception, as Julian Young notes: “Self-deception is at the heart of the Apollinian solution to pessimism.”³⁷

Yet it is self-deception in the name of a higher ideal, that of the Dionysian. The Apollinian component of early Greek tragedy has utility inasmuch as it opens up the aesthetic space for the emergence or recognition of the Dionysian, which Nietzsche describes as the creative and processive ground of existence, the abyss (*Abgrund*) of living, suffering, and dying.

In Dionysian art. . . the same nature cries to us with its true, undissembled voice: “Be as I am! Amid the ceaseless flux of phenomena I am the eternally creative primordial mother, eternally impelling to existence, eternally finding satisfaction in this change of phenomena!”³⁸

The portal of the Apollinian propels the tragic audience into the Dionysian abyss of flux, change, and passing; one is driven towards union with the “creative primordial mother.” As Sallis recognizes, the apprehension of the Dionysian in Greek tragedy is one in which the individual is thrown beyond herself, “driven on beyond the very limit that would delimit every state of the individual.”³⁹ The individual is plunged into the collective frenzy of earthly becoming.

This movement is a perilous journey which demands a constant tension between the Apollinian and Dionysian. The Dionysian drive towards abandonment and fusion must be balanced by the Apollinian striving for individuation; Dionysian frenzy must be

in tension with Apollinian rationality; and the Dionysian abyss must always be seen through the dream-like patina of the Apollinian. In *The Birth of Tragedy* this complex interplay between the Apollinian and Dionysian is achieved by the tragic artist, one who “experiences mystical unification with reality and transforms it into music in order to give expression to this unity.”⁴⁰ Nietzsche’s aesthetics vacillate between the viewer of Greek tragedy and the Dionysian tragic artist, who constantly holds in tension the Apollinian and Dionysian so as to safely transport others into the realms of the Dionysian abyss. As Julian Young states, “[S]ocial life depends upon the confinement of Dionysian ecstasy to symbolic, artistic expression.”⁴¹ The artist is to be valued as the individual who releases the creative potencies of the Apollinian and Dionysian components of tragedy:

Insofar as the subject is the artist, however, he has already been released from his individual will, and has become, as it were, the medium through which the one truly existent subject celebrates his release in appearance. . . The entire comedy of art is neither performed for our betterment or education nor are we the true authors of this art world. On the contrary, we may assume that we are merely images and artistic projections for the true author, and that we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art—for it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*. . . ⁴²

For many, this signals a “soteriological” turn in Nietzsche’s aesthetics, a felt need to redeem life from itself. However, what is of even more importance is the role played by the artist, who allows a viewer, along with himself, to see that life is “justified” as an aesthetic phenomenon. Rather than posing a Nietzschean soteriology, the above reveals both the therapeutic status of tragedy in Nietzsche’s aesthetics as well as the centrality of the tragic artist in bringing such a perspective to life and sustaining it.

The vacillation between an aesthetics-of-artworks to an aesthetics-of-artists proves decisive for Nietzsche’s aesthetics during and after *The Birth of Tragedy*. Pushing

the tension which existed in Kant's Third Critique and in Schiller's work on aesthetics, Nietzsche's aesthetics increasingly moves in the direction of prioritizing "genius" and the artist: "Only insofar as the genius in the act of artistic creation coalesces with this primordial artist of the world, does he know anything of the eternal essence of art; . . . he is at once subject and object, at once poet, actor, and spectator."⁴³ The Dionysian artist becomes one with his work: the tragedian "is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: in these paroxysms of intoxication [*Rausch*] the artistic power of all nature reveals itself to the highest gratification of the primordial unity."⁴⁴ Here, the artist holds the capacity to become one, if only momentarily, with the object of his art—the artist is not only the medium for art, but can become art himself.⁴⁵

Nietzsche is quick to realize that such an identification rests on a falsehood, one which he willingly accepts. Rather, art is *itself* a falsehood, and the identity between artist and art rests on such an illusion: "The beautiful illusion of the dream worlds, in the creation of which every man is truly an artist, is the prerequisite of all plastic art. . . ."⁴⁶ Art is *necessarily* illusory, as it must extricate simplicity and linearity from a world of flux. Nietzsche recognizes such a necessity in his *Untimely Meditations*:

The struggles [art] depicts are simplifications of the real struggles of life; its problems are abbreviations of the endlessly complex calculus of human action and desire. But the greatness and indispensability of art lie precisely in its being able to produce the *appearance* of a simpler world, a shorter solution to the riddle of life. . . . Art exists *so that the bow shall not break*.⁴⁷

Once again, art is seen as having a saving power, if only hypothetical and self-consciously illusory. One can reach a unity with the object of art—as does the tragic artist—through the illusions produced by art itself. And, conversely, it is the tragic artist who is able to seek unity with the Dionysian abyss.

In Nietzsche's aesthetics, then, it is the artist himself who anchors any interpretation of art or the aesthetic. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, this figure is the Greek tragedian; in the later *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche speaks of the "dithrambic dramatist," who is "at once the actor, poet and composer."⁴⁸ Such a figure need not be only a tragedian or dramatist, however, and, even in Nietzsche's early works, he moves to see the philosopher as tantamount to the tragedian inasmuch as he mediates between worlds and provides an exemplar for the model synthesis of the Apollinian and Dionysian elements of life. "Thus the aesthetically sensitive man stands in the same relation to the reality of dreams as the philosopher does to the reality of existence; he is a close and willing observer, for these images afford him an interpretation of life. . . ."⁴⁹ The work of the philosopher comes to approximate that of the artist, who mediates the disparate and conflicting spheres of existence and the tragic arts. For example, Nietzsche asserts in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*:

While [the philosopher] is contemplative-perceptive like the artist, compassionate like the religious, a seeker of purposes and causalities like the scientist, even while he feels himself swelling into a macrocosm, he all the while retains a certain self-possession, a way of viewing himself coldly as the mirror of the world. This is the same sense of self-possession which characterizes the dramatic artist who transforms himself into alien bodies and talks with their alien tongues and yet can project this transformation into written verse that exists in the outside world on its own.⁵⁰

The philosopher is envisioned as akin to the scientist, artist, and religious man, though he does not succumb to self-deception. While the philosopher does not don masks, he may become greater than the artist, as he is able to view reality more dispassionately: "Let us think of the philosopher's eye resting upon existence: he wants to determine its value anew. For it has been the proper task of all great thinkers to be lawgivers as to the

measure, stamp, and weight of things.”⁵¹ The philosopher is able to achieve the same depths of understanding and ecstasy as the artist, but this vision is always tempered by the ability to measure and judge the aesthetic in relation to reality. The philosopher effectively combines the skills of the tragedian in mediating the Dionysian and Apollinian dimensions of existence and the philosophical ability to contextualize intoxication and illusion. Thus, while the artist ostensibly engages in a self-conscious illusion which allows the emergence of a critical affirmation of the world, the philosopher may stand above the artist in his ability to place art within the context of existence itself. The ideal artist stands in relation to the conscious illusion as the ideal philosopher stands in relation to existence.

Nietzsche’s early phase does not attempt to bridge the tension between the tragic artist and the philosopher. Yet he is clear in who opposes such a figure—the Platonized scientist who delineates general rational principles for the functioning of the cosmos. “Science [*Wissenschaft*] is not related to wisdom as virtuousness is related to holiness; it is cold and dry, it has not love and knows nothing of a deep feeling of inadequacy and longing.”⁵² Or, in the words of *The Birth of Tragedy*, science and the Socratic are the “un-Dionysian” which believe that “it can correct the world by knowledge, guide life by science [*Wissenschaft*], and actually confine the individual within a limited sphere of solvable problems, from which he can cheerfully say to life: ‘I desire you, you are worth knowing.’”⁵³ This is a tension which clearly marks the latter half of *The Birth of Tragedy*, as well as many of Nietzsche’s other early writings. The scientist comes to be seen as a dangerous counter to the tragic and philosophical ideal typified in the artist and philosopher, respectively.⁵⁴

It is therefore intriguing that the scientific comes to be seen as an ideal tantamount to the artistic in Nietzsche's so-called "positivistic phase."

Human, All Too Human–Dawn

During the time of Nietzsche's break with Wagner, he published two books, *Human, All Too Human* (which contains parts of *The Wanderer and His Shadow*) and *Dawn* (*Morgenröte*). Both books are generally considered as part of Nietzsche's "positivistic phase," wherein he abandons the appeal to art as seen in the early works and moves towards a more hearty embrace of the scientific. This contention, I would argue, misses the point on multiple accounts, inasmuch as it ignores the remarkable continuity of Nietzsche's aesthetics and the instrumental value he assigns to *both* art and science.

What is perhaps most remarkable, given Nietzsche's "positivism," is the absolute fluorescence of ideal types that marks this period in his writing. Calling to mind Nietzsche's use of the term in the *Untimely Meditations*,⁵⁵ he consistently employs the term *freie Geist* (translated as a "free spirit," or a "spirit that has become free"⁵⁶) as his chief conceptual persona in both *Human, All Too Human* and *Dawn*.⁵⁷ In numerous instances, the free spirit is described as one who lives freely, who undergoes a transformation (or "great separation [*Loslösung*]"⁵⁸), and who creates his own values. In his preface for *Human, All Too Human* (written in 1886), Nietzsche describes the free spirits in a tone befitting Deleuze's conceptual personae:

Thus I invented, when I needed them, the "free spirits" [*freien Geister*] too. . . There are no such "free spirits," were none—but, as I said, I needed their company at the time. . . That there *could* someday be such free spirits. . . I am the last person to want to doubt that. I already see them *coming*, slowly, slowly. . .⁵⁹

Nietzsche is clear—contra Nehamas—that such figures are almost always futural, creations which endow the future with value. And, in an alternate reading, they are not only *of* the future, but are also those who are capable of *thinking* the future. “The men of the future [*die zukunfftigen Menschen*] will one day deal in this way [living without faith] with all the evaluations of the past; one has voluntarily *to live through* them once again, and likewise their antithesis. . . .”⁶⁰

Just as Nietzsche proposes that one “live through” such futural free spirits, however, he also specifies another parallel conceptual persona, that of the “thinker [*Denker*].”⁶¹ In many respects, the thinker sounds similar to the free spirit: “A thinker [*Denker*] can for years on end force himself to think against the grain: that is to say, to pursue not the thoughts which offer themselves from within him but those to which an office, a prescribed schedule, an arbitrary kind of industriousness seem to oblige him.”⁶² At other times, however, the thinker bears more cerebral overtones than the free spirit, as he is often equated with the “man of knowledge [*Erkennenden*]”⁶³ and the “investigators [*Ferschern*],” who are described as “like all conquerors, discoverers, seafarers, adventurers, of an audacious morality and must reconcile ourselves to being considered on the whole evil.”⁶⁴ It is clear from these instances that the thinker is not intended as an alternative to the free spirit; rather, the thinker bears within himself supplemental characteristics of investigation, knowledge, and persistence which can be seen alongside those of the free spirit.

Nietzsche’s use of the thinker as an analogue to the free spirit also has the consequence of shifting the emphasis on his conceptual persona towards that of thinking and its attendant metaphors, analogies, and images. Nietzsche can therefore use a more

Kantian term—“genius [*Genie*]”—without collapsing it to the more Idealist import behind the term, instead subsuming it under the more general designation of his free spirits and thinkers. Thus the free spirit appears as “the spectacle of that strength which employs genius *not for works* but for *itself as a work*; that is, for its own constraint, for the purification of its imagination, for the imposition of order and choice upon the influx of tasks and impressions.”⁶⁵ Thinking, exemplified in genius, is here employed as that which constrains the self, imposes a form of self-rule, and lends clarity to the task of living. The function of genius, as Jorg Salaquarda notes, is to “seduce us to live fully.”⁶⁶

The move to see the free spirits as supplemented by the thinker and the genius paves the way for Nietzsche’s return to the concept of the philosopher, which he had examined in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* and in his *Untimely Meditations*. The philosopher, resonant with the personae of the thinker, free spirit, and genius, appears again as a cultivated exemplar:

Are we then seeking too much if we seek the company of men who have grown gentle, well-tasting and nutritious, like chestnuts which have been put on the fire and taken from it again at the proper time? . . . Such men we should call philosophers [*Philosophen*], and they themselves will always find a more modest name.⁶⁷

The philosopher now appears as the figure who has practiced self-formation to the point of perfection; like the genius, he is that figure who sees himself “as a work,” something to be perfected through the qualities of thinking, self-imposed separation,⁶⁸ and a disposition to the future (the for-the-sake-of-which in self-formation).

As in *The Birth of Tragedy* previously, the philosopher and free spirit is given expression alongside the conceptual persona of the artist, who remains the center of

Nietzsche's aesthetics. As in the previous section, Nietzsche's artist continues to seduce humans to live in particular ways and affirm life itself:

The tragic poet has just as little desire to take sides *against* life with his images of life! He cries rather: "it is the stimulant of stimulants, this exciting, changing, dangerous, gloomy and often sun-drenched existence! It is an *adventure* to live—espouse what party in it you will, it will always retain this character!"⁶⁹

This is done, once again, through the spirit of intoxication, which Nietzsche invokes as the primary stimulus within art: "But [in the cases of affliction] men are accustomed to resort to means of intoxication [*Rausch*]: to art, for example—to the detriment of themselves and of art as well!"⁷⁰ What Nietzsche saw as the primary allure for Greek tragedy has now become the characteristic of art *writ large*: intoxication and the seduction to higher states of consciousness.

This is achieved, as before, through deception and the constructive use of illusion. Yet this period in Nietzsche's writing evinces a more concerted effort to see art as deceptive, illusory, and as potentially harmful.⁷¹ At multiple points in both *Human, All Too Human* and *Dawn* Nietzsche is clearly at pains to assert the "lie" often perpetrated by art. Art foists an interpretation on the world which is simplistic and illusory. As he states in his updated preface to *Human, All Too Human*: "I had to gain it by force artificially, to counterfeit it, or create it poetically. (And what have poets ever done otherwise? And why else do we have all the art in the world?)"⁷² At some points, the "counterfeit" nature of art renders it useful, a creative fiction which allows us to live, as in the case of the Greeks, in reverence towards existence. However, at other points in this phase, it is precisely the illusory nature of art which seems to lend itself to a more scientific

interpretation, one which clarifies the simplifications imposed by the artist and the work of art:

The artist [*Kunstler*] knows that his work has its full effect only when it arouses belief in an improvisation. . . . As is self-evident, the science of art must oppose this illusion most firmly, and point out the false conclusions and self-indulgences of the intellect that drive it into the artist's trap.⁷³

It is not hard to see such statements as supercessionist. Nietzsche repeatedly identifies the illusion(s) of art as the subject of scientific inquiry, which is explicitly invoked as that which may clarify and possibly eradicate the “traps” of art itself. Nietzsche therefore asserts, “Beginning with art, one can more easily move on to a truly liberating philosophical science [*philosophische Wissenschaft*],”⁷⁴ and “The scientific man [*wissenschaftliche Mensch*] is a further development of the artistic man.”⁷⁵

Nietzsche therefore places art in a subordinate position with respect to the sciences (as *Wissenschaften*) in his “positivistic phase.” For it is science, under Nietzsche’s general definition, which clarifies all errors and deception, whether they be artistic, religious, cultural, or otherwise.⁷⁶ As Peter Heckman avers, “science, in *Human all too Human*, is often straightforwardly associated with truth and knowledge in contrast to religion, metaphysics, and art.”⁷⁷ Nietzsche is less than clear, however, with regard to the nature of such inquiry or deconstruction. At some points the claims of science appear grandiose: Nietzsche plainly asserts that science can be the measure for what is “true and actual.”⁷⁸ At other points, science is a multi-faceted method of critique whose primary duty is to eradicate error and pretension. One such error is substantialist and metaphysical thinking. As Heckman once again observes: “Science, or ‘historical philosophy,’ will not disclose the underlying invariant structure of the world. Instead, by showing us that

everything is in a process of evolution, it will dismantle our commitment to invariant structure itself. . . ”⁷⁹ Such a deconstructive project can be placed in the service of life, reclaiming an affirmation of the world which was once wrought through the enterprise of tragedy and the arts. As Nietzsche states, “It was only science which reconquered [the spirit of life], as it had to do when it at the same time rejected any other idea of death and of any life beyond it.”⁸⁰ Science thus becomes a means of critical deconstruction, of eradicating error, simplicity, and illusion (of which art is a form).

Unfortunately, Nietzsche’s proposal for scientific thinking as a mode of critical skepticism lacks a definitive statement as to how such thinking is performed. Presumably the works of this phase are an exemplification of scientific thinking itself. Yet, unlike Kant before him and Adorno after him (see the following chapter), Nietzsche does not explicitly state how *science*—as rigorous method of inquiry—is performed either phenomenologically or normatively. Rather, in keeping with his characterization of the artist, the free spirit, and others, he prefers to describe the psychology of the scientist in more literary and metaphorical terms: “we must conjure up the spirit of science [*Geist der Wissenschaft*], which makes us somewhat colder and more skeptical, on the whole, and cools down particularly the hot flow of belief in ultimate truths. . . ”⁸¹ At other times, conjuring his persistent use of the lone, wanderer figure, he describes the scientific person as one who inhabits landscapes of isolation:

A scientific nature, on the other hand, knows that the gift of having all kinds of ideas must be reined in most severely by the scientific spirit. . . his daemon takes him through the desert as well as through tropical vegetation, so that wherever he goes he will take pleasure only in what is real, tenable, genuine.⁸²

Drawing on his parallel references to the wanderer, the free spirit, and the thinker, the scientific nature can be seen as a controlled investigator and skeptic of human creations, illusions, and, in a more grandiose tone, “what is real.” The coldness, heartiness, and grim resignation of the scientist appear as necessary to the task of tearing down the idols which Nietzsche intends to illustrate in all their forms.

In general, the above depiction is often seen as the last word with regard to Nietzsche’s “positivism” and his embrace of scientific and critical inquiry in this phase. This critically ignores the place he assigns to science, however, one which is central to his articulation of ideal types and the nature of life as art. For, just as art is consistently seen as an illusion in Nietzsche’s work, science is *also* seen as a process of illusion and concept formation. Babette Babich puts it nicely:

Like poetry and like art, both science. . . and mathematics *work* as conventions or inventions but lie *about* and most perniciously *to* themselves. Inventing itself, dressing itself to seduce its own expectations of reality, science’s unshaken confidence embraces the metaphysical reality of its own invention.⁸³

Science, too, is a construction, a way of seeing. Whereas art is predicated on the illusion of creative deception, science is also an invented mode of seeing and analyzing the world, though one committed to the discovery of truth and emancipation from falsehood.

Science is one among many perspectives one can bring to the world. “Every thinker paints his world in fewer colours than *are actually there*, and is blind to certain individual colours. . . . By virtue of this approximation and simplification he introduces harmonies of colours. . . , and those harmonies possess great charm and can constitute an enrichment of nature.”⁸⁴

With this critical qualification, Nietzsche adds a critical element which is lacking in most scholarship on this phase in his writing: if science is in some sense tantamount to art, then it can be employed in the same manner. As Heckman states, “Nietzsche, in *Human all too Human*, has given a unique sense to the notion of science such that he is able to enlist it in the service of the project to which he is committed: the installation of humanity within the natural order of innocence.”⁸⁵ Nietzsche’s appreciation of science, like art in this phase of his writing, is purely instrumental: it is a tool to be used by his ideal types for the formation and perfection of themselves as a coherent “work.” This is stunningly depicted in Nietzsche’s portrayal of the “double brain” in *Human, All Too Human*:

Now, if science produces ever less joy in itself and takes ever greater joy in casting suspicion on the comforts of metaphysics, religion, and art, then the greatest source of pleasure, to which mankind owes its whole humanity, is impoverished. Therefore a higher culture must give man a double brain, two chambers, as it were, one to experience science, and one to experience nonscience. Lying next to one another, without confusion, separable, self-contained: our health demands this. In the one domain lies the source of strength, in the other the regulator.⁸⁶

Art—as illusion—is called forth as the source of strength, science as the “regulator,” giving clarity and restraint to the project of crafting a “higher culture.” Nietzsche continues with this theme of the double brain in #273, where the appreciation for the forces unleashed by science and art (stated explicitly in #272) reaches the poetic:

But by having dwelled in those realms where heat and energy are unleashed, and power keeps streaming like a volcanic river out of an everflowing spring, he [the free spirit?] then, once having left those domains in time, comes the more quickly forward; his feet have wings; his breast has learned to breathe more peacefully, longer, with more endurance.⁸⁷

The double-brained figure now resonates with the cheery resolve, power, and strength of the free spirits, philosophers, and thinkers. Lest the task at hand be left as ambiguous, Nietzsche makes the bold claim for self-culture and the creative amalgamation of science and art in this final long quotation:

Given that a man loved the plastic arts or music as much as he was moved by the spirit of science, and that he deemed it impossible to end this contradiction by destroying the one and completely unleashing the other power; then, the only thing remaining to him is to make such a large edifice of culture *out of himself* that both powers can live there, even if at different ends of it; between them are sheltered conciliatory central powers, with the dominating strength to settle, if need be, any quarrels that break out.⁸⁸

With the foregoing notions of art and science, Nietzsche's promulgation of the double brain becomes clear: humans, presumably Nietzsche's ideal types, are to employ art and science as opposing forces that lend strength and heat, resolve and coldness, to one's life. As in the Dionysian and Apollinian instance above, the illusions of the artistic are to be tempered by the rationality of the scientific, the imaginative psyche of the artist countered by the hard truths of the scientist. What emerges is a self which makes a "culture out of himself," a unique individual who blends the vigor of art with the coldness and truth of science: one to constrain the domain of what is possible, and one to entice oneself to different visions of reality.

While the double brain image is stunning, it does not give explicit details on how such nuptials are to take place. Presumably, one is to follow the scientific spirit in such an endeavor, as Nietzsche frequently employs the images consistent with experimentation as constructive metaphors for living: "We are experiments: let us also want to be them!"⁸⁹ "We may experiment with ourselves! Yes, mankind now has a right to do that!"⁹⁰ At other points, Nietzsche refers to the "art in the wisdom of life [*das Kunststück der*

Lebensweisheit],”⁹¹ which, if inferred from his own theory of art, would certainly include the art of self-conscious illusion and world-perfection.

Yet Nietzsche’s most apt metaphor for the synthesis of art and science may be another one drawn from the arts—that of dancing. Dancing for Nietzsche is both a daring and aristocratic pursuit, one that glides between the forces of grace, strength, and delicacy. “He who is tired of play, and has no reason to work because of new needs, is sometimes overcome by the longing for a *third state* that relates to play as floating does to dancing, as dancing does to walking, a blissful, peaceful state of motion: it is the artist’s and philosopher’s vision of happiness.”⁹² Floating, play, and grace are here coupled with the well-drawn images of the artist and philosopher, the spirit of illusion and the spirit of synthesis. Arguably, Nietzsche counters a dialectical interpretation of the relationship between art and science by consistently invoking metaphors of experimentation, play, and dance. Hence, “one might remember that *dancing* is not the same thing as staggering wearily back and forth between different impulses. High culture will resemble a daring dance, thus requiring, as we said, much strength and flexibility.”⁹³ If there is to be a conciliation between the different poles of the double brain, then such a synthesis would resemble the graceful dance of philosophers and artists. Science and art, hard truth and illusion, are to be brought together not dialectically or linearly, but through a “third state,” an art of synthesis between competing spheres. As will be seen in chapter five, this experimental synthesis is the aesthetic ethics within life as art.

Gay Science—Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Nietzsche's *Gay Science* and the more literary *Zarathustra* mark a new period in his development of the ideal types, one which grants an even heavier role to the artistic and thinking in their development, and pushes the ideal type toward a more creative affirmation of existence. There are, however, remarkable continuities in this phase of Nietzsche's work with his previous efforts, and one can therefore assume much of the preceding as a guiding framework for his later thought.

For example, calling upon his earlier work, Nietzsche consistently employs the terms free spirit,⁹⁴ wanderer,⁹⁵ the philosopher,⁹⁶ thinker,⁹⁷ the "seeker after knowledge [*Leidenschaft des Erkennenden*],"⁹⁸ and artist.⁹⁹ Of the artist, and recalling his earlier work on tragedy and its capacity to open the Dionysian abyssal realm, Nietzsche states:

Only artists, and especially those of the theater, have given men eyes and ears to see and hear with some pleasure what each man *is* himself, experiences himself, desires himself; only they have taught us to esteem the hero that is concealed in everyday characters; only they have taught us the art of viewing ourselves as heroes. . . .¹⁰⁰

The artist still remains implicated in the process of revealing truth through illusion.

Similarly, the philosopher remains the individual capable of transforming existence through synthesis and self-reflection:

A philosopher who has traversed many kinds of health, and keeps traversing them, has passed through an equal number of philosophies; he simply *cannot* keep from transposing his states every time into the most spiritual form and distance: this art of transfiguration *is* philosophy. . . . Life—that means for us constantly transforming all that we are into light and flame—also everything that wounds us; we simply can do no other.¹⁰¹

Both the artist and the philosopher remain steadfast in their ability to transform life into something more terrifying, insightful, and affirming. The artist and philosopher practice the arts of living.

To these more familiar figures, Nietzsche adds a new cast of conceptual personae who help illuminate the nature of idealized existence and its relation to art and thinking. Presaging a more consistent turn to the term in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche mentions the “higher type [*höhere Natur*]”¹⁰² in the *Gay Science*, and also introduces two parallel conceptual personae, the “man of renunciation [*der Entsagende*]” and “this man of affirmation [*dieser Bejahende*]”,¹⁰³ the former of which is indicated as the first conceptual persona to will the eternal recurrence.¹⁰⁴ Once again, renunciation, the critical tool of science, is seen as implicated alongside the affirmative, artistic impulse.

These additional figures are outstripped, however, by Nietzsche’s best known conceptual persona, that of the *übermensch* in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Nietzsche clearly subsumes some of the key characteristics of his previous ideal types under that of the *übermensch* and his prophet, Zarathustra: art and illusion, critical thinking, isolation, renunciation, the desire to educate, and, finally, affirmation. As Nehamas states, these facets are all critical to self-formation: “*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is constructed around the idea of creating one’s own self or, what comes to the same thing, the *Übermensch*.”¹⁰⁵ Or, as Kaufmann states, the *übermensch* “gives style to his character,”¹⁰⁶ practicing the art of transfiguration. “Giving style” to oneself, as Kaufmann notes, is concomitant to the task of affirmation, which decidedly marks this period in Nietzsche’s writing:

The man. . . who has organized the chaos of his passions and integrated every feature of his character, redeeming even the ugly by giving it a meaning in a beautiful totality—this *übermensch* would also realize how inextricably his own being was involved in the totality of the cosmos: and in affirming his own being, he would also affirm all that is, has been, or will be.¹⁰⁷

What constitutes the distinctiveness of the *übermensch* is the move towards radical affirmation. Given Nietzsche’s own proclamation of the Death of God, however,

the *übermensch*'s radical affirmation of the earth cannot be carried out in metaphysical terms. Rather, Nietzsche's approach is wholly immanent, and relies principally on Nietzsche's concept of time, or, in the case of the *übermensch*, the consistent deferral of their temporal status so as to lend weight and gravity to the future and present. In this spirit, the *übermensch* is constantly referred to in futural terms, such as the one that "shall be [sollen],"¹⁰⁸ as the one who "perhaps [vielleicht]" will come.¹⁰⁹ Zarathustra, the prophet of the *übermensch* is spoken of as such: "O Zarathustra, you shall [sollst] go as a shadow [Schatten] of that which must [musst] come. . ."¹¹⁰ Nietzsche's temporal terms of reference for the figure of the *übermensch* are always colored by the German conditional verbs *sollen* (should), *müssen* (must), *kommen* (to come), and the transitory *vielleicht* (perhaps).

If the *übermensch* lies in a conditional future that is somehow deferred, then it remains incumbent upon us, and specifically figures like Zarathustra and the ideal types, to prepare the way for such figures. "[T]hat for the sake of a very few human beings, who always 'will come' [werden kommen] but are never there, a very large amount of fastidious and even dirty work needs to be done first. . ."¹¹¹ Or, as Nietzsche states in the final book of *Gay Science* (written after *Zarathustra*): "history might one day give birth to such people, too—once a great many favorable preconditions have been created and determined that even the dice throws of the luckiest chance could not bring together today."¹¹²

While on a superficial level the use of futural conditionals may be seen as a way to account for the creation of an ideal character, the use of temporal deferral serves a philosophical purpose with respect to the *übermensch*: that of lending value to the future

and present. Whereas the “eternal recurrence” lends value to the past by redeeming all that was, the deferral of the *übermensch* into the future gives value to the future and the present—to the future by seeing in it a place for humans of a higher type, and to the present by preparing the conditions necessary for their arrival. This dual movement reciprocally aids in redeeming the past. Zarathustra states: “I taught them to work on the future and to redeem with their creation all that *has been*.”¹¹³

The orientation towards the future, as Zarathustra notes, must be one of *creation*: one creates because one values the future; one creates because one sees the coming of those who will affirm such creation. Zarathustra repeatedly praises those who seek to create and lend value to the present and the future: “Let your spirit and your virtue serve the sense of the earth, my brothers; and let the value of all things be posited newly by you. . . .For that you shall be creators!”¹¹⁴ Creation is directly tied to affirmation of the earth: one cannot affirm unless one values the future, and one cannot value unless one creates. This is Nietzsche’s post-theistic solution to the spectre of nihilism and the loss of value. To this end, *Zarathustra* is littered with references to pregnancy and the process of creation: “Creation—that is the great redemption from suffering, and life’s growing light. . . .Indeed, there must be much bitter dying in your life, you creators. . . .To be the child who is newly born, the creator must also want to be the mother who gives birth and the pangs of the birth giver.”¹¹⁵ “You creators, there is much that is unclean in you. That is because you had to be mothers.”¹¹⁶ Birth, pregnancy, and creation inherently place value on the future and bestow upon it a necessity for work and preparation. Nietzsche’s erotic imagery is called into the service of his radical project of affirmation. As Eric Blondel states, “it is across the sexual metaphor that life is presented both as fertility and as

artistic fertility: *the meta-phoric creativity of life is expressed on the metaphorical level of procreation.*”¹¹⁷

The profound images of creation find a deep resonance in Nietzsche’s metamorphoses, presented in the Prologue to *Zarathustra*. Under this interpretation, the camel becomes the symbol of work, labor, and pregnancy, just as the child becomes the exemplar of a radical affirmation of the future and the earth.¹¹⁸ Yet this radical affirmation, as in the “man of affirmation” above, must always be paired with a powerful renunciation of what has come before, of those values that do not affirm the earth. The lion is therefore participatory in the metamorphoses of the camel and child: “And whoever must be a creator in good and evil, verily, he must first be an annihilator and break values. Thus the highest evil belongs to the highest goodness: but this is creative.”¹¹⁹ Interestingly, Nietzsche sees such renunciation as a form of love, as part of creation itself. As Zarathustra states poetically, “Out of love alone shall my despising and my warning bird fly up, not out of the swamp.”¹²⁰ As in the two previous phases of Nietzsche’s work, a critical, rational element is seen as essential to the process of affirmation and even artistry.

It is with this critical tension in mind that Nietzsche invokes many of his claims with respect to the role of science, though science no longer holds the same elevated status as his previous phase. Science remains “the realization that delusion and error are conditions of human knowledge and sensation.”¹²¹ Or, reminiscent of *Human, All Too Human*, science is a “weighing and judging matters and passing judgment.”¹²² Again, science is that which fends off illusion. When, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the higher men are being entranced by the soothsayer (likely a pseudonym for Wagner), only the

“conscientious in spirit [*Gewissenhafte des Geistes*] was not caught: quickly he threw the harp away from the magician and cried: . . . ‘You are seducing us, you false and subtle one, to unknown desires and wildernesses. . . Woe unto all free spirits who do not watch out against such magicians!’”¹²³ Nietzsche’s continual play with the stem of science, *Wissen-*, marks his characterization of those who are conscientious, the role of conscience, and knowledge (often used by Nietzsche as *Wissen*). Here, the “conscientious in spirit” performs the role of the scientist, that of warding off illusion, error, and sorcery (presumably a spell to which Nietzsche himself fell prey).

Nietzsche’s use of “science” in this sense, and its continual word play, has given way to many errors that color a reading of *The Gay Science*. By employing the term *Wissenschaft*, Nietzsche did not presuppose a concept of “natural science” (which usually carries the adjective *naturalisch-*), but used the term more generally, indicating that what he “meant by science presupposed its broadest sense (*Wissenschaft*).”¹²⁴ Nietzsche divests “science” of its more positivistic implications in general, a tendency evident in his previous phase of work. This move to a broader conception which moves beyond a purely negative conception of science is signaled in the beginning of *The Gay Science*, where Nietzsche asks “whether science can furnish goals of action after it has proved that it can take such goals away and annihilate them; and then experimentation would be in order that would allow every kind of heroism to find satisfaction. . . .”¹²⁵

A more positivistic construal of science then gives way to one which still maintains a critical, deconstructive side, but is also experimental and affirmative. Babette Babich captures this well: “Nietzsche’s gay science is a passionate, fully joyful science. But to say this is also to say that a gay science is a *dedicated science*: scientific ‘all the

way down.’ This is a science including the most painful and troubling insights. . . .”¹²⁶

The more cold science of *Human, All Too Human* and *Dawn* is amended by a gay science, one which appropriates the methodology and criticality of the previous phase, but also adds to it the necessary condition that it be in the service of a higher ideal, namely, life.

A similar move occurs with Nietzsche’s concept of art. As in the previous two phases, art is maintained as self-deception and illusion.¹²⁷ Nietzsche frequently invokes variants of Homer’s “Many lies tell the poets,”¹²⁸ and, in *Zarathustra*, provides the following poem which also appears in his posthumously published *Dionysian*

Dithyrambs:

Only poet!
An animal, cunning, preying, prowling,
That must lie,
That must knowingly, willingly lie:
Lusting for prey,
Colorfully masked,
A mask for itself,
Prey for itself—
This, the suitor of truth?
No! Only fool! Only poet!¹²⁹

Despite the pejorative language of lying, cunning, and masking, this is not a negative assessment. Nietzsche’s “greatest creation,” Zarathustra, states the following, which shows the importance of the function of illusion: “But what was it that Zarathustra once said to you? That the poets lie too much? But Zarathustra too is a poet. Do you now believe that he spoke the truth here?”¹³⁰ In fact, Zarathustra refers to himself a number of times as a poet, as one who practices the arts of illusion and self-deception.¹³¹

Zarathustra becomes the prophet-artist, one who practices the art of self-delusion even as he proclaims the coming generation of ideal types, the *übermensch*.¹³² He is also

a man of science, resisting life-denying illusions and searching for the cold truths of existence. Zarathustra effectively becomes the philosopher envisaged in the previous writings, one who, with a “double-brain,” is capable of living the joyous science of renunciation and the artful illusion which brings radical affirmation: “Equally, in his mode as poet, Nietzsche-Zarathustra must lie, but as thinker and anti-artist, he must tell the truth. How does he do this at one and the same time? The answer is, of course, that he must do both, and almost, as it were, at the same time.”¹³³ Zarathustra practices the illusion necessary to redeem existence (the eternal recurrence possibly being one of these illusions¹³⁴) and the critical self- and world-awareness which does not allow such delusions to become madness or escapist. They are all subsumed under the higher purpose of affirmation and creation.

In keeping with the previous phase, then, the criticality of science and the illusion of art are seen as having instrumental value with respect to the pathology and construction of the ideal type. As science is slowly relieved of its elevated status, it is seen as a method alongside that of art. “Both science and art draw upon the same creative powers, both are directed to the purpose of life, and, most importantly for Nietzsche, both are illusions.”¹³⁵ Or, as Nietzsche himself states in the first-person plural, “No, if we convalescents still need art, it is another kind of art—a mocking, light, fleeting, divinely untroubled, divinely artificial art that, like a pure flame, licks into unclouded skies. Above all, an art for artists, for artists only!”¹³⁶ Or, with respect to science, “Free spirits take liberties even with science. . . .”¹³⁷ This is precisely the attitude which Nietzsche wishes to advocate: a free, but constrained, “taking liberty” with the resources of both science and art, in which each is symbiotic upon, and yet antagonistic to, the other.

Nietzsche's ideal types "need" such a synthesis inasmuch as it guides and deepens their task of affirmation and creative renewal.

The metaphors Nietzsche employs for such a synthesis are unmistakably artistic. Dancing—a somewhat ancillary notion in the previous phase—reaches its nadir in this phase of Nietzsche's writing, as he uses it to explicitly call to mind the relation between the self, art, science, and existence.

As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* for us, and art furnishes us with eyes and hands and above all the good conscience to be *able* to turn ourselves into such a phenomenon. . . . nothing does us as much good as a *fools' cap*: we need it in relation to ourselves—we need all exuberant, floating, dancing, mocking, childish, and blissful art lest we lose the *freedom* above things that our ideal demands of us.¹³⁸

Here, it is art itself that must be dancing and which is directly implicated, as above, in the aestheticized existence. This notion of an exuberant art is supplemented by the ideal types themselves, who are said to practice the art of dancing. For example, the spirit (*Geist*) who would doubt even his faith in science, "would take leave of all faith and every wish for certainty, being practiced in maintaining himself on insubstantial ropes and possibilities and dancing even near abysses. Such a spirit would be the *free spirit* par excellence."¹³⁹ The free spirit who takes leave of science dances near the abyss, a phrase which clearly calls to mind Nietzsche's earlier work on the Dionysian and the Apollinian. And, finally, the philosopher also practices the art of dance, the art which is, in Nietzsche's opinion, religious in nature: "and I would not know what the spirit of a philosopher might wish more to be than a good dancer. For the dance is his ideal, also his art, and finally also his only piety, his 'service of God.'"¹⁴⁰

Such a tone is continued in *Zarathustra*, where there are a number of references to dancing as a virtue. Zarathustra, for example, praises the "free storm spirit [*freie*

Sturmgeist] that dances on swamps and on melancholy as on meadows.”¹⁴¹ At another point, Zarathustra praises “the supple, persuasive body, the dancer whose parable and epitome is the self-enjoying soul.”¹⁴² And other characters in *Zarathustra* consistently praise Zarathustra himself for his dancing, stating that he is “like a dancer,”¹⁴³ that he possesses the “dancer’s virtue.”¹⁴⁴

The persistent intonations of dance and walking lightly call forth a litany of powerful images. First among such images is the psyche of the “gay science” itself, a “warm” science which creatively melds science and art to the end of affirmation. Such an image undermines the more supercessionist claims made in favor of science in Nietzsche’s previous work, and invokes a powerful relationship between art and science. Nor should this relationship, through the metaphor of dancing, be seen as linear or dialectical. In fact, as dancing is consistently identified with ideal types, it should not be thought of as in any way systematic or logical. Art and science are brought under the aegis of the ideal type through playfulness and grace. They are the tools used by the ideal type to create a life which is affirmative, loyal to the future, and independent. In short, one “dances” in order to live the ideal life.

The art of relating science and art, called forth in the image of dance, thus becomes central to an interpretation of Nietzsche’s ideal types. This formulation culminates in Nietzsche’s description of the art of living:

How can we make things beautiful, attractive, and desirable for us when they are not? And I rather think that in themselves they never are. Here we could learn something from physicians. . . but even more from artists who are really continually trying to bring off such inventions and feats. . . For with them this subtle power usually comes to an end where art ends and life begins; but we [*wir*] want to be the poets of our life—first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters.¹⁴⁵

Here, the image of poetry is invoked to symbolize the constructive attempt to forge a sense of beauty in one's life. Such poetry is said to begin precisely where "art ends," implying that this is a *new* art, a *poeisis* of self which is different in orientation and kind from the art of illusion which is the subject of Nietzsche's aesthetics. Nietzsche continues this theme here, where "higher human beings" overlook

that he himself is really the poet who keeps creating this life. . . .As a poet, he certainly has *vis contemplativa* and the ability to look back upon his work, but at the same time also and above all *vis creativa*, which the active human being lacks. . . .We who think and feel at the same time are those who really continually *fashion* something that had not been there before: the whole eternally growing world of valuations, colors, accents, perspectives, scales, affirmations, and negations.¹⁴⁶

There is thus a dual sense of the artistic: a first, more instrumental sense, in which art represents illusion, acting, and dissimulation; and a second, in which art is equated with "fashioning," self-construction according to an aesthetic ideal reigned in by the critical edge of science. This effectively becomes the art of living, in which the creative life can be seen as an aesthetic phenomenon which is radically affirmative of the past, present, and future. By creating new values, affirmations, and negations, new ways to blend science and art, one becomes an artist of the self, fashioning an ideal life.

One thing is needful—To "give style" to one's character—a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. . . .

It will be [*werden sein*] the strong and domineering natures that enjoy their finest gaiety in such constraint and perfection under a law of their own. . . .¹⁴⁷

Like a poet, one lives by whittling and refining the elements of one's life according to an artistic blueprint. Science is introduced as an element of constraint, art as an element of illusion and affirmation, a new art, the art of living as an element of synthesis, and

creation as the process of birthing and fashioning. The ideal life in Nietzsche's middle works becomes one defined by the art of living.

Beyond Good and Evil—Ecce Homo

In many ways the preceding phase represents the apex of Nietzsche's intuitions on life as art, as it lays out the fundamental basis for how one is to live artfully. This is not to say that his final phase does not advance many of his central intuitions on the ideal type and the art of living. In his final phase, Nietzsche re-appropriates many previous themes from his earlier writings, and adds stylistic and philosophical nuances that change their meaning and the overall direction for the aesthetic life.

As part of his project of re-appropriation, Nietzsche continues, in geologic fashion, to add on to his previous strata of ideal types. Thus in the final phase he continues to speak of free spirits,¹⁴⁸ the wanderer,¹⁴⁹ the thinker,¹⁵⁰ the artist,¹⁵¹ the "man of knowledge,"¹⁵² and the "noble type"¹⁵³ as ideal types. Interestingly, with the exception of *Ecce Homo* and a few minor mentions in *Twilight of the Idols*, neither the *übermensch* or Zarathustra receive much treatment in the later works. As figures within *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, they stand alone.

Nietzsche's most important ideal type in the final phase is a figure he had constructed in both *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* and *Untimely Meditations* (especially 3 and 4)—the philosopher. The late writings contain innumerable references to the philosopher as an ideal type,¹⁵⁴ almost all of which invite Laurence Lampert's assessment that, "The philosopher. . . is simply the highest human type. . ." ¹⁵⁵ As such, the philosopher continues the dual projects of science and art, both in the name of self-

formation. Gilles Deleuze remarks: “the philosopher, as philosopher, ceases to obey,. . . he replaces the old wisdom by command,. . . he destroys the old values and creates new ones,. . . the whole of his science is legislative in this sense.”¹⁵⁶ It is precisely this demand for legislation and criticism that continues to mark the philosopher as contiguous with previous incarnations of the ideal type, but also signals a move on Nietzsche’s part to subordinate the functions of the artist and the scientist into one figure—the philosopher.

Similarly, after *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche can no longer speak of his ideal types in anything less than redemptive terms, and so he adds to his philosophers the genitive temporal modifier, “of the future.” This addition reinforces the redemptive and creative functions of the philosopher, and shows their temporal status to be futural and deferred. This redemptive function is shown in Nietzsche’s description of his free spirits:

But some day, in a stronger age than this decaying, self-doubting present, he must yet come to us, the *redeeming* man of great love and contempt, the creative spirit whose compelling strength will not let him rest in any aloofness or any beyond. . . .this victor over God and nothingness—*he must come one day*. —¹⁵⁷

Again, the spirit is marked by the conditional verb *müssen*, indicating a futural, and possibly necessary, orientation to the coming free spirit. This is coupled with Nietzsche’s repeated use of the word “*vielleicht*”¹⁵⁸ (translated as “perhaps”), which further indicates the conditional status of the philosophers of the future. Not only are they deferred, but their coming is never fully promised or insured.

To Jacques Derrida, and countering the more biographical reading of Alexander Nehamas, the “perhaps” in Nietzsche’s text becomes essential to understanding Nietzsche’s radically affirmative project. The perhaps for Derrida signals a love of the future:

[O]ne must love the future. And there is no more just category for the future than that of the “perhaps.” Such a thought conjoins friendship, the future, and the *perhaps* to open on to the coming of what comes—that is to say, necessarily in the regime of a possible whose possibilization must prevail over the impossible.¹⁵⁹

On Derrida’s deconstructed reading, the perhaps carries with it an ethical orientation to the future, an openness to those philosophers who *may* come. This openness, signaled by withdrawal for Derrida, is titled “teleiopoiesis”: “Teleiopoiesis makes the *arrivants* come—or rather, allows them to come—by withdrawing; it produces an event, sinking into the darkness of a friendship which is not yet.”¹⁶⁰ To the philosophers of the future Derrida indicates the relation of friendship, that of the ideal friend who withdraws before the befriended and allows her to come. This is precisely the ethical orientation which Nietzsche is said to assume in his later works: that of withdrawing before, and therefore welcoming, the philosophers who may come.

Parallel to this more deconstructed reading is one which sees the philosophers as not only those who are *of* the future, but those who are capable of *thinking* the future as well: “Not because *they will come, if they do, in the future*, but because these philosophers of the future *already are philosophers capable of thinking the future*, of carrying and sustaining the future. . . .”¹⁶¹ Or, as Nehamas states in a way complimentary to his more literalist reading, “A philosophy of the future need not be a philosophy *that is composed in the future*. It can also well be a philosophy *that concerns the future*.”¹⁶² The dual readings of Derrida and Nehamas indicate an openness to Nietzsche’s text, one which was surely intentional: the philosophers of the future are those who may come, as well as those who think the future. Derrida captures this dual meaning well: “I feel responsible towards *them* (the new thinkers who are coming), therefore responsible

before *us* who announce them, therefore towards *us* who are already what we are announcing and who must watch over that very thing. . . ”¹⁶³ The futural dimension of Nietzsche’s philosophers carries within it a dual means of instilling value in the absence of God: by expecting and preparing the way for the arrival of such philosophers, and by *hoping* and thinking for such philosophers ourselves. Both situate value immanently and forge a radical affirmation of time and the earth itself.

The re-appearance of the philosopher as an ideal type, now modified as the philosophers of the future, is augmented by Nietzsche’s re-appropriation of the terminology of *The Birth of Tragedy*, specifically his resumed use of the “Dionysian” as both an aesthetic concept and an ideal type. For many, such as Julian Young, this marks a return of the redemptive, Schopenhauerian tendency in the earlier works: “Precisely what Nietzsche *himself* offers is ‘redemption’ from world and self, through either Apollinian ‘superficiality’ or else through Dionysian illusion.”¹⁶⁴ This possible reading is furthered by Nietzsche’s effective collapse of the Apollinian into the Dionysian in the later works, dissolving the constructive tension between the two and possibly forging a more abyssal and ecstatic picture of the aesthetic ideal. As Walter Kaufmann avers, “The later Dionysus is the synthesis of the two forces represented by Dionysus and Apollo in *The Birth of Tragedy*. . . ”¹⁶⁵

These are largely accurate readings of Nietzsche’s later work, and I have no intention of countering them. More importantly, though, they signal a move within Nietzsche’s final phase: the subordination of the roles of art and science, aesthetics and thinking, within the ideal type. Dionysus is now said to subsume the qualities of Apollo, and therefore assumes the rational, imaginative, and individuating project of the

Apollinian. As Nietzsche states, the later Dionysus takes on a deconstructive task, “*the joy even in destroying*.”¹⁶⁶ For Deleuze, this implies a shift in Nietzsche’s philosophy, one which expresses the dual roles of renunciation and affirmation in a single figure, Dionysus: “This is the ‘decisive point’ of Dionysian philosophy: the point at which negation expresses an affirmation of life, destroys reactive forces and restores the rights of activity.”¹⁶⁷ While the earlier writings revealed an irresolvable tension between art and thinking posited in the ideal type, the later writings witness a more unified approach to the ideal type in which art, thinking, science, philosophy, and the Apollinian are united in a single figure with many names, the Dionysian-philosopher.

This subsuming tendency is further carried out in Nietzsche’s later writings on science and art. In science, the equivalence between the “scientific man [*wissenschaftlichen Menschen*]” and the philosopher is made clear as early as *Beyond Good and Evil*.¹⁶⁸ This sense of equivalence still retains the instrumental value assigned to science, however, as it is concretely seen as a preparatory art in the service of the ideal type: “All the sciences [*Wissenschaften*] have from now on to prepare the way for the future task of the philosophers: this task understood as the solution of the *problem of value*, the determination of the *order of rank among values*.”¹⁶⁹ This dual notion of instrumentality and functional equivalence to the role of the philosopher is maintained by virtue of Nietzsche’s consignment of science to the same status as art in the earlier works, that is, as fruitful illusion: “science at its best seeks. . . to keep us in this *simplified*, thoroughly artificial, suitably constructed and suitably falsified world—at the way in which, willy-nilly, it loves error, because, being alive, it loves life.”¹⁷⁰ As in art in previous instantiations, science here can be seen as life-affirming so long as it remains

conscious of its own nature. Science affirms the world because, through illusion, it makes the world more interesting.

Much of the same can be said with respect to art, whose illusory nature now becomes essential to its instrumental value in the service of the ideal type. As Julian Young states, “The . . . essentially life-affirming character of art. . . is the fundamental concern of Nietzsche’s philosophy of art during his final productive year. . . .”¹⁷¹ The affirmative role of art in this phase is clearly channeled through art’s dishonest nature, its ability to dissimulate in ways that draw attention to, and affirm, facets of existence. Thus, in the *Genealogy of Morals*, what is needed in contradistinction to the ascetic ideal (itself a lie), is a “real lie, a genuine, resolute, ‘honest’ lie.”¹⁷² Or, as Nietzsche states only a few sections later, art is that arena in which “precisely the *lie* is sanctified and the *will to deception* has a good conscience”¹⁷³ The illusion of art becomes necessary for the formation of fictions and even philosophers who give value to the earth in the absence of essential value.

In contrast to much of his previous work, however, Nietzsche in *Twilight of the Idols* is clear to grant that there is a *telos* to art, one which can serve the ideal type in instructive ways. While he continues to grant the illusory nature of art, he adds that art is a “compulsion to transform into the perfect.”¹⁷⁴ Art forges perfection where such perfection was lacking. Such a function is perfectly contiguous with Nietzsche’s earlier intuitions on art as illusion and deception:

For art to exist, for any sort of aesthetic activity or perception to exist, a certain physiological precondition is indispensable: *intoxication* [*Rausch*]. . . . The essence of intoxication is the feeling of plenitude and increased energy. From out of this feeling one gives to things, one *compels* them to take, rapes them—one calls this procedure *idealizing*.¹⁷⁵

Nietzsche's vivid and sadistic language here is apt: art penetrates the world itself in order to foist an interpretation on it; art, through the process of idealization and intoxication, is also a process of domination and perfection.

In keeping with the aristocratic values extolled in the later works, it is precisely the process of idealization and domination which Nietzsche wishes to uphold for his Dionysian philosophers of the future. Such idealizations contribute to the philosopher's creative and affirmative project, allowing the artist to penetrate the abyss. They can also be part of the process of the creation of ideal types themselves, casting out new identities and selves through which the ideal type must pass. "Every profound spirit [*tiefe Geist*] needs a mask: even more, around every profound spirit a mask is growing continually, owing to the constantly false, namely *shallow*, interpretation of every word, every step, every sign of life he gives."¹⁷⁶ These masks are the various interpretations the ideal type gives the world, the conceptual personae he creates as part of the creative process. And, in keeping with the scientific project, such masks are the constant subject of experimentation and self-formation: "The philosophers of the future are the ones who will be constantly looking forward, defining and redefining themselves in and through immanent critiques and self-consuming parodies provided by the figurative exemplars they experiment with."¹⁷⁷

If Nietzsche is to unify the subset of tools available to the ideal type, then the ideal type *himself* must be a part of the productive process. These figures and masks become "experiments," "parodies," personae of dissonance and resonance who refine the creative process. This unifying tendency is made clear by Nietzsche:

Perhaps he [the ideal type] himself must have been critic and skeptic and dogmatist and historian and also poet and collector and traveler and

solver of riddles and moralist and seer and “free spirit” and almost everything in order to pass through the whole range of human values and value feelings and to be able to see with many different eyes and consciences, from a height and into every distance, from the depths into every height, from a nook into every expanse.¹⁷⁸

Art and its power of production, creativity, and self-illusion are called forth in the imaginative process of psychological production and projection. One produces various selves and conceptual persona in order to live through and *with* them in the process of self-perfection.

Such a phenomenon in Nietzsche’s thought must be seen as part of a broader pattern, and that is his persistent call to live as do the “real artists of life [*Artisten des Lebens*].”¹⁷⁹ Calling to mind the dual sense of artistry in the previous phase of his work, Nietzsche proposes that the art of life be used to coordinate all dimensions of existence in line with an affirmative ideal:

What is essential “in heaven and on earth” seems to be, to say it once more, that there should be *obedience* over a long period of time and in a *single* direction: given that, something always develops, and has developed, for whose sake it is worthwhile to live on earth: for example, virtue, art, music, dance, reason, spirituality—something transfiguring, subtle, mad, and divine.¹⁸⁰

The task of living, creating, and thinking, then, is to order one’s existence, down to the finest detail, according to one’s affirmative ideal. Even, the “small things” of “nutrition, place, climate, recreation, the whole casuistry of selfishness—are inconceivably more important than everything one has taken to be important so far.”¹⁸¹ Nothing is to elude the task of self-creation and perfection. The ideal type must be in the constant process of creating, refining, looking forward, and renouncing. All is to be aligned according to the affirmative ideal, a task which demands the service of science (as thinking) and art:

To become what one is, one must not have the faintest notion *what* one is. From this point of view even the *blunders* of life have their own meaning and value—the occasional side roads and wrong roads, the delays, “modesties,” seriousness wasted on tasks that are remote from *the* task. . . .Meanwhile the organizing “idea” that is destined to rule keeps growing deep down—it begins to command; slowly it leads us *back* from side roads and wrong roads; it prepares *single* qualities and fitnesses that will one day prove to indispensable as means toward a whole. . . .¹⁸²

The final phase of Nietzsche’s writing, then, reveals a continuation of the process of refining and unifying the characteristics of the ideal type. Whereas in previous phases Nietzsche’s aesthetics and theories of science, along with the ideal types themselves, could be said to be distinct yet interdependent, Nietzsche’s last writings witness a profound unification of the characteristics, values, and identity of the ideal type. In doing so, Nietzsche presents a figure who relies upon the past idealized constructions, but also extends the lines of his thought in significant directions, appropriating Zarathustra’s call to creativity, the ideal type’s instrumental relationship with art and science, and the Dionysian character of the earlier writings. To this is added the conditional nature of the ideal type, the collapse of art and science within the philosopher in the name of self-perfection, the abyssal nature of the Dionysian itself, and the programmatic call to a constant attention to the details of life, a Dionysian asceticism.

The Dionysian-philosopher is to be seen as the figure who practices the art of living, who becomes “what one is” through obedience to the aesthetic ideal of self-perfection. This task is continually refined through the employment of science and art, thinking and constructive illusion, which aim to make life more affirmative and committed to the future. In the final phase of Nietzsche’s writing, the ideal type becomes a means of envisioning an artful life which continually produces not only new ways of

living, but new *selves* who forge an economy of existence through creativity, negation, and affirmation.

IV: Conclusion

An examination of Nietzsche's use of ideal types throughout his work has opened a series of interpretive horizons which shed light on his conception of life as art. In the earliest works, the Apollinian/Dionysian artist, along with the philosopher, provide instructive examples of how one is to achieve, at least in preliminary terms, a synthesis between the Apollinian and Dionysian aspects of Attic tragedy. A significant advance is made upon this phase of Nietzsche's work in his more scientifically-inspired phase, as a burgeoning list of ideal types is supplemented with Nietzsche's more robust characterization of science and the process of thinking. Nietzsche also adds some of his more lasting insights into the nature of art, namely its illusory and deceptive nature. In the third and fourth phases of his work, the conceptual tools developed in Nietzsche's early career are used, re-appropriated, and enhanced by Nietzsche's increasing move towards radical affirmation, self-perfection, and the increasing unity of the ideal type itself.

None of the above positions, however, represents Nietzsche's "final statement" on the matter, and, if anything, Nietzsche's own philosophy reveals that the process of creation, dissimulation, and conceptual production is part of the ongoing aestheticization of life. At each phase, Nietzsche introduces conceptual personae who are capable of introducing a new way of being and typifying a mode of living, thinking, and creating. "The philosopher of the future, like Zarathustra and the *Übermensch*, is best interpreted as a figurative device in the context of Nietzsche's educational project. . . of transforming

our sensibilities, rather than literalistically.”¹⁸³ Moreover, the abundance of conceptual personae points to the prevailing characteristic of the ideal types: they must be those who create, and live through, multiple masks, identities, and ways of being. As Sarah Kofman states with eloquence: “The plurality of metaphors for philosophy also indicates the diversity of the task of the philosopher—the philosopher being the one who has covered the whole range of human values. . . .”¹⁸⁴

The ideal types sketched here characterize the ways in which a way of life may be deeply affirmative and creative through employing the resources of multiple modes of inquiry, namely art and *Wissenschaft*, in a creative and playful existential synthesis. The “aesthetic life,” then, is not one which necessarily seeks beauty or identity with the work of art (as in Baudelaire),¹⁸⁵ but one which constructively uses art *and* science in the continual refinement of the task of the self-formation and radical affirmation. The aim of the aesthetic life for Nietzsche is both philosophical and existential: one is to both affirm the earth and liberate the self through practices of self-formation, illusion, and a commitment to truth.

This task demands, as he makes clear through his images of the wanderer, free spirit, and his own autobiographical writings in *Ecce Homo*, the refinement of every aspect of existence according to a dynamic philosophical and aesthetic goal. One’s relationship to diet, sexuality, religion, politics, even one’s own chosen place of living, contribute to the project of self-creation. The creative production of illusion and the critical eye of the scientific hone these elements and grant them significance.

To acquire knowledge of how life should be lived is to organize or structure life’s experiences or “wanderings” into a coherent or harmonious whole. . . . How life should be lived, then, requires organized experiences or perceptions; it requires that each experience is integrated

with or related to each other, so that their harmonious unity produces a life that is worth living.¹⁸⁶

Art and thinking help to organize the chaotic experiences of life and to integrate them under the unity of the self, which is also, in some sense, an artistic fiction that one must live through. One continually creates new identities and selves as experiments in the art of living, each revealing new possibilities for affirmation, renunciation, and self-formation. By deploying the illusions of art—in both the construction of concepts and the creation of new self-identities—as well as the deconstructive edge of *Wissenschaft*, the free spirit crafts a life which is integrated, affirmative of immanence, and liberated.

Evaluation of Nietzsche's project will unfold in the forthcoming pages, as life as art assumes the architectonic sketched in Nietzsche's work. If life as art is to be a viable way of living and thinking, then it must do so through the use of art, science, and their synthesis through play and experimentation. Life as art after Nietzsche bears the traces of his language, metaphors, and personae. The chapters which follow represent an attempt to follow the spirit of Nietzsche's investigation into the art of living by carefully enriching the themes of deconstruction, affirmation through illusion, and self-experimentation. What emerges, as in Nietzsche's own work, is a self who remains greater than the sum of these parts.

Endnotes

¹ See, for example, Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 4.

² J.P. Degenaar, "Nietzsche's View of the Aesthetic," *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 4, no. 2 (1985): 45. Also see Daniel Came, "The Aesthetic Justification of Existence," in *A Companion to Nietzsche*, ed., Keith Ansell Pearson (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 50.

³ Nehamas, Alexander. *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 3.

⁴ Stephen Barker, *Autoaesthetics: Strategies of the Self after Nietzsche* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1992), 3.

⁵ Barker, 4.

⁶ Robert C. Solomon, "Nietzsche and Nehamas's Nietzsche," *International Studies in Philosophy*, 21, no. 2 (1989): 57.

⁷ Nehamas, *Life as Literature*, 165. For more on Nehamas' interpretation of life as a "text," see Nehamas, *Life as Literature*, 108, 166, and 227.

⁸ Barker, 176.

⁹ Nehamas, *Life as Literature*, 91. Also see 189.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 49. Also see 185ff.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8. Also see 60, 137, and 196.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 234. Also see Laurence Lampert, "Beyond Good and Evil: Nietzsche's 'Free Spirit' Mask," *International Studies in Philosophy*, 16, no. 2 (1984): 51, where he gives the following: "It is his ambition to become the modern Plato and that means for him giving being itself the stamp of his thinking."

¹⁴ Solomon, 56.

¹⁵ Steven V. Hicks and Alan Rosenberg, "Nietzsche and Untimeliness: The 'Philosopher of the Future' as the Figure of Disruptive Wisdom," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 25 (2003): 26. Also see Lampert, 41, where he states: "[Nietzsche] is himself the philosopher of the future now returned from that future to his own present where he finds it prudent to speak carefully, to speak as if he himself were something less than the philosopher he is."

¹⁶ This also undoubtedly feeds into the cult of Nietzsche as a person.

¹⁷ Alexander Nehamas, "Different Readings: A Reply to Magnus, Solomon, and Conway," *International Studies in Philosophy*, 21, no. 2 (1989): 79.

¹⁸ Nehamas, *Life as Literature*, 223.

¹⁹ Solomon, 57.

²⁰ Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, trans., Duncan Large (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 15.

²¹ Kofman, 33.

²² Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans., Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 65.

²³ Gilles Deleuze, "Nomad Thought," in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, trans and ed., David B. Allison (New York: Dell Publishing, 1977), 146. Also see Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans., Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), x, where he states: "For any proposition is itself a set of symptoms expressing a way of being or a mode of existence of the speaker, that is to say the state of forces that he maintains or tries to maintain with himself and others. . . . In this sense a proposition always reflects a mode of existence, a 'type.'"

²⁴ Deleuze, "Nomad Thought," 146-7.

²⁵ Kofman, 60.

²⁶ Hicks and Rosenberg, 1.

²⁷ Nietzsche, "On Truth and Falsity in an Extra-Moral Sense [OTF]," in *Early Greek Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. and ed., Oscar Levy (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1964), section 1. Also see *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* [PT], trans., Marianne Cowan (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1998), 11, where he asserts that man [sic], "breathes and lives by means of a metaphor, i.e., a non-logical process, upon all other things." Hereafter all Nietzsche references will refer to the aphorism number, and, where pertinent, the section from which the aphorism came. In each case I will also use standard Nietzsche scholarly convention and employ the abbreviation for each work instead of the full title. In many instances I have included the original German in brackets within quotations from Nietzsche. In all cases, the original German was obtained from the corresponding version from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, eds., Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbusch Verlag, 1999).

²⁸ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* [EH; the book is typically bundled with *On the Genealogy of Morals*], trans., Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), "Wise," 7.

²⁹ Nietzsche consistently speaks of "types" in *Ecce Homo* and the later writings. See EH, "Untimely," 1, 3; "Zarathustra," 1, 2, 3, and 6 (as "the *supreme type of all human beings*"); "Beyond," 2; and "Destiny," 5. Also see Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* [TI], trans., R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), "The Problem of Socrates," 2; "Expeditions of an Untimely Man," 1 (where there is a sundry list of types); and *The Antichrist* [A], trans., R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 3 ("what type of human being one ought to *breed*, ought to *will*, as more valuable, more worthy of life, more certain of the future"), and 42 (the "type of the redeemer").

³⁰ TI, "Expeditions," 44. Also see PT, the preface, where Nietzsche makes a similar claim: "The task is to bring to light what we *must ever love and honor* and what no subsequent enlightenment can take away: great individual human beings."

³¹ TI, "Expeditions," 49.

³² Pothen, 109. Also see William R. Schroeder, "Nietzschean Philosophers," *International Studies in Philosophy* 24, no. 2 (1992): 107-8.

³³ Hicks and Rosenberg, 2.

³⁴ See John Sallis, *Crossings: Nietzsche and the Space of Tragedy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 33.

³⁵ Sallis, 29.

³⁶ See Sallis, 37.

³⁷ Young, 44.

³⁸ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* [BT] and *the Case of Wagner* [CW], trans., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), BT, 16.

³⁹ Sallis, 54.

⁴⁰ Degenaar, 40.

⁴¹ Young, 34.

⁴² BT, 5.

⁴³ BT, 5.

⁴⁴ BT, 1.

⁴⁵ See Lesley Chamberlain, *Nietzsche in Turin: The End of the Future* (London: Quartet Books, 1996), 73, where she gives the following: "The artistically reshaped man would finally achieve that blend of the Apollonian and Dionysian elements in himself, the merger of individual dream and collective frenzy, of proud form and acknowledged chaos. . ."

⁴⁶ BT, 1.

⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations* [UM], trans., R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), IV: 4.

⁴⁸ UM, IV: 7. Also note the similarity to the quote from BT, 1, given above.

⁴⁹ BT, 1. Also see UM, III: 7.

⁵⁰ PT, 3.

⁵¹ UM, III: 3.

⁵² UM, III: 6.

⁵³ BT, 17.

⁵⁴ This is in contrast to the notion of *Wissenschaft* in Nietzsche's following works, which is more positivistic and materialistic in orientation.

⁵⁵ UM, III: 3 and 7.

⁵⁶ EH, "Human," 1.

⁵⁷ For examples of Nietzsche's use of "free spirit," see: *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality* [D], trans., R.J. Hollingdale, ed., Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), sections 56, 146, 179, 192, and 514 (where he refers to "stronger and arrogant spirits"); also see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* [HATH], trans., Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), preface 3 and 6; 30, 34, 264, 426 (where the free spirit prefers to "fly alone"), 431, 433 (on Socrates as a free spirit), and 595.

⁵⁸ See, for instance, the Preface to HATH.

⁵⁹ HATH, preface, 2.

⁶⁰ D, 61. Also see D, 547, for Nietzsche's use of the "thinker of the future [*künftigen Denkers*]."

⁶¹ For a few examples of Nietzsche's use of the thinker, see D, 505, 507, 510, 530, and 555.

⁶² D, 500.

⁶³ D, 550.

⁶⁴ D, 432. Also note the use of first-person plural in this instance.

⁶⁵ D, 548. Also see HATH, 231, where the genius gives rise to the free spirit, and 258, where the genius "throws in errors, vices, hopes, delusions, and other things of baser as well as nobler metal."

⁶⁶ Jorg Salaquarda, "'Art Is More Powerful Than Knowledge': Nietzsche on the Relationship between Art and Science," *New Nietzsche Studies* 3, no. 3, and 4 (1999): 6.

⁶⁷ D, 482.

⁶⁸ One should also see, in this regard, Nietzsche's use of the term "wanderer," which appears in UM, III: 7 and IV: 10, and whom Angelo Caranfa, in his "The Aesthetic Harmony of How Life Should Be Lived: Van Gogh, Socrates, Nietzsche," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 35, no. 1 (2001): 10, describes thus: "Nietzsche portrays the 'wanderer' as an individual who is constantly shaping and reshaping his or her 'scattered' experiences until they become a work of art. . . The 'hardiness' and the 'discerning eye' of the wanderer provide one with a means to construct and reconstruct existence."

⁶⁹ D, 240.

⁷⁰ D, 269.

⁷¹ On the subject of art as deception, see, for example, D, 223, 306, 337; and HATH, 160, where Nietzsche asserts: "Art proceeds from man's natural *ignorance* about

his interior. . . : it is not for physicists and philosophers.” Also see Pothen, 7 and 67, and Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 102, where he states: “art is the highest power of falsehood, it magnifies the ‘world as error,’ it sanctifies the lie; the will to deception is turned into a superior ideal.”

⁷² HATH, preface, 1.

⁷³ HATH, 145.

⁷⁴ HATH, 27.

⁷⁵ HATH, 222.

⁷⁶ As stated in a previous note, it is important to distinguish the role of “science” in the positivistic phase from that of the earlier phase of Nietzsche’s work. In the middle and later works, science is clearly intended to mean a more materialist and deconstructive disposition than the Platonic overtones of *Wissenschaft* adopted in the earlier works.

⁷⁷ Peter Heckman, “The Role of Science in *Human-All-Too-Human*,” *Man and World*, 26 (1993): 149.

⁷⁸ D, 270.

⁷⁹ Heckman, 151.

⁸⁰ D, 72.

⁸¹ HATH, 244. Also see HATH, 635.

⁸² HATH, 264.

⁸³ Babich, *Words in Flowers*, 150.

⁸⁴ D, 426.

⁸⁵ Heckman, 159.

⁸⁶ HATH, 251.

⁸⁷ HATH, 273.

⁸⁸ HATH, 276, emphasis added.

⁸⁹ D, 453.

⁹⁰ D, 501. Also see HATH, preface, 4.

⁹¹ D, 376.

⁹² HATH, 611. Emphasis added.

⁹³ HATH, 278.

⁹⁴ See Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* [GS], trans., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), Preface, 4 (where Nietzsche speaks of “daredevils of the spirit” as “artists”) and 282; and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* [Z], trans., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), “Metamorphoses” (where the spirit undergoes the metamorphoses), and “On the Famous Wise Men,” where he asserts: “But the free spirit,

the enemy of fetters, the non-adorer who dwells in the woods, is as hateful to the people as a wolf to dogs. . . . “Truthful I call him who goes into godless deserts, having broken his revering heart. . . . “It was ever in the desert that the truthful have dwelt the free spirits, as masters of the desert. . . .”

⁹⁵ See GS, 287, 309, and 380; Z, Prologue, 2, “On Great Events,” “The Wanderer” “The Leech,” and “The Retired” (where Zarathustra is equated with the “wanderer”).

⁹⁶ See GS, 289, 343 (where the philosopher is equated with the “free spirit”), and 372 (“we philosophers of the present and the future”).

⁹⁷ Of the thinker, see GS, 110: “A thinker is now that being in whom the impulse for truth and those life-preserving errors clash for their first fight, after the impulse for truth has proved to be also a life-preserving power. . . . To what extent can truth endure incorporation? That is the question: that is the experiment.” The thinker, as before, is seen as the individual capable of enduring experimentation and of fostering the scientific attitude towards truth.

⁹⁸ GS, 351.

⁹⁹ See GS, 59.

¹⁰⁰ GS, 78.

¹⁰¹ GS, Preface, 3. Also see Nietzsche’s poem, “Ecce Homo,” in the same volume, which relies on similar imagery of light and flame.

¹⁰² GS, 3. Note the affinity here to his use of “type [*Natur*]” in his latest writings.

¹⁰³ GS, 27.

¹⁰⁴ See GS, 285.

¹⁰⁵ Nehamas, *Life as Literature*, 174.

¹⁰⁶ Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 312 and 316.

¹⁰⁷ Kaufmann, 320. Also see Kaufmann, 324, where he states that the *übermensch*, “gives meaning to his own life by achieving perfection and exulting in every moment.”

¹⁰⁸ Z, Prologue, 3.

¹⁰⁹ Z, “On Old and New Tablets,” 16. See the short section on Jacques Derrida’s appropriation of the term in the following section.

¹¹⁰ Z, “The stillest Hour.”

¹¹¹ GS, 102.

¹¹² GS, 288.

¹¹³ Z, “On Old and New Tablets,” 3.

¹¹⁴ Z, “On the Gift-Giving Virtue,” 2.

¹¹⁵ Z, "Upon the Blessed Isles." Also see Z, "On Immaculate Perception."

¹¹⁶ Z, "On the Higher Man," 12. Also see Z, "On Involuntary Bliss," as well as "On Old and New Tablets," 12, where Nietzsche states: "Your *children's land* shall you love: this love shall be your new nobility—the undiscovered land in the most distant sea. . . In your children you shall make up for being the children of your fathers: thus shall you redeem all that is past."

¹¹⁷ Eric Blondel, "Nietzsche: Life as Metaphor," in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, trans. and ed., David B. Allison (New York: Dell Publishing, 1977), 165.

¹¹⁸ For the symbol of the camel, see Z, "On the Spirit of Gravity," 2. The camel is also a symbol of hardness and labor, able to survive in the desert.

¹¹⁹ Z, "On Self-Overcoming."

¹²⁰ Z, "On Passing By."

¹²¹ GS, 107. Also see GS, 112.

¹²² GS, 293. Also see GS, 308, where science [*Wissen*] makes an object even of conscience [*Gewissen*].

¹²³ Z, "On Science."

¹²⁴ Babette Babich, "Nietzsche's 'Gay' Science," in *A Companion to Nietzsche*, ed., Keith Ansell Pearson (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) 103. Also see 104, 105 ("*Wissenschaft* yet remains unquestionably broader"), and 107 ("Nietzsche's gay science is. . . exactly to be understood in opposition to the nineteenth-century ideal of the positive, measure, or technologically defined sciences.")

¹²⁵ GS, 7.

¹²⁶ Babich, "Nietzsche's 'Gay' Science," 99.

¹²⁷ See Pothen, 81 and 91, for a good summary.

¹²⁸ See, for example, GS, 84.

¹²⁹ Z, "The Song of Melancholy," 3. Also see *Dionysian Dithyrambs*, 1.

¹³⁰ (Z, "On Poets")

¹³¹ See, for example, Z, "On Redemption," "Is he a poet? or truthful?" (asked of Zarathustra, by Zarathustra) and Z, "On Old and New Tablets," 2, where he states, "I am ashamed that I must still be a poet."

¹³² In this sense, the *übermensch* themselves may be seen as a form of self-delusion practiced by Zarathustra.

¹³³ Pothen, 82.

¹³⁴ See Young, 103ff.

¹³⁵ Babich, "Nietzsche's 'Gay' Science," 103. Also see 110 in the same volume.

¹³⁶ GS, Preface, 4.

¹³⁷ GS, 180.

¹³⁸ GS, 107.

¹³⁹ GS, 347.

¹⁴⁰ GS, 381.

¹⁴¹ Z, “On the Higher Man,” 20.

¹⁴² Z, “On the Three Evils,” 2.

¹⁴³ Z, Prologue.

¹⁴⁴ Z, “The Seven Seals,” 6.

¹⁴⁵ GS, 299.

¹⁴⁶ GS, 301.

¹⁴⁷ GS, 290.

¹⁴⁸ For his use of free spirits, see, for example, *On the Genealogy of Morals* [GM], trans., Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), I:9; CW, First Postscript; *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* [BGE], trans., Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), Preface (“we good Europeans and free, very free spirits”), 28, 44, 61 (where they are equated with the philosophers of the future), 105 (as a pious seeker of knowledge), 203, and 227 (as the “last Stoics”); and A, 32 (where Jesus is deemed a free spirit), 36 and 37 (where Nietzsche uses the term “emancipated spirits”).

¹⁴⁹ BGE, 278.

¹⁵⁰ BGE, 10.

¹⁵¹ BGE, 250.

¹⁵² See BGE, 26 (the “lover of knowledge [*Liebhaber der Erkenntnis*]”) and 229 (as “an artist and transfigurer of cruelty”).

¹⁵³ See BGE, 260 (where the noble type is seen as “value creating”) and 265 (where the noble type is seen as egoistic).

¹⁵⁴ For Nietzsche’s use of “philosopher” in an ideal sense, see GM, Preface: 2, III: 8; EH, Preface, 3, “Wise,” 2; CW, Preface; BGE, 9 (as one who possesses a drive to “create the world in its own image”), 39 (as opposed to the scholar), 44, 203, and 205 (where the “genuine philosopher” “risks *himself* constantly, he plays the wicked game”).

¹⁵⁵ Lampert, 45.

¹⁵⁶ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 92.

¹⁵⁷ GM, II: 24. Also see GM, III: 14.

¹⁵⁸ See, for example, BGE, 2 and 223.

¹⁵⁹ Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans., George Collins (New York: Verso Press, 2005), 29.

¹⁶⁰ Derrida, 43.

¹⁶¹ Derrida, 36-7.

¹⁶² Alexander Nehamas, "Who Are 'the Philosophers of the Future'?: A Reading of *Beyond Good and Evil*," in *Reading Nietzsche*, eds., Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 58.

¹⁶³ Derrida, 39.

¹⁶⁴ Young, 146. Also see Young, 118, 134, and 137.

¹⁶⁵ Kaufmann, 129.

¹⁶⁶ EH, "Zarathustra," 8.

¹⁶⁷ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 174-5.

¹⁶⁸ BGE, 204; also see 206 of the same volume.

¹⁶⁹ GM, I: 17. Also see BGE, 210, where Nietzsche states: "our new philosophers will say nevertheless: critics [i.e., scientific men] are instruments of the philosopher and for that very reason, being instruments, a long ways from being philosophers themselves."

¹⁷⁰ BGE, 24.

¹⁷¹ Young, 119.

¹⁷² GM, III: 19.

¹⁷³ GM, III: 25.

¹⁷⁴ TI, "Expeditions," 9.

¹⁷⁵ TI, "Expeditions," 8; also see 10 of the same section, as well as 24, where Nietzsche states: "what does all art do? does it no praise? does it not glorify? does it not select? does it not highlight? By doing all this it *strengthens* or *weakens* certain valuations. . . Art is the great stimulus to life: how could it be thought purposeless, aimless, *l'art pour l'art*?"

¹⁷⁶ BGE, 40.

¹⁷⁷ Hicks and Rosenberg, 22.

¹⁷⁸ BGE, 211.

¹⁷⁹ BGE, 31.

¹⁸⁰ BGE, 188.

¹⁸¹ EH, "Clever," 10.

¹⁸² EH, "Clever," 9.

¹⁸³ Hicks and Rosenberg, 25.

¹⁸⁴ Kofman, 107.

¹⁸⁵ There is the notable exception of the latest writings of Nietzsche, which do posit perfection as the goal of the artwork.

¹⁸⁶ Caranfa, 8-9. Also see Kathleen Higgins, "Reading *Zarathustra*," in *Reading Nietzsche*, eds., Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 146, where she states: "Nietzsche is not suggesting that we adopt an 'aesthetic' lifestyle in which everything is done for some theatrical effect. Nor does he believe that we have ultimate control over whether our guiding project of aspiration succeeds; our lives are not self-contained art projects. But he is suggesting that we can find meaning in our lives by postulating something like an aesthetic goal—a vision of greatness—that we can pursue with our entire effort, arranging our activities in such a way that they contribute to the project."

Chapter 3: Resistance

Adorno and Marcuse on Negativity, Particularity, and Utopia

If thought is any way to gain a relation to art it must be on the basis that something in reality, something back of the veil spun by the interplay of false institutions and false needs, objectively demands art, and that it demands an art that speaks for what the veil hides.

– Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*

Civilization produces the means for freeing Nature from its own brutality, its own insufficiency, its own blindness, by virtue of the cognitive and transforming power of Reason. And Reason can fulfill this function only as post-technological rationality, in which technics is itself the instrumentality of pacification, organon of the “art of life.” The function of Reason then converges with the function of *Art*.

– Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*

I: Introduction

With Nietzsche we have the first sustained attempt to wed the disparate spheres of thinking and art into a constructive existential synthesis. Nietzsche’s ideal types are dynamic constructions that reveal how one uses art and thinking in order to live affirmatively, poetically, and truthfully. The Dionysian philosopher of the future, the free spirit, and the dramatic artist and thinker are all incisive examples of how one maintains a critical disposition towards rationality and illusion without falling prey to either.

The form taken by life as art after Nietzsche builds on the foundational motifs characterized by his ideal types. If one is to live artfully, then it should be through a creative synthesis of art and science, illusion and rationality, the Dionysian and Apollonian dimensions of existence. Thus, while Nietzsche himself could not complete or fully elaborate upon the nature of the artful life, those thinkers who follow him and are inheritors of his aesthetic project must both incorporate and transcend the themes established throughout his work.

It is with this spirit of building upon and deepening the fundamental language of Nietzsche that this chapter, and the two which follow it, attempts to more clearly articulate what precisely constitutes the “scientific,” “artistic,” and “creative” dimensions of the artful life powerfully evoked in Nietzsche’s ideal types. These three moments can be grouped into two categories of analysis: the creative dimension of the artful life, articulated in chapter five, will be given as the “aesthetic ethics” within life as art, while the scientific and artistic dimensions of life as art, given in this chapter and chapter four, respectively, form the “aesthetic judgment” necessary to the artful life. Each is a “moment” essential to the development of a self along aesthetic lines, a life which fully integrates the essence of art into one’s everyday living, thinking, and seeing.

The present and following chapters constitute a form of *aesthetic judgment* inasmuch as they link accounts of acting and perceiving with a normative account of how one thinks. This is accomplished through the play of imagination and the work of artistic representation and interpretation.¹ That is, critical theory and phenomenology collectively use art and aesthetics as a means of both clarifying the task of thinking and of linking how one thinks with how one acts. Aesthetics, in critical theory and phenomenology, becomes the lynchpin for epistemology and ethics, and is a way of mediating the relationship between thinking and being. As a form of judgment, aesthetics in this chapter and chapter four is to be seen as the chief resource through which ideal forms of thinking are related to ideal forms of living and seeing.

The relationship between the two forms of aesthetic judgment analyzed in the following two chapters will be more fully elaborated in chapter five. Of importance for the present chapter, however, is the nature of aesthetic judgment in critical theory. To this

end, critical theory attempts to bridge its normative demand for “thinking after the Holocaust” to a utopian social vision through an analysis which sees the work of art and aesthetics as bringing forth particularity and dissonance. The work of art and aesthetics supplement the task of negative dialectical thinking² and reveal alternative configurations of reality which are themselves demands for a more just order. As will be seen in the following pages, this “negative moment” in the artful life aligns with Nietzsche’s later reading of *Wissenschaft*, wherein science is given the task of deconstructing false idols and creating the necessary space for creative and affirmative renewal.

Moreover, the form of aesthetic judgment to be shown here is deeply resistant. By mediating and supplementing negative dialectical thinking, the negative dimension of aesthetic judgment is a way of thinking which opposes unjust or oppressive forms of thought. Furthermore, by emphasizing the negative dimension of art and conjoining it to a progressive political and social agenda, critical theory sees art and aesthetics as part of the constructive struggle for a more just social and political order. Art, in both cases, is intrinsic to defining a response to the present and outlining sites for both modification and outright resistance.

The Situation

The resistance called for by critical theory is made through an acute awareness of the historical-philosophical situation in the 20th century, one which bore the horrors of war, genocide, and famine. The contemporary era is one in which, as Max Horkheimer and Adorno observe, “the world is made subject to man.”³ And, as Marcuse argues, the

expanded ability to dominate the earth and others has led to the transformation of experience itself:

This larger context of experience, this real empirical world, today is still that of the gas chambers and concentration camps, of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, of American Cadillacs and German Mercedes, of the Pentagon and the Kremlin, of the nuclear cities and the Chinese communes, of Cuba, of brainwashing and massacres.⁴

The landscape for human interaction and experience has been altered after world war, globalization, and the modern security state. If one is to create an opening for the artful life, it must do so by acknowledging that the ways in which we live, see, and think have been dramatically altered. Only by delineating these points of resistance can one begin the task of renewing thinking and living under the impress of art and aesthetics.

For both Adorno and Marcuse, the greatest point of potential resistance in the post-war era is the rise of the modern security state and the administration of human cultural and intellectual behavior. As Marcuse states, “Today total administration is necessary, and the means are at hand; mass gratification, market research, industrial psychology, computer mathematics, and the so-called science of human relations.”⁵

While the modern advanced societies of the West have expanded the means for the satisfaction of human need, such an advance has been coupled with an increase in administered attitudes and behaviors. This gives rise, as Adorno and Marcuse frequently note, to the “manipulation of consciousness,”⁶ the proscription of possibilities through the market, culture, media, educational system, and family. As Marcuse states, “intensified progress seems to be bound up with intensified unfreedom. Throughout the world of industrial civilization, the domination of man by man is growing in scope and efficiency.”⁷

It is in this historical paradox that critical theorists situate their reflections on the normative role of thinking and art in fashioning a more just individual and society. If one is to foment a creative space for social, civil, and individual renewal, then it must be *through* the contradictory resources of the present: the increased opulence of advanced industrial society and the ways in which it constrains and even oppresses human modes of being. Artful thinking and living, and therefore artful judgment, is to be a counter to past and present modes of constraint while still envisioning alternatives for the future.

The Role of Philosophy

In a theme which recurs frequently in life as art, Adorno and Marcuse assign the task of assessing, deconstructing, and posing alternatives to the present to philosophy.

Philosophy is to both clarify and denounce the present while formulating modes of thinking which release us from the grip of administered and tainted realities. It is also to clarify the essence of artworks, laying bare their dissonant content and showing the alternatives posed within the aesthetic sphere. In sum, philosophy is to be both diagnostic and therapeutic, illuminating points of resistance and outlining formidable alternatives. The critical theoretical understanding of philosophy after the Holocaust is one in which ideal forms of thinking and society, and their linkage through art, represent one of the few resources for immanent salvation in the West.

If critical theory and the attempt to revive the critical function of philosophy is to move forward, it must do so through the resources of European thought and its terminus in the present. And, as early as the 1930s, the principle source of injustice in Western societies was seen by critical theorists as the gross imbalance between a domineering

subject and its opposition to an essentializable and manipulable object. As Horkheimer and Adorno state, “The manifold affinities between existing things are supplanted [in Western society] by the single relationship between the subject who confers meaning and the meaningless object, between rational significance and its accidental bearer.”⁸ The rise of the transcendental subject, heralded by the Cartesian *cogito* (but prophesied as distantly as Odysseus), is coupled with profound advances in technology and the sciences and, correlatively, our ability to control and marshal natural resources and other beings. To Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse, western history traces the development of the transcendental subject against an increasingly manipulable object. As Adorno states: “subject and object have been integrated in a false identity, and with the acquiescence of the masses to the apparatus of domination, this tension between subject and object has dissolved. . . .”⁹ Philosophy, if it is to serve the therapeutic function frequently called for by critical theorists, must do so by somehow overcoming the objectivation of the natural world and others and the identity created between subject and object.

This occurs through acts of epistemic, aesthetic, and concrete resistance, where all take part in the “effort to contradict a reality in which all logic and all speech are false to the extent they are part of a mutilated whole.”¹⁰ This amounts to not only strident deconstruction (as seen most formidably in Adorno), but to efforts of *construction*, the use of art, thinking, and other resources to envision new forms of reality which oppose the present. Just as Nietzsche had envisioned a life balanced between forms of *Wissenschaft* and creativity, critical theory formulates acts of resistance by balancing negativity and hope, the need for critical deconstruction alongside the metaphysical impulse for something more. The philosophical effort to overcome the “mutilated whole”

can only survive through acts which blend both the dissonant and metaphysical moments within every work of art.

This chapter proceeds by outlining the various modes of resistance found in the thought of Adorno and Marcuse. And, as a philosophical project, the form of resistance in critical theory must overcome the multifarious forms of objectivation which undergird acts of normalization and oppression. This turn to the dialectical opposition between subject and object grounds the negative moment of aesthetic judgment in life as art, such that the Nietzschean subject is given a concrete historical and social underpinning, transforming *Wissenschaft* into *Kritik* and art-as-illusion into art-as-revolution; the fluidity of the dance is formalized into a dialectical relationship between critique and liberation, subject and object. The resistant moment in life as art turns on the possibility for negative forms of thinking and being, and their conjunction with aesthetics, to subvert the identity between subject and object in fruitful ways which illuminate positive and creative spaces into which the artful life may enter. With this in mind, this chapter will begin with an analysis of critical thinking and move to the nature of art itself. Both, when combined, present possibilities for the transformation of contemporary society and the liberation of the individual.

II: Adorno and Marcuse on the Dialectic and the Role of Thinking

The Role of Thinking

Adorno and Marcuse's attempt to revive the philosophical project through aesthetic imperatives is animated by their common understanding that objects have increasingly been seen as identical to the aims of the subject throughout Western intellectual history

since the Greeks. The reversal of this identity between the subject and object becomes critical to the negative moment in life as art; in order to free a creative space for the aesthetic life, one must overcome ways of thinking and being which normalize one's own self and oppress others. Thinking against objectivity becomes a means by which one begins to deconstruct oppressive and unjust ways of thinking and being.

In dialectical terms, this indicates a desire to “freeze” the Hegelian dialectic in which the object is taken up (*aufgehoben*) into the subject and transformed, thereby reinstituting a tension between subject and object. As Robert Hullot-Kentor states, “Adorno’s philosophy conceived as a whole seeks the primacy of the object.”¹¹ By making the object primary, totalizing and identitarian reason is suspended; the object, when placed in concrete tension with a subject, is restored to its own identity and becomes once again nonidentical with the subject. Adorno states the normative dimensions of his project: “Dialectics is the consistent sense of nonidentity. It does not begin by taking a standpoint. My thought is driven to it by its own inevitable insufficiency, by my guilt of what I am thinking.”¹²

The recovery of the particular in critical theory is an ethical move made from within philosophy itself: by recasting dialectical thought as a tension between subject and object, one gives primacy to the object and simultaneously abdicates the dominating role of subjectivity. Yet this should not be seen as a call to unmediated access to the object. Rather, for both Adorno and Marcuse, like Kant and Hegel before them,¹³ the object can only be approached through concepts, that is, through accessory ideas which present the object to consciousness. Adorno states: “Because entity is not immediate, because it is

only through the concept, we should begin with the concept, not with the mere datum.”¹⁴
Or, in more plain terms, “thinking without a concept is not thinking at all.”¹⁵

The use of concepts as representative of an object should not be seen as an attempt to obviate the object in Adorno’s dialectics, however. Instead, Adorno is explicit in acknowledging that all concepts refer to objects themselves: “it is only by way of conceptual thought that the determining force of this nonidentical other may find conceptual expression.”¹⁶ The object of thought is always expressed in concepts, but the concepts themselves are always referred to particularity. Adorno invokes concepts in order to re-assert the primacy of the object.¹⁷

In asserting the primacy of *both* the concept and the object in thinking, Adorno explicitly invokes the dialectic as the form of thought itself. In order to think, one must have both the object of thought (without which there is no concept) and the subject which conceptualizes objects. Subject and object are constitutive of all thinking: “We cannot, by thinking, assume any position in which that separation of subject and object will directly vanish, for the separation is inherent in each thought; it is inherent in thinking itself.”¹⁸ In stark contrast to Hegel and Marx, however, and in a move which shows the resistive dimensions of Adorno’s thinking, the dialectic is to remain frozen between the subject and object: neither is to be *aufgehoben* in either a conceptual or an historical synthesis. This normative declaration is to remain the *sine qua non* of proper thinking and philosophy in general. “The duality of subject and object must be critically maintained against the thought’s inherent claim to be total.”¹⁹

Even with the normative declaration that thinking is to be properly dialectical, Adorno and Marcuse do admit of limitations to both the dialectic and to conceptual

mediation in general. Owing to their disposition towards objects and particularity, dialectics is inherently limited by the surplus of the object over-and-above all possible conceptualizations—no concept, or set of concepts, can exhaustively explain an object. In a tone anticipatory of Jean-Luc Marion (see chapter 4), Adorno gives the following: “The name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to contradict the traditional norm of adequacy. . . .As the heterogeneous collides with its limit it exceeds itself.”²⁰ Or, in his *Minima Moralia*, he declares that, “thought must aim beyond its target just because it never quite reaches it.”²¹ Marcuse similarly remains committed to an “‘excess’ of meaning over and above the operational concept.”²²

The excess of the object with respect to subjective conceptualization forms the impetus for a reformed version of dialectical thinking which sees the concept not as constitutive, but, as Henry Pickford notes, akin to Kant’s regulative concepts: “although never fulfilled by empirical experience, the emphatic meaning [of a concept] nonetheless offers a standard against which candidates for the concept can be evaluated.”²³ Concepts are heuristical, guides to further understanding of an object, though consciously aware of their own provisional and limited status. Concepts for Adorno and Marcuse can only *aim* at objects which exceed and limit the viability of the concept itself.

One must therefore admit of both the limitations of the concept while still employing them in persistent deference to the object. Thinking becomes a self-conscious practice of deploying concepts and iteratively measuring them against the object itself, which nonetheless remains resistant to pure conceptualization. This forms, as Adorno notes in *Negative Dialectics*, a “third possibility” for thinking beyond positivism and

idealism, in which “constellations” of concepts are piled against an object.²⁴ As Allison Stone remarks, the sedimentation of concepts around an object allows us more access—however limited—to the object’s particularity and alienation: “By thinking in what Adorno calls ‘constellations,’ we can gain a sense of what is unique in particular things, and of the domination that these things have suffered.”²⁵

Constellations thus represent the best option for thinking an object without submitting it to the totality of identitarian thinking: they restore the primacy of the object and renounce objectivating modes of thought. And, as dialectical, they represent the most thoroughgoing means of understanding the history and social relations which are immanent within the object. “The concept must immerse itself in the monad to the point that the social essence emerges of its own dynamic, not classify it as a special case of the macrocosm. . . .”²⁶ The call for “immersion” is precisely the constellational imperative demanded by Adorno’s later work. Constellations, as a recognition of conceptual finitude and a call for further experience, become the only means by which we see an object more fully. As he states in *Negative Dialectics*: “Cognition of the object in its constellation is cognition of the process stored in the object. As a constellation, theoretical thought circles the concept it would like to unseal, hoping that it may fly open like the lock of a well-guarded safe-deposit box.”²⁷ Yet as should be already clear, no object “flies open” like the lock of a safe-deposit box, fully revealing its secrets. The object always remains beyond the horizon of constellational thinking.

Despite this persistent reminder that objects remain partially conceptualizable through the aggregation of “an ensemble of . . . models,”²⁸ Adorno refuses to admit an easy means of access to the object. Even though the object remains “knowable” only as a

negation of the subject, as nonidentity, Adorno does not allow the negative to be made positive. Conjuring Hegel's notion of a "bad infinity," he remarks: "The nonidentical is not to be obtained directly, as something positive on its part, nor is it obtainable by a negation of the negative. This negation is not an affirmation itself, as it is to Hegel."²⁹ Instead of somehow achieving positivity through negativity, Adorno's frozen dialectic and the call for constellational thinking is to remain a persistent reminder of the surplus of the object. "Totality is to be opposed by convicting it of nonidentity with itself—of the nonidentity it denies, according to its own concept."³⁰ The conviction of nonidentity within dialectical thinking formalizes the intertwining of philosophy and ethics, or, rather, makes philosophy *ethical* by purging it of identity and forcing it to recognize the damage rendered by the subject upon the object. Allison Stone summarizes:

Via constellations, we sense that particular natural beings are vestiges of their original selves, their inherent tendencies having been crushed and ruined. . . .Critical reflection on concepts leads us to construct constellations that make us aware that natural things have suffered from our dominating them, and this implies that our efforts at domination have been ethically wrong.³¹

Constellational thinking, by restoring the primacy of the object, serves to reveal the ways in which objects have become deformed through identitarian and totalizing modes of thought. By examining the historical, social, and particular dimensions of an object, one comes to see its surplus in relation to the subject and the ways in which it defies pure identity. More generally, thinking in constellations allows one to begin the process of resisting normalizing forms of thought and crafting an open space for more just ways of thinking.

The Negative Dialectic and the Demand for Experience

The ethical motivation behind critical theory for a recovery of objects which have suffered under totalizing reason motivates a return to dialectical thinking in which the object is given primacy principally through constellational thinking and its explicit awareness of its own limitations. This method of prioritizing the object by means of the dialectic becomes for Adorno “negative dialectics.” By consistently seeing the opposition and tension between subject and object, the dialectic delivers the subject over to the object, enabling a perspective on its history, suffering, and nonidentity. Marcuse traces this development:

Dialectical thought thus becomes negative in itself. Its function is to break down the self-assurance and self-contentment of common sense, to undermine the sinister confidence in the power and language of facts,. . . [that] leads necessarily to qualitative change: the explosion and catastrophe of the established state of affairs.³²

Insomuch as the dialectic “undermines the sinister confidence” in subjectivity and the subject’s hold on reality, it is a method which is inherently negative, both epistemologically (forging a realization of nonidentity) and practically (conditioning one’s hold on the established facts). Marcuse summarizes both senses of the dialectic in his *Reason and Revolution*: “dialectical thought is necessarily destructive, and whatever liberation it may bring is a liberation in thought, in theory.”³³

One must see, however, that the agent of “destruction” in negative dialectics is the object itself. Negative dialectics derives its negativity from *within* the dialectic: the undermining of the subject stems from its displacement by the object. Dialectical thought provides the seeds for its own systemic un-doing: “Thinking. . . breaks the supremacy of thinking over its otherness, because it always is otherness already, within itself.”³⁴ For Adorno and Marcuse alike, this means that the logic of dialectics, along with its

responsibility to the object, consistently work against the identitarian labor of the subject. Negativity lies at the heart of dialectics inasmuch as the object lies at the heart of all thought.

Once again, this indicates not only a pre-eminently dialectical orientation to critical theory and philosophy in general, but also an ethical approbation within negative dialectics. The call for the philosopher is not only to think in constellations, models, and through the dialectic, but to “give himself up to it,” in order to arrive at “the pre-dialectical stage: the serene demonstration of the fact that there are two sides to everything.”³⁵ Here, and in many other instances, Adorno marks his theory of negative dialectics with the motif of recovery: the positive return to what objects were before they were brought to suffer. This dimension of Adorno’s thought is reinforced by the persistent demand for thinking to absolve itself of its own contents through the object, to be brought to “thinking against itself.” As he notes here, such thinking is inherently political and moral:

If negative dialectics calls for the self-reflection of thinking, the tangible implication is that if thinking is to be true—if it is to be true today, in any case—it must also be a thinking against itself. If thought is not measured by the extremity that eludes the concept, it is from the outset in the nature of the musical accompaniment with which the SS liked to drown out the screams of its victims.³⁶

The intended ethical import of Adorno’s negative dialectics is clear: thinking against thought is *itself* an ethical practice.

This invocation of philosophy-as-morality is clearly echoed in Adorno’s thoughts on the nature of experience, in which “experience” comes to mean the conviction of nonidentity by means of immersion in the object. “There is no remedy but steadfast diagnosis of oneself and others, the attempt, through awareness, if not to escape doom, at

least to rob it of its dreadful violence, that of blindness.”³⁷ Adorno’s notion of “steadfast diagnosis” becomes more clear in his later writings, in which the object is said to deliver precisely the type of experience he demands: “[I]t is up to dialectical cognition to pursue the inadequacy of thought and thing, to experience it in the thing.”³⁸ And, finally, in a striking passage, Adorno’s notion of experience becomes transformed into the concept of “expansive concentration,”³⁹ where the measure of philosophical acuity is one’s degree of immersion in an object:

Certainly reflective thinking has not been described accurately enough. Most likely it should be called expansive concentration. . . . Thoughts that are true must incessantly renew themselves in the experience of the subject matter. . . . The strength to do that, and not the measuring-out and marking-off of conclusions, is the essence of philosophical rigor.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, Adorno’s consistent use of “experience,” “immersion,” and “concentration” are not clear in themselves, nor do they indicate how one must encounter an object without falling prey to identitarian or dominating modes of thought. One must take Adorno’s word on experience *prima facie*: it is a directive to think in constellations, to build models of objects which are constantly in interaction with the object itself, to constantly think against the tendencies of one’s own thought. To think ethically for Adorno, and therefore to suspend the dialectic between subject and object, means to re-awaken one’s experience of the object through persistent investigation, modification, and patience.

The Role of Philosophy after Negative Dialectics

As in Nietzsche before, the critical theoretical normative assessment of the role of thinking is directly tied to the project of philosophy: the ideal pose of thinking in

advanced industrial society *is* philosophical. Taking his direction from negative dialectics, Adorno claims, “philosophy is obliged ruthlessly to criticize itself,”⁴¹ a statement which directly equates ideal thinking and philosophy. This equation reads critique into the role of philosophy itself, where the negative dialectical mode of philosophizing is a means of criticizing subjectivity: “The subject is to see reason against its reason. The critique of ideology is thus not something peripheral and intra-scientific. . . . Philosophically, it is central: it is a critique of the constitutive consciousness itself.”⁴² Philosophy’s proper domain should not be merely limited to subjectivity, though; negative dialectics is a criticism of *all* forms of totality which seek to dominate or identify an object. Critique therefore becomes political in its essence, and “philosophy. . . must in the end be irreconcilably at odds with the dominant consciousness.”⁴³ Adorno’s call for resistance turns on philosophy’s ability to respond to dominant forms of thought and normalization.

This normative direction for philosophy is grounded in the notion that liberation from totality and injustice can only come from *within* the strictures of totality and injustice themselves. Liberation is “by forces developing within. . . a system. That is a decisive point. And liberation by virtue of the contradiction generated by the system, precisely because it is a bad, a false system.”⁴⁴ Dialectics exposes the system from within, undercutting its artificial grasp and appropriation of the object. Negative dialectics is to use the negativity that develops within thinking against identitarian thought. As Rudiger Bubner states, “Confronted with the opponent’s superior strength, theory has only one viable recourse—to strike back with the most stringent, thoroughgoing

form of negativity.”⁴⁵ Philosophy becomes tactical, using that which the totality leaves behind against it, opposing positivity with negativity. Adorno summarizes the point well:

If philosophy is still necessary, it is so only in the way it has been from time immemorial: as critique, as resistance to the expanding heteronomy, even if only as thought’s powerless attempt to remain its own master and to convict of untruth, *by their own criteria*, both a fabricated mythology and a conniving, resigned acquiescence on the other of untruth.⁴⁶

In assuming the role of strident negativity, philosophy not only opposes totality with particularity, subjectivity with objectivity, but it opposes heteronomy with liberation. Philosophy’s tactical response is not only purely negative, then, but, dialectically, it is also futural, opening up a critical space for the presentation of alternative configurations of society and the self. As Allison Stone states:

[C]ritical reflection on our concepts can make us palpably aware that our domination of nature is ethically wrong, an awareness which distances us from our pursuit of self-preservation and so alters the motivational background that shapes future exercises of critical thinking.⁴⁷

Negative dialectics is committed not only to the object in its particularity, but to the object as it may appear in the future under different structural relations. By thinking through the object, one captures a vision of what the object might be without damage or within an alternate reality. It is at this juncture that critical theory becomes *constructive*, catching a glimpse of the fact that “what ought to be does not yet exist, and that what exists is not yet what it ought to be.”⁴⁸ Adorno’s modified conception of philosophy, seen as the imperative for negative dialectics and a commitment to the object, becomes a means for not only seeing the damage done to an object through history, but, in a constructive move, for envisioning alternatives to the present reality. Negative dialectics, like Nietzsche’s call for ideal types, becomes a means for assessing the present and

concomitantly opening up new horizons in the future. The negative moment in life as art begins by overcoming oppressive modes of thought in the present with an eye towards what ought to be.

III: Art, Aesthetics, and Their Relation to Thinking

The “Nature” of Art

Unfortunately, Adorno and Marcuse’s respective theories on the nature of thinking and the role of philosophy fall short of granting successful notions of “experience” or properly conceptualizing the removal of the identifying subject. Neither constellational thinking nor rigorous philosophy as normatively practiced within critical theory are sufficient for releasing objects from the heteronomy and suffering imposed by Western advanced industrial societies. A different, and still yet complementary, form of reflection and possible cue to action is required. This form of reflection, for both Adorno and Marcuse, can be found in art and aesthetic reflection on the nature of art. For it is in art that a genuine experience of a non-damaged object can at least be envisioned. As Alastair Morgan boldly claims, “The model for an authentic experience in Adorno’s philosophy is aesthetic experience.”⁴⁹

The complementarity of art, or even its necessity with respect to philosophy and the task of thinking, should not be seen as a dismissal of philosophy or negative dialectics. Rather, art for both Adorno and Marcuse is still bound by the constraints of the dialectic, and, as such, in the artwork “subjectivity mediates objectivity.”⁵⁰ The mediation of the object in artworks is not conceptual, however: the object is instead mediated through a subjective mimesis or appropriation (*aufheben*) of images, techniques, forms,

and concepts which have been given to the artist. The work of art thus remains within the realm of dialectics by virtue of its subjective mediation through the artist and the artist's history; yet the forms of mediation—form, style, semblance, etc.—are what mark the work of art as different than the process of thinking. Adorno puts the point nicely:

Aesthetic objectivity is not unmediated; he who thinks he holds it in the palm of his hand is led astray by it. If it were unmediated it would coincide with the sensuous phenomena of art and would suppress its spiritual element, which is, however, fallible both for itself and for others.⁵¹

For Adorno, the “spiritual element” is the admixture of subjective elements which inevitably go into every composition, the way in which they are arranged, and that which is left out.⁵² It is this subjective arrangement of elements which both makes art similar to thought and yet distinguishes it in its potential diversity of expression.

As dialectical, one cannot conceive of art without subjecting it to the criteria of particularity and objectivity. Just as art is the subjective arrangement of elements of form and style, emphasis must also be placed on its *mimetic* essence, its dependence upon content and images gleaned from objects themselves. “Art is mimesis of the world of imagery and at the same time its enlightenment through forms of control.”⁵³ Artistic mimesis is a focused attempt to bring to light that which remains elusive and partial in all thinking: the object. This struggle to express the object forms the tension in all artworks between the content and a perpetually inadequate means of expression: “The tension between objectivating technique and the mimetic essence of artworks is fought out in the effort to save the fleeting, the ephemeral, the transitory in a form that is immune to reification and yet akin to it in being permanent.”⁵⁴ Adorno's appropriation of Hegelian language of struggle between the subject and its intended object here is apt, for art in

Adorno and Marcuse is the primary arena in which one can still see the frozen tension between the imperfect subject and its attempts to grasp and express a surplus object. Tom Huhn expresses this tension: “Mimesis is thus the necessarily thwarted inclination to become one with nature, indeed to become nature. Mimesis ends with the act of becoming not nature, but *like* nature.”⁵⁵

Art, however, is not satisfied with *merely* becoming “like” nature, and thus all art attempts to fully express the object itself.⁵⁶ Art must therefore admit its dependence on the object, and loyalty to the particular is the ultimate practical expression of the desideratum carried within every artwork. As Adorno states, “The [historically] new wants nonidentity, yet intention reduces it to identity; modern art constantly works at the Munchhausean trick of carrying out the identification of the nonidentical.”⁵⁷ Or, in an expression of deference to the object and the risk taken by the artist and the work of art:

The real source of the risk taken by all artworks, however, is not located in their level of contingency but rather in the fact that each one must follow the whippoorwill of objectivity immanent to it, without any guarantee that the productive forces—the spirit of the artist and his procedures—will be equal to that objectivity.⁵⁸

Of course, given the nature of the object itself as explored earlier, no work of art, like concepts, can fully express its intended object. The object always exceeds and renounces the artist’s intention at adequate expression.

The mimetic character of all art, however, is what allows it to be thoroughly dialectical. Not only does art exemplify the tension between subject and object by virtue of the ongoing slippage between expression and content, but, by comporting itself to an object and using historical methods of expression, art expresses its historical situation often regardless of its conscious appropriation or manifestation of that situation. This

historical and political consciousness of art forms part of Adorno's definition of a "successful" work:

[T]here has accrued to art in a "consciousness of distress," in the boundless suffering that crashes over mankind and in the traces that this suffering has left behind in the subject itself, a darkness that by no means interrupts an achieved enlightenment intermittently but, on the contrary, completely overshadows enlightenment's most recent phase and through its real force almost bars its portrayal in the image.⁵⁹

The consciousness of which Adorno speaks is constitutive of the work of art: as a subjective medium of expression which is dependent on an historical object and modes of expression, the artwork is an opening to the suffering endured by the object. As in Adorno's calls for constellational thinking and loyalty to the object, this "consciousness" often takes on a highly ethical tone: "Consciousness does justice to the experience of nature only when, like impressionist art, it incorporates nature's wounds."⁶⁰

While the object is clearly at the center of Adorno's reflections on the mimesis of history within the work of art, he makes a parallel move to see *form* and *style* as equally expressive of the historical tension immanent within the artistic object. As Marcuse notes, "stylization" is essential to the work of art: "The only requirement is that [art] must be *stylized*, subjected to aesthetic 'formation.'"⁶¹ Style, however, is historically mediated, as shown poignantly by Adorno's analysis of Schoenberg and Stravinsky in *Philosophy of New Music*, or in his varied analyses of surrealism and the work of Kafka. The means of expression are historical, and, as such, express the sedimentation of various modes of expression through time. "By oscillating between fragmentation and framed coherence, artworks imbue their materials with reference to a history of being constricted and damaged, and when we sense this, we also, indirectly, sense the analogous suffering of nature."⁶² The historical sedimentation of suffering within artistic methods allows a

viewer of art to perceive the damage done to the object through time: the renaissance rebels against the flatness of medieval art, impressionism against the distinctness of classicism, and surrealism against the autarky of order in contemporary forms of expression.

Historical mediation through both the object *and* style, then, is the means by which art becomes properly dialectical. The object undergoes transformation through subjective stylization and novelty.⁶³ This tension is necessary to any successful or authentic work of art: “[Contemporary] works must consciously measure themselves against the historical situation of their material: they must neither abandon themselves blindly and fetishistically to the material nor mold it from outside with subjective intentions.”⁶⁴ The artist must perform the trick of expressing subjective intention without losing sight of the object, of creating through objective modes of expression a style which is adequate to subjective intention. If this tension is carried through to the work of art properly, then art reveals the dialectical nature of understanding and history:

[I]f this “translation” is to pierce and comprehend the everyday reality, it must be subjected to aesthetic stylization: it must be made into a novel, play, or story, in which every sentence has its own rhythm, its own weight. This stylization reveals the universal in the particular social situation, the ever recurring, desiring Subject in all objectivity.⁶⁵

Marcuse’s keen play on universal and particular, as well as subject and object, traces the contours of ideal art in critical theoretical aesthetics. As dialectical, art incorporates history within itself even as it becomes *Geist*. Art is an expression of historical and subjective truth, albeit in aesthetic and non-conceptual form:

[Artworks] are predicated on fissuredness and thus on the concrete historical situation. Their social truth depends on their opening themselves to this content. The content becomes their subject, to which they mold themselves, to the same extent that their law of form does not

obscure the fissure but rather, in demanding that it be shaped, makes it its own concern.⁶⁶

The historical and deeply dialectical nature of art also means, negatively, that Adorno and Marcuse do not espouse an “ontology of art” as some might contend.⁶⁷ Rather, art is always dependent on historical and social means of expression and seeks to portray objects as they have endured transformation from history and society. Yet critics are partially right in their assertion of an ontology of art, inasmuch as Adorno and Marcuse do posit art as a separate sphere in which, although it is historical in style and content, it remains autonomous from dominant modes of production, reception, and objectification. While this may not make for an “ontology” of art, it does assert art’s *autonomy* in the face of reality. Adorno states:

Art’s separation from the process of material production has enabled it to demystify the reality reproduced in this process. Art challenges the monopoly of the established reality to determine what is “real,” and it does so by creating a fictitious world which is nevertheless “more real than reality itself.”⁶⁸

Of critical importance here is the “fictitious” nature of art, a point examined in depth in the previous chapter. In Adorno, it is the fictitious or “semblance” (*Schein*) quality of art that allows it to remain autonomous from productive reality and to bring forth “another world.” “Artworks detach themselves from the empirical world and bring forth another world, one opposed to the empirical world as if this other world too were an autonomous entity.”⁶⁹ As a fiction and fabrication, artworks separate themselves from reality and bring forth a semblance of the object as it has undergone subjective stylization. As a fetish and an exemplar of the dialectic, art becomes autonomous in a heteronomous world.

This autonomy is always in peril, however, and, akin to maintaining the dialectical nature of thought by freezing in tension the subject and object, the successful work of art remains loyal to its object only while maintaining its own autonomy. “Art is autonomous and it is not; without what is heterogeneous to it, its autonomy eludes it.”⁷⁰ Art must remain autonomous from reality itself while attempting to incorporate reality into its nexus of expression. It can only do so by remaining removed from reality while still incorporating it, in touch with “the world” though not a part of the operational universe. As Marcuse states, “the realm of aesthetics is essentially ‘unrealistic’: it has retained its freedom from the reality principle at the price of being ineffective in the reality.”⁷¹

The contradiction between autonomy gained through semblance, illusion, and its own uselessness as a commercial artifact and its simultaneous attempt to depict reality as earnestly as possible is constitutive of the work of art. This paradox, however, is the essence of art’s ability to levy multifarious forms of social critique on the existing reality: as historical and loyal to an object, works of art incorporate reality; and yet, as *Geistlich* and autonomous, works of art both undermine and transform reality. Thus, “art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art.”⁷² Art, or at least successful art, becomes oppositional by its very nature. Art, for Christoph Menke, is autonomous because it “brings to bear potentialities, capabilities, and insights, which, though still unrealized in society, can, in principle, remove themselves from the esoteric reality of the aesthetic and become incorporated into social relations.”⁷³ Reality can be transformed in the work of art because it is reality that stands to be transformed, deformed, and reconsidered through the artist’s expression of the world.

The social-critical nature of art is not incidental. For both Adorno and Marcuse, art must remain as autonomous and socially critical in order to remain art at all: if art falls into a false objectivity or subjectivity, it becomes either propaganda or narcissism. The essence of art lies in its ability to maintain social critique without falling prey to either end of the spectrum. Art, like negative thinking before it, is essentially “resistance”:

Art keeps itself alive through its social force of resistance: unless it reifies itself, it becomes a commodity. Its contribution to society is not communication with it but rather something extremely mediated: It is resistance in which, by virtue of inner-aesthetic development, social development is reproduced without being imitated.⁷⁴

A work of art remains resistant through its ability to integrate objectivity without collapsing into it altogether. If it succeeds in doing so, art remains autonomous and capable of altering and re-conceiving the very reality it intends to depict. To be sure, this means that art abdicates its role as directly functional in the world: successful art denies reality at the cost of being ineffectual in that reality. The most sincere form of social criticism in advanced industrial society remains captive to its nature as directly ineffectual: “But the function of art in the totally functional world is functionlessness; it is pure superstition to believe that art could intervene directly or lead to an intervention.”⁷⁵

Resistance lies at the heart of the critical theoretical understanding of art. By appropriating and interpreting the object through form, style, and artistic expression, art reveals the deformation of the object through history. And, by remaining ineffectual and autonomous, the work of art remains a non-assimilable form of social, historical, and intellectual critique. In a theme which permeates life as art, the ability for art to resist forms of oppression and injustice is contingent on its ability to remain autonomous.

Art, the Object, and Spirit

Ironically, the most able means of expressing the historical and social contradictions and alternatives latent within an object for Adorno and Marcuse is also the most functionless in advanced Western societies. In this sense, the work of art may supplement conceptuality as a means of envisioning the object, but is nevertheless incomplete, inasmuch as it can never fully envision alternatives or concrete modes of action. Art's most noble role may be as a necessary, though insufficient, moment within more just forms of thinking and acting.

If, provisionally, art is to serve as an adjunct or supplement to reason, it must simultaneously replicate, albeit in more complete form, the role of reason, as well as persistently displace totalizing subjectivity. Art must therefore address objects in terms proximal to constellational thinking and also reveal that thinking to be insufficient.

It is with this topology in mind that Adorno consistently addresses the artistic object in his *Aesthetic Theory* in terms similar to his depiction of the cognitive object in *Negative Dialectics*. He states:

Aesthetic comportment, however, is neither immediately mimesis nor its repression but rather the process that mimesis sets in motion and in which, modified, mimesis is preserved. . . . Ultimately, aesthetic comportment is to be defined as the capacity to shudder. . . . That shudder in which subjectivity stirs without yet being subjectivity is the act of being touched by the other. . . . Such a constitutive relation of the subject to objectivity in aesthetic comportment joins eros and knowledge.⁷⁶

Adorno employs Walter Benjamin's concept of the "shudder" as integral to the process of aesthetic (and artistic) comportment. The object must be approached with an indefinite openness, one which is here, in highly Marcusean terms, described both bodily and

erotically. It is through this openness, like Adorno's models before, that the "artwork is permeated by its other, its own essence, the movement toward objectivation, and is motivated by that heterogeneous other."⁷⁷ Artworks, like concepts, constellations, and models, are persistently driven by their desire to express the object through which it is moved both bodily and conceptually.

And, as before in Adorno's reflections on the object, there is the parallel realization that the object can never be fully expressed in the work of art. As Thomas Huhn states, "mimesis is forced to imitate that which categorically refuses to be mimetically appropriated."⁷⁸ The "refusal" practiced by the object is the very nature of the object itself, and what gives rise to Adorno's earlier call for constellational thinking. In art it is this very irreducibility that motivates the aesthetic impulse. Remarking on the Hegelian tendency to falsely sublimate objects which are intrinsic to the aesthetic process itself, Adorno notes that Hegel "hypostatizes the subjective preformation of the existing as the absolute," and, thus, he misses the "experience of the nonidentical as the telos and emancipation of the aesthetic subject."⁷⁹ Adorno's critique of Hegel strikes to the heart of his reformed dialectical theory of art: a work of art must express that which is the aim of all art without falsely embodying the object or denying its excess with respect to the subject.

Insomuch as art places the object in relief and simultaneously recognizes that it "leaves a remainder," it also becomes an exemplar of the dialectic. Much of Adorno's work, such as his private correspondence with Benjamin, reveals the gravity he assigned to dialectical works of art, those which showed the reciprocal interpenetration and tension between the universal and particular.⁸⁰ Equally important, much of Adorno's writings in

aesthetics are a castigation of what he sees as undialectical works of art, those which, like the compositions of Stravinsky and even the followers of Schoenberg, show a disparity between the structural elements of composition and the order imposed upon them by, for example, twelve-tone technique.⁸¹ What emerges from these reflections is the observation that, if art is to supplement proper thinking after the Holocaust, it must itself *be dialectical*. Art must show the perpetual slippage between the identitarian subject and its object, universality and particularity. As Adorno observes, “The struggle between alienated objectivity and limited subjectivity is unresolved, and its irreconcilability is its truth.”⁸² Not only is the work of art dialectical because of its immanent incorporation of form, the object, and the subject, but, because of their permanent tension, it becomes the bearer of truth. In this sense, art becomes tantamount to philosophy, as its primary aim is to reveal the opposition between subject and object. Thinking and art collide in their commitment to the object.

If, as I contend, art comes to be seen as a prosthetic of the philosophical project, then it must be equally dialectical to thinking and must also call the project of thinking itself into question (itself a negative dialectical procedure). This latter point is borne out, I would argue, in Adorno’s arguments on *Geist* within artworks and its inevitable failure to schematize objectivity. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno describes *Geist* (translated as spirit):

That through which artworks, by becoming appearance, are more than they are: This is their spirit. . . . What appears in artworks and is neither to be separated from their appearance nor to be held simply identical with it—the nonfactual in their facticity—is their spirit.⁸³

Or, as described by Christoph Menke: “Aesthetic spirit is not the free movement of the imagination no longer subject to any cognitive end, but rather that movement of the imagination that uncovers ‘ideas to a given concept’ and finds the appropriate ‘expression

to this [concept].”⁸⁴ Spirit is, in short, the sublated (*aufgehoben*) form of artworks. It is the subjective appropriation and stylization of objective content, expressed in artistic form. Spirit is neither reducible to its subject nor its object, as it is the immanent production and mediation of both.

Adorno’s conception of *Geist* therefore vacillates between a more subjective or objective reading. On some occasions, spiritualization is indelibly connected to mind, and is seen to be “the progress of consciousness.”⁸⁵ At other points, *Geist* comes to represent the mimetic comportment of a work of art to its object: “The rationality of artworks becomes spirit only when it is immersed in its polar opposite.”⁸⁶ *Geist* mediates the subjective and objective components of a work of art, combining to form “aesthetic stylization” in which the world is subjected to individual style and form.

Given the dialectical characterization of art which Adorno uses to construct a notion of *Geist*, it is unsurprising that *Geist* itself becomes the proper expression of the dialectical character of works of art. This concept is conditioned, of course, by the recognition that the *Geist* found in works of work is neither absolute nor atemporal: it is simply the mediation between subject and object immanent in the work of art. “Art is to be construed dialectically insofar as spirit inheres in it, without however possessing spirit as an absolute or spirit’s serving to guarantee an absolute to art.”⁸⁷ And, as spiritual, art can also come to express, like the dialectic, the contradictions latent in subjectivity and the potential alternatives to patterns of thinking. Art acquires a political force that Adorno had hitherto only accorded to negative dialectics and critical theory:

When art reflects the social coercion in which it is harnessed and by doing so opens up a perspective on reconciliation, it is spiritualization. . . . Only through spiritualization, and not through stubborn rank natural

growth, do artworks break the net of the domination of nature and mold themselves to nature; only from within does one issue forth.⁸⁸

Spiritualization, like the frozen dialectic in *Negative Dialectics* and *Minima Moralia*, is envisioned as the means by which subjectivity releases its grip on nature and frees objects in their particularity and social location.

Adorno is not clear, however, on how *Geist* in artworks is to perform such a procedure. Indeed, *Geist* cannot perform the work of “reconciliation” on its own—as dialectical, it must be opposed to something which conditions its own claim to identity. Arguably, this opposition can be found in the semblance character of artworks, which is cast by Adorno in direct relief with *Geist* and the mediated nature of works of art. As in Nietzsche before, semblance (*Schein*) gives rise to both illusion and a multiplicity of meanings in a work of art. Marcuse gives a preliminary indication of this line of thinking: “Nevertheless the world of a work of art is ‘unreal’ in the ordinary sense of the word: it is a fictitious reality. . . .As fictitious world, as illusion (*Schein*), it contains more truth than does everyday reality.”⁸⁹ Or, only a few pages later, the “fictitious” nature of art is given a highly conceptual character: “There is in art inevitably an element of *hubris*: art cannot translate its vision into reality. It remains a ‘fictitious’ world, though as such it sees through and anticipates reality.”⁹⁰

The fictitious nature of artworks not only “anticipates reality,” but, in its genesis, is entirely dependent on *Geist*. If art were to be purely subjective, it would not anticipate reality or alter the object so as to produce an illusion; as purely objective, art would be purely mimetic, mere representationalism. It is only as *Geist* that art produces the “fiction” essential to its very nature:

The semblance of artworks originates, however, in their spiritual essence. Spirit as something separated from its other, making itself dependent in opposition to it and intangible in this being-for-itself, is necessarily illusory; all spirit. . . has in itself the aspect of raising what does not exist, what is abstract, to existence. . .⁹¹

Semblance is borne out of *Geist*; dialectically speaking, semblance is posited by *Geist* through its own movement. Fiction emerges from mediation. And it is precisely this fiction that undercuts the potential totality claimed by *Geist* in its movement between subject and object:

The spirit of artworks is their objectivated mimetic comportment: It is opposed to mimesis and at the same time the form that mimesis takes in art. . . .By wanting to make itself like the objectivated other, the artwork becomes unlike that other [semblance]. But it is only by way of its self-alienation through imitation that the subject so strengthens itself that it is able to shake off the spell of imitation.⁹²

In this striking quotation, illusion and semblance produce the “self-alienation” necessary to “shake off” the potential for self-identity and totality in the work of art. Semblance conditions and undercuts *Geist*. Christoph Menke summarizes this movement of self-alienation and self-opposition: “negative aesthetics thus provides a two-stage description of aesthetic experience: as an attempt at understanding and as the negation of this attempt.”⁹³ It is the genius of works of art, for Adorno and Marcuse, that they produce the means by which they undercut *themselves*. If the work of art is properly dialectical, it is also illusory; yet, as illusory, as “unreal,” the work of art re-creates the dialectic and calls into question *Geist* and the mediation of subject and object. In short, the work of art replicates the movement of the dialectic and its distillation in negative dialectics.

This motif of semblance-as-critique is redoubled in Adorno’s synthesis of semblance and autonomy in the work of art. As illusion *and* as autonomous, the work of art founds its own liberation and grounds a critique of reality:

In formal terms. . . [artworks] are ideology in that a priori they posit something spiritual as being independent from the conditions of its material production and therefore as being intrinsically superior and beyond the primordial guilt of the separation of physical and spiritual labor. . . Only what does not submit to the principle [of heteronomy] acts as the plenipotentiary of what is free from domination; only what is useless can stand in for the stunted use value.⁹⁴

Here Adorno repeats themes addressed earlier: the “uselessness” of art as well as its separation from the sphere of exchange. The addition of *Geist* here, however, implies that it is the mediation within the work of art, and its subsequent nature as illusion, which frees it from the “primordial guilt of the separation of physical and spiritual labor.” The semblance character of artworks effectively frees it from the conditions of production and reproduction, becoming constitutive of its very autonomy.⁹⁵

As such, art can become critical by delivering reality in a form autonomous from reality itself. Marcuse states, “In order to be negated, unfreedom must be represented in the work of art with the semblance of reality. This element of semblance (show, *Schein*) necessarily subjects the represented reality to aesthetic standards and thus deprives it of its terror.”⁹⁶ Art, through its necessary semblance, delivers a view of unfreedom and reality without itself being that reality. And, in doing so, art reveals an alternative picture of reality removed from its own suffering and terror: it is a vision of something else. As Adorno states, “Semblance is a promise of nonsemblance;”⁹⁷ that is, illusion is the prospect for the transformation of illusion into reality. Once again, a negative moment founds the possibility for construction into the future.

To be sure, this is a highly politicized notion of art which, while hinging on art’s autonomy and its fundamental tension between semblance and *Geist*, may indeed threaten its very basis for being critical. Yet this is the tightrope which art must walk in advanced

industrial society. Art remains the best—if not the only—means of undermining identitarian reason *from within*, that is, through the structure of the dialectic. In showing the persistent intransigence of *Geist* in the face of illusion, in revealing the particularity and excess of the object, and in showing the historical sedimentation of suffering embedded in the object, art becomes the form of negative dialectics, and therefore social critique, *par excellence*. Adorno addresses the hope invested in the work of art and *Geist*: “Only insofar as spirit, in its most advanced form, survives and perseveres is any opposition to the total domination of the social totality possible.”⁹⁸

By removing the “illusion of the autarky of thought,”⁹⁹ art effectively shows subjectivity, along with reality, to be illusory in its heteronomous manifestations. Thus, “Every authentic artwork is internally revolutionary.”¹⁰⁰ Artworks indict the present reality without actively attempting to do so: their indictment is internal and essential to their nature as autonomous productions, not part of their content or intended message.

[T]he political positions deliberately adopted by artworks are epiphenomena and usually impinge on the elaboration of works and thus, ultimately, on their social truth content. . . . Society appears in it all the more authentically the less it is the intended object.¹⁰¹

Art which is intentionally “political,” Adorno often observes, either serves as propaganda or becomes part of the administered world. Only by remaining steadfastly autonomous and illusory, by maintaining their dialectical nature, do works of art come to posit meaningful social critique.

While the bulk of Adorno’s theory of art remains enrapt to its social-critical nature, he also at times expresses a deep-seated hope embedded in the nature of art. Adorno expresses this intertwining of hope and criticism in the work of art: “Yet whoever, rightly, senses unfreedom in all art is tempted to capitulate, to resign in the face

of the gathering forces of administration, with the dismissive assertion that ‘nothing ever changes,’ whereas instead, in the semblance of what is other, its possibility also unfolds.”¹⁰² Art expresses both the despair of the present reality and the hope embedded in its possible opposition. This occurs through the transcendence required of all semblance, embedded in its birth through *Geist*.¹⁰³ By going beyond *itself*, that is, beyond its own mediation of subject and object, the work of art shows that transcendence is possible, even if only through fiction or illusion.

The hope expressed in art’s internal transcendence is admittedly a minor explicit component of Adorno’s aesthetics. Yet, arguably, it animates his entire corpus on aesthetics, as art provides a lasting refuge for criticality even as thought itself becomes increasingly more administered. As will be seen in the following section, it is the operative binary between criticality and hope, opened up by the work of art, which may point the way to alternative visions of the world, and, in the case of Marcuse, a society which becomes a “work of art.” Marcuse expresses the hope expressed *through* negativity essential to the work of art: “In creating its own Form, its own ‘language,’ art moves in a dimension of reality/which is other than, and antagonistic to the established everyday reality. . . .”¹⁰⁴

The resistant moment in life as art hinges on the potential negativity of both thinking and successful works of art. Each is to show the ways in which the object overcomes the intended totality of the subject. In doing so, thinking and art become a means of expressing and remedying the injustice wrought by damaging modes of thought and expression. Thinking and art are at one in their appeal to a rectified world. Yet their appeal is not merely negative: by deconstructing the illusions of subjectivity, revealing

the deformation of objects, and, in the case of art, becoming illusions themselves, thinking and art open up a critical space for alternative forms of thinking and being. In the remaining sections of this chapter, this dual movement of resistance and creation will come to be seen as critical to the self- and world-creation called for in life as art.

IV: Adorno and Marcuse on the Dialectic and the Role of Thinking Part II

Art's Demand for Aesthetics

Art for Adorno and Marcuse serves as a critical adjunct to reason in advanced industrial societies. Through its dialectical nature, its autonomy, and its possibility for critique, the work of art captures the essence of constellational thinking without being subsumed by identitarian reason. This does not imply a triumphalist view of art, however. As with Nietzsche before, Adorno and Marcuse recognize the limitations of the semblance character of art and its inability to posit concrete social directives or even concepts which specify the nature of the artistic object. Nor is art “pure” in any sense: by assuming form and style, art integrates the administered world, if only to show it as an illusion and heteronomous. In light of this insufficiency, Adorno and Marcuse argue for the necessity of aesthetics as a theoretical supplement to the work of art.¹⁰⁵ While the social nature of art lends it its brilliance and is constitutive of its dialectical character, it is also the reason for its ambiguity: by becoming historical, art also stands in need of an analysis which brings out its historical character. It is only through analysis that art can be “fully experienced”: “Every artwork, if it is to be fully experienced, requires thought and therefore stands in need of philosophy, which is nothing but the thought that refuses all restrictions.”¹⁰⁶

Moreover, the dialectical nature of art is not obvious. Only through a sustained conceptualization of the work of art—such as that practiced by Adorno in *Philosophy of New Music*—can art’s dialectical nature be shown. This becomes, in short, art’s “truth content,” its subjective comportment to the object as elucidated through a critical theoretical analysis which illuminates its embedded history, fragmentation, and self-transcendence. “The truth content of an artwork requires philosophy. It is only in this truth content that philosophy converges with art or extinguishes itself in it.”¹⁰⁷ Concepts—the proper domain of philosophy—become the means whereby the secrets within a work of art are unleashed and set free for further analysis and reflection. Yet, as Adorno recognizes, concepts cannot exhaust the spiritual character of artworks, but, rather, can only indicate its unfolding dialectical nature. “Thus the goal of a philosophical interpretation of works of art cannot be their identification with the concept, their absorption in the concept; yet it is through such interpretation that the truth of the work unfolds.”¹⁰⁸ Michael Kelly radicalizes Adorno’s contention, recognizing that “art is so dependent on critique that the (truth) content of art cannot even ‘unfold’ without it.”¹⁰⁹

The dependence upon philosophy or aesthetics by the work of art should be seen as completely in the service of unlocking the particularity embedded within the work itself. Concepts operate as ways of encircling and freeing an artistic object in its particularity. “Art is the intuition of what is not intuitable; it is akin to the conceptual without the concept. It is by way of concepts, however, that art sets free its mimetic, nonconceptual layer.”¹¹⁰ As was seen before, aesthetics is not to totalize or complete a desired identity with the object: there is, and always will be, an excess of the artistic object in relation to aesthetic concepts. “The task of aesthetics is not to comprehend

artworks as hermetical objects; in the contemporary situation, it is the incomprehensibility that needs to be comprehended.”¹¹¹ The “incomprehensibility” spoken of here is reflective of the iteratively confounding nature of artworks: as mimetic representation of the object, it remains resistant to analysis; and, as *Schein*, it disassembles any claim to reality whatsoever. Aesthetics remains constrained by the very object of its analysis—art—which persistently denies any exhaustive representation.

Aesthetics is consequently thrust into a double bind between irreducibility and the necessity for philosophical analysis, though it must also remain loyal to the work of art. To this end, the primary task of aesthetics is not only to unlock the particularity of the object, but to do so via. an historical-social analysis of its form, structure, and content itself. Only with such concepts in hand can aesthetics properly gauge the dialectical and social-critical nature of art. Max Paddison states: “It is the sociohistorical content of the work mediated through its form which Adorno identifies. . . as the truth content of the work, and which is thus the *telos* of his hermeneutics.”¹¹² Adorno further recognizes that artistic reflection *in itself* is incapable of granting such knowledge: “the social content of great music is grasped not by sensual listening but only through the conceptually mediated knowledge of its elements and their configuration.”¹¹³ Art stands in need of *philosophical* analysis, interpreted by Adorno and Marcuse as essentially the task of critical theory: recording the history and deformations of an object as it is expressed in the work of art.

With an analysis of the social and historical dimensions of the artistic object in hand, aesthetics begins to encircle the conditions which gave rise to the work of art and its mimesis of the object. In this way, aesthetics becomes the vehicle for experience—the

saturation of the subject with the particularity of the object. As Adorno states, “Art awaits its own explanation. It is achieved methodically through the confrontation of historical categories and elements of aesthetic theory with artistic experience, which correct one another reciprocally.”¹¹⁴ This transforms aesthetics into the normative expression of philosophy itself: namely, the practice whereby concepts are brought into humble dialogue with an object whose particularity is the subject of analysis. By means of this practice, “philosophy and art are forced to act on each other in such a way as to make the truth of social reality totally transparent.”¹¹⁵ And, to be sure, the evaluation of the social reality embedded in the object, as before, is not a benign thought experiment. By unlocking the social reality within a work of art and showing the deformation of the object as well as its excess in relation to the subject, aesthetics performs the task of social and historical critique that is lacking in “philosophy” proper: “Philosophy thus adds what is not already contained in innocent artworks, indeed what can never be contained in them: the interpretation of their meaning as *the negation of existing reality*.”¹¹⁶ In Adorno’s aesthetics, ideal thinking becomes dependent upon the work of art for both its content and aim: art founds a form of thinking which is oriented towards justice and resistance.

It is through philosophy, then, that art comes to be seen as fully social-critical: aesthetics, and aesthetics only, can examine the social, historical, and formative content of a work of art to bring out its truly dialectical character. And, as the dialectical nature of art is laid bare, aesthetics itself becomes transformed into an indictment of social reality. For, in successful works of art, the identitarian nature of the subject, the excess of the object, the illusory nature of *Geist* and semblance, and the deformation of the object

itself, are all immanent within the work itself. Aesthetics is to bring this content to light, and, as such, it becomes the medium by which the present reality is shown to be wrong. Thinking becomes what it should be *through* the work of art. The critical theoretical understanding of aesthetics effectively conjoins the constellational character of thinking with the autonomous and objective qualities of the work of art; thinking successfully means thinking *aesthetically*.

The Clarification of Thinking

The role of aesthetics shows a reciprocal relationship between art and philosophy. Art stands in need of philosophy for an illumination of its content, methods, and structure; philosophy stands in need of art as it remains the last bastion of autonomous expression in advanced industrial society. Art's autonomy is essential to the work of philosophy: philosophy requires autonomous art in order to adequately express the dialectic that philosophy itself has lost.

The reciprocal dependence between philosophy and the work of art reveals the deep connections between art and thinking in critical theory. Both are placed in the service of, and in fact mediated by, the object, whose autonomy and particularity is the only corrective for the suffering and damage imposed by society. In aesthetics, thinking and art come to meet one another as reciprocally dependent modes of conceptualizing and expressing the object in its particularity.

In sharing a common aim or "third term," the object, and by variously encircling the object through *Schein* and constellations, art and thinking are brought into dialectical

dependence upon one another: the shortcomings of one posit the need for the other.

Allison Stone once again expresses this point:

For Adorno, artworks are like constellations: they embody a kind of thought that makes us aware of the sufferings of particular natural things. Both these kinds of thought re-enchant natural phenomena, making us aware that these phenomena have an indeterminate history of suffering.¹¹⁷

In mediating the object through form, style, and subjective mimesis, the artwork comes to form a constellation around the object. Unlike philosophy, however, the constellations of artworks remain indeterminate and even more illusory. Art maintains its value to philosophy by preserving this critical distinction.

Just as in philosophy and art, then, aesthetics is to bear the same socio-critical apprehension of reality that allows it to be properly dialectical. By drawing out the social and historical character in works of art, aesthetics becomes a philosophical hermeneutic oriented towards social critique and the elucidation of suffering in objects. Aesthetics, like art, has the fundamental capacity of “turning the powers of the world against itself.”¹¹⁸ This social-critical capacity is not purely abstract, however. It is always constructed with an eye towards future reformations of society and the individual. As Marcuse observes, art and philosophy, as well as aesthetics, are always attuned to elaborating the disjunctions between the ideal and real, which are a pointer to future configurations of society: “Here is the original link. . . between science, art, and philosophy. It is the consciousness of the discrepancy between the real and the possible, between the apparent and the authentic truth, and the effort to comprehend and to master this discrepancy.”¹¹⁹ By showing the perpetual distance between the ideal and the real

and by displacing the identitarian subject, art and philosophy, and their mediation through aesthetics, reveal potential alternatives to the present reality.

It is at this critical juncture that Adorno's notion of "redemption" becomes central, as the "redeemed" object is that which would exist before the suffering and damage imposed by the present reality. Aesthetics, by remaining loyal to the particularity of objects in their deformation through suffering and history, allows us to catch a glimpse of the redeemed object, one which opens up critical perspectives and alternate visions of the object and the world itself. In this seminal passage from *Minima Moralia*, Adorno speaks of redemption in nearly theological language:

The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light.¹²⁰

The philosophy here of which Adorno speaks is, as I have constructed it, aesthetics.

Aesthetics is the contemplation of the object in both its deformation, and, contingently, as that which *may have been* or, equally, that which *will be*. Adorno's seemingly proleptic note here is fitting: aesthetics casts a vision of what the object will be in an apocalyptic future, but also illuminates the perspective which will bring about the intended end.

Aesthetics figures, then, not only as a determination of the present reality, but is a mode of proleptic creation which can bring about the future through its indictment and conviction of the present. As Burke recognizes, this is the "utopia" which is the consequence of aesthetics: "[A]rt and philosophy are both oriented towards a future

reconciliation with nature in a utopia that can only be presented, though not concretized, negatively. . . »¹²¹

If ideal thinking is *aesthetic* thinking, then such thinking aims for an immanent redemption of objects and the world itself. By revealing the suffering endured by an object, aesthetics is committed to what may have been; at the same time, such a vision shows what might be. Aesthetics is simultaneously an effort at diagnosis and therapy, a dual effort to assess the present and reform the future. The resistant moment in life as art hangs on this critical tension between deconstruction and reformation; without renunciation, one can never see the possibilities for future affirmation. Aesthetics in critical theory is the consummation of the fold between renunciation and creation.

Reconciliation and Utopia

In bringing together art and philosophy by virtue of their common commitment to the object, aesthetics illuminates the possibilities for a redeemed object and a messianic future in which the present reality is subject to alteration. This vision, animating the thought of both Adorno and Marcuse, is positively utopian, and is the constructive aspect of aesthetics to which their work opens. Adorno crystallizes this vision:

Unconsciously every artwork must ask itself if and how it can exist as utopia: always only through the constellation of its elements. The artwork transcends not by the bare and abstract difference from the unvarying but rather by taking the unvarying into itself, taking it apart, and putting it back together again; such composition is what is usually called aesthetic creativity.¹²²

Here it is the artwork which is utopian; yet, as was shown before, this utopian content can only be unlocked through aesthetics. Aesthetics is hence the key by which future configurations of reality are unsealed by examining the constellation of elements in the

work of art. As Douglas Kellner notes, Marcuse shares this vision of an alternate reality: “Authentic art thus represents for Marcuse a negation of existing oppressive reality and the postulating of another world. Authentic art preserves visions of emancipation and is thus part of the radical project.”¹²³

As in the passage in the preceding section, the turn to utopianism in aesthetics often takes on a religious tone, though Adorno’s utopia is positively immanent and social. As he states in *Negative Dialectics*, “Even in an age when they fall silent, great works of art express hope more powerfully than the traditional theological texts. . . .”¹²⁴ For Adorno, aesthetics and art are one of the few means for preserving hope in Western society. It is this sense of aesthetics-as-hope which allows Adorno to demur that, “artworks recuperate, neutralized, what once was literally and directly experienced in life and what was expelled by spirit.”¹²⁵ Artworks both identify the need for an alternate reality and point to that reality by showing the potential for an object undamaged by thinking and history. Artworks redeem history inasmuch as they seek to isolate and remedy its ills.

The hope embedded in aesthetics is predicated on an act of mourning which must occur in aesthetic reception and analysis. In order for there to be hope, one must both remember the object before its deformation and mourn such a loss.

As radiant things give up their magic claims, renounce the power with which the subject invested them and hoped with their help himself to wield, they become transformed into images of gentleness, promises of a happiness cured of domination over nature. This is the primeval history of luxury, that has migrated into the meaning of all art.¹²⁶

Adorno’s emphasis on the “images of gentleness” and “promises of happiness” is not a return to a primordial history or Being. Rather, it is a stark acknowledgement that things

are not as they can be, that the present reality falls short of the demands of the object. It is a realization of *absence* (not the positivity of Being) that propels the work of art and aesthetics forward to new alternatives founded on the object itself. Marcuse captures this poignantly: “Naming the ‘things that are absent’ is breaking the spell of the things that are. . . .”¹²⁷ By identifying a lack in the present reality, art transforms the aesthetic experience of suffering into a new consciousness of transformation and hope.¹²⁸

By dialectically identifying an *absence* through the *presence* of history, society, and subjectivity, the work of art (and thereby aesthetics) points towards a potential transformation of objects and a reformation of reality whereby the object is seen in its fullness. This is further elaborated in Adorno’s notion of happiness, where he remarks: “All happiness is but a fragment of the entire happiness men are denied, and are denied themselves.”¹²⁹ Happiness, too, is the negation of the present unhappiness and unfreedom. Yet, as in the case of art, positing happiness as a negation within the present positivity gives rise to a form of thinking which points beyond unfreedom towards another form of the world. As Martin Jay states, this mediated or spiritual (as *Geist*) thinking can be indicated by art and is deemed by Adorno to be “metaphysical”: “art gestures toward the happiness of genuine metaphysical experience, which is precisely what the current world denies and which the merely epistemological concept cannot envisage.”¹³⁰ “Metaphysical experience,” in this sense, comes to represent the thought that goes through, and beyond, the present negativity and positivity to indicate a different state of affairs. And, as Jay rightly recognizes, it is art, mediated by aesthetics, which aids in the construction of metaphysical experience.

Metaphysics thus becomes the conceptual representative for Adorno and Marcuse's critical intuition that thought must think beyond itself. Aided by the work of art and brought to consciousness by aesthetics, metaphysical concepts assume the negativity within the work of art and the positivity of reality to assume a vantage point beyond both.¹³¹ As Adorno states, "what metaphysics has to ponder is the extent to which they are nonetheless able to see beyond themselves."¹³² Or, in short, "metaphysics must know how to wish."¹³³ The ability to transcend the present is clearly given in the dialectical nature of aesthetic and philosophical reflection; metaphysics is therefore the outgrowth of aesthetics as normatively practiced. By "seeing beyond itself," metaphysics can only indicate a future reality: it cannot state what, or how, such a reality is to occur. This sense of indication, or of a "promise," is ubiquitous in the work of Adorno and Marcuse: "nothing could be experienced as truly alive if something that transcends life were not promised also; no straining of the concept leads beyond that."¹³⁴

As a promise and an indication, metaphysics can only point beyond itself. It is the terminus of dialectical thinking, brought to itself through the work of mourning embedded within art and aesthetics. And, as a point of termination and a utopian promise, Adorno continues to use religious and theological language to express what is ostensibly an immanent and practical aim. Inasmuch as metaphysical concepts point beyond the present to a yet absent future, they assume the status of proleptic theological statements which anticipate, and even prepare for, a prophesied future. Adorno indicates this direction of metaphysical thought in the following:

Metaphysics cannot rise again—the concept of resurrection belongs to creatures, not to something created, and in the structures of the mind it is an indication of untruth—but it may originate only with the realization of what has been thought in its sign. *Art anticipates some of this.*

Nietzsche's work is brimful of anti-metaphysical invective, but no formula describes metaphysics as faithfully as Zarathustra's "Pure fool, pure poet." The thinking artist understood the unthought art.¹³⁵

In calling upon Nietzsche's Zarathustra and the illusory nature of art, Adorno generates a keen circularity between the critical theoretical notion of aesthetic negativity and its terminus in metaphysics. Metaphysics—in the sense elaborated by Adorno and pursued in his dialectical aesthetics—becomes Nietzsche's artful illusion, the illumination of possibilities of life which lie in the future. Adorno's concept of metaphysics, and the encircling path he uses to reach it, can thus be seen as a critical re-interpretation of Nietzsche's self-illusory ideal type who uses art and forms of resistance, both cognitive and aesthetic, to create the critical space necessary for creation and affirmation.

Yet the similarities between Nietzsche and Adorno should not be drawn out too far. Adorno's metaphysics, though illusory and a refuge of affirmative thought which is not identitarian, still must traverse the dialectical landscape of constellational thinking, art, semblance, *Geist*, and aesthetics before it arrives at its terminal positive dimension. It is only through a form of thinking that is humbly committed to the object, and through an art which takes the suffering and potential of the object into itself, that metaphysics, brought to itself through aesthetic reflection, can actually present itself as a fiction that conceptualizes a redeemed and utopian future.

The postulation of an indeterminate metaphysical future forms both the terminus and the critical impasse of Adorno's thought on the relationship between thinking and art. When brought into tension with one another, art and thinking can illuminate a possible future, but Adorno's metaphysics are steadfastly deferred: "the reconciliation achieved by art is fictive, . . . not present in reality but [lying] forever in a distant, utopian future."¹³⁶

Adorno does not envision *how* reality is to be transformed, much less the concretion of metaphysical thought. Rather, he envisions philosophy, art, and aesthetics as ethical *in themselves*, and is content to prefigure the alternatives to the present in the form of a loyalty to the object as practiced by right thinking and artistic expression.

Adorno effectively brings art and thinking together into a dialectical relationship where each reciprocally overcomes the shortcomings of the other, but his thought, though brilliantly undergirded by his immanent metaphysics, does not give fruitful indications for how reality is to be transformed. Though art and philosophy stand in relation to each other through aesthetics and the positing of metaphysical hope, they do not terminate in a *concrete* social, political, or ethical aim. Rather, they are to be seen as ways of envisioning alternative realities or utopias to which thought may only extend.

It is into this breach that the following section proceeds. Adorno's conception of the relationship between art and thinking is critical in its use of aesthetics as a means to unlock metaphysical hope and potentially affirm the future, but it remains unsatisfactory for the reconstruction and reformation of one's life demanded by life as art. In short, Adorno's thought is salient for its linkage of art and thinking, but fails to illuminate potential concrete alternatives. For this reason, the work of Marcuse is needed to more fully elaborate upon the negative form of aesthetic judgment in life as art. Marcuse, while almost wholly sympathetic to Adorno's aesthetic theory, attempts to overcome this deficiency by positing concrete ways of living and thinking the aesthetic as shown by Adorno. It is to his work, and the possibility of a practical direction for thinking, art, and life as art, that I turn to in these final sections.

V: Marcuse, the Sensuous, and the Artful Life

The Transition to a Sensuous Aesthetics

Adorno's negative aesthetics reaches a critical impasse precisely where it determines its own limits. By advocating metaphysics as the dialectical end-point of aesthetic reflection, Adorno indicates what he sees as the only consistent means of practicing the spirit of aesthetic reflection while positing alternatives for the future. The metaphysics at which Adorno arrives, however, by its very nature of mediating and overcoming the mourning and multiplicity in aesthetics, is still largely bound to his conception of philosophy, thinking, and an aesthetics highly dependent on critical reflection. In a sense, the alternative posed by Adorno is largely hyper-rational and sees ethics as dependent upon, if not wholly constituted by, the practice of philosophy.

Herbert Marcuse, writing from the standpoint of a more concretely oriented Marxism, Freudianism, and Hegelianism, largely assumes the negativistic framework of Adorno's aesthetics, but seeks to transcend it through a more practical orientation to the meaning of the "aesthetic," one which eventually terminates in a more lived articulation of the negative moment in life as art.¹³⁷ Aesthetics, and the negative resources it provides, may indeed be much richer than envisioned by Adorno. It may provide a positive dimension that transcends the Adorno's more thoroughgoing metaphysics. "Although the concept of the political is left undetermined by Adorno, his account of a changed concept of metaphysical experience demands a political response, even if it disavows any content given to such a response."¹³⁸

The "political response" demanded by Adorno's metaphysics is precisely where I wish to situate the thought of Marcuse. In assimilating Adorno's rigorous aesthetics and

his speculations on metaphysics, and in attempting to articulate positive alternatives, Marcuse extends the critical theoretical trajectory in directions deemed impossible or unattractive by Adorno himself. As Jurgen Habermas observes, “Marcuse did not, in contrast to Adorno, only encircle the ineffable; he made straight appeals to future alternatives.”¹³⁹ These “straight appeals” constitute a deeply political and practical dimension to life as art which will take its cue from the dialectical negativity and commitment to the object revealed in critical theoretical aesthetics. In the thought of Marcuse, aesthetic resistance is not limited to metaphysical hope: it is the demand for the alteration of the present with an eye to the future.

Freud, Fantasy, the German artist, and Marx: Marcuse’s Differences

Marcuse’s more practical orientation to the aims of philosophy lies partially in his philosophical and personal background, the latter of which included participation in the 1918 German Revolution as a Marxist, work for the United States government combating fascism in the 1950s, and participation in the American student movement of the 1960s and 70s. These deeply personal undertakings were animated by Marcuse’s philosophical commitments, which, in contrast to Adorno’s readings of Hegel, Kant, and Benjamin, included readings of Kant, Schiller, Freud, Marx, German novelists, and a renewed appreciation for Nietzsche.

In this more extended treatment of Continental philosophy, Marcuse found the critical resources for a practical aesthetics that eventually culminated in his notion of life as art. His reading of Kant, for example, alighted upon the work of the imagination and

the aesthetic in the Third Critique, where (in terms akin to my own analysis) he advocated the imagination as a “third term” between reason and judgment:

To Kant, the aesthetic dimension is the medium in which the sense and the intellect meet. The mediation is accomplished by the imagination, which is the “third” mental faculty. Moreover, the aesthetic dimension is also the medium in which nature and freedom meet.¹⁴⁰

This reading of Kant is continued in Marcuse’s appeal to Schiller, whose concept of the “freedom to play” relied directly on Kantian concepts of aesthetic education and the cultivation of reason. In Schiller’s work, “The mental faculty exercising this freedom [of play] is that of *imagination*. It traces and projects the potentialities of all being; liberated from their enslavement by constraining matter, they appear as ‘pure forms.’”¹⁴¹ Here, as elsewhere in Marcuse’s work (see below on “fantasy”), imagination is identified positively with *aesthetic* imagination: that is, as a means of projecting alternatives through an autonomous transformation of reason.

Owing to Marcuse’s more practical orientation, this formulation of the aesthetic imagination in Schiller is further extended into the direction of one’s life. Thus, according to Marcuse, the primary elements of Schiller’s philosophy are as follows: “(1) The transformation of toil (labor) into play, and of repressive productivity into ‘display’. . . (2) The self-sublimation of sensuousness (or the sensuous impulse) and the de-sublimation of reason. . . in order to reconcile the two basic antagonistic impulses.”¹⁴² These are themes which will clearly be revisited at multiple points in Marcuse’s work, especially (1), where labor is productively transformed by the aesthetic imagination into a less repressive form of productivity.

This reading of German Idealism continues with Marcuse’s interpretation of Hegel, to whom he devoted his first full-length book, *Reason and Revolution*, a book

whose title at least betrays Marcuse's more radical critical theoretical interpretation of Hegel. There, in opposition to the view of Hegel as a pure systematician only concerned with dialectical identity, Marcuse gives the following:

Hegel's concept of reason thus has a distinctly critical and polemical character. It is opposed to all ready acceptance of the given state of affairs. It denies the hegemony of every prevailing form of existence by demonstrating the antagonisms that dissolve it into other forms.¹⁴³

As before with Adorno, Hegel's dialectic is seen as the primary means by which one comes to a negative assessment of the present reality. Indeed, the dialectic is seen as inherently "polemical."

This reading is superseded by Marcuse's allegiance to Marxist thought, which forms the philosophical endpoint of his reflections on Hegel. Despite his insistence on the potentially negative character of Hegel's corpus, Marcuse sees Marx's work as a simultaneous appropriation of the correct elements of Hegel's thought and a denial of its more totalizing and affirmative aspects:

[W]e may say that in Hegel's system all categories terminate in the existing order, while in Marx's they refer to the negation of this order. They aim at a new form of society even when describing its current form. Essentially they address themselves to a truth to be had only through the abolition of civil society. Marx's theory is a "critique" in the sense that all concepts are an indictment of the totality of the existing order.¹⁴⁴

The positive contributions of Hegel's work are distilled in Marx's more negative and critical work, attuned as it is to the material conditions and welfare of working people in the industrial world. This more concrete direction is directly linked to the negative nature of Marxian discourse: "There are two basic elements linking [Marxist] materialism to correct social theory: concern with human happiness, and the conviction that it can be attained only through a transformation of the material conditions of existence."¹⁴⁵

Insomuch as Marxist thought remains committed to improving the practical conditions of life through materialist dialectics, it is also thereby committed to restructuring the current means of production and distribution in bourgeois industrial society. According to Marcuse's reading of Marx, "the correct theory is the consciousness of a practice that aims at changing the world."¹⁴⁶ And, to be sure, the *telos* of such a changed world would undoubtedly be one in which the material excess created by bourgeois industrialism allows for a positive re-envisionment of the quality of life for all members of society.

Marx's idea of a rational society implies an order in which it is not the universality of labor but the universal satisfaction of all individual potentialities that constitutes the principle of social organization. . . . The idea of reason has been superseded by the idea of happiness.¹⁴⁷

The new priority for advanced industrial society is to be "happiness," consistently defined by Marcuse as a life in which excruciating and dehumanizing labor is reduced (if not eliminated altogether), necessities for existence are consistently met, and opportunities for leisure, sex, and pleasure are optimized. This is to be achieved principally through a re-definition of the aims of industrial production: "The new social union of individuals, again, is necessary, but only in the sense that it is necessary to use available productive forces for the general satisfaction of all individuals."¹⁴⁸

It is this consistent application of Marxist principles which distinguishes Marcuse's thought from other members of the Frankfurt school, and which give his thought a considerably more practical and economic bent.¹⁴⁹ The concern for human happiness, the appropriation of Hegelian dialectics, and the understanding of the concrete material conditions necessary to secure individual liberation, all permeate Marcuse's thought to his death. Similarly, after his more extended encounters with Marx, Marcuse

engages in an attempt to positively appropriate the work of Freud to his project.¹⁵⁰

Marcuse re-interprets Freud's concept of the "reality principle" in advanced industrial society as the "performance principle," preserving the Freudian emphasis on repressive rationality but casting it in light of modern standards of productivity:

The performance principle, which is that of an acquisitive and antagonistic society in the process of constant expansion, presupposes a long development during which domination has increasingly been rationalized: control over social labor now reproduces society on an enlarged scale and under improving conditions.¹⁵¹

Overcoming the performance principle, articulated as the rationalized repression of the working body in bourgeois society, is one of the major foci in Marcuse's work which motivates his articulation of life as art. If Marcuse is to use aesthetics as a means of envisioning an alternate reality, that reality will inevitably be attentive to both one's material and psycho-social well-being.

Marcuse's engagement with Freud is also relevant to this analysis in one other respect. Inasmuch as the performance principle seeks to limit irrational or non-operationalized expressions of the self, its primary locus of repression is on the sexual body.¹⁵² Part of the institutionalized repression of the body includes restricting the very domain of sexuality itself, such that it becomes genito-centric: "the libido becomes concentrated in one part of the body, leaving most of the rest free for use as the instrument of labor."¹⁵³ Genital-oriented sexuality has the powerful consequence of not only *desexualizing* the rest of the body, but of simultaneously operationalizing the non-genital regions. Transcending the desexualization of the body thus becomes not only an imperative with respect to restoring pleasure,¹⁵⁴ but also a means of subverting the

performance principle and de-operationalizing the self. This new form of sexuality would not be genital-centric, but would spread to other pleasurable zones of the body.¹⁵⁵

Operating alongside Marcuse's creative reading of Freud is an attendant concern with another Freudian theme: fantasy.¹⁵⁶ As early as his 1930s sojourn with the Frankfurt school (in exile in Los Angeles), Marcuse proclaimed the following: "The abyss between rational and present reality cannot be bridged by conceptual thought. In order to retain what is not yet present as a goal in the present, phantasy is required."¹⁵⁷ Fantasy, in both Marcuse's early and middle work, is consistently viewed as the mental process whereby the separated domains of the ideal and real are cognitively bridged.¹⁵⁸ For Freudians, of course, this indicates a linkage between dream states and their repression in rationalized society. Yet, for Marcuse, this operating definition is expanded and generalized to include all mental processes which imaginatively connect products of creativity, illusion, and dreaming with those of reality: "Phantasy plays a most decisive function in the total mental structure: it links the deepest layers of the unconscious with the highest products of consciousness (art), the dream with the reality. . . "¹⁵⁹

Marcuse's parenthetical inclusion of "art" in the preceding quotation is not without accident, for it is art, as the "highest product of consciousness," that effectively points towards the realm of imagination, in ways similar to the function of art, aesthetics, and metaphysics in the work of Adorno. Art becomes the highest expression of fantasy, one which can transcend the present reality (via. its autonomy) and point towards a future reality:

In and against the world of the antagonistic *principium individuationis*, imagination sustains the claim of the whole individual, in union with the genus and with the "archaic" past. . . As a fundamental, independent mental process, phantasy has a truth value of its own, which corresponds

to an experience of its own—namely, the surmounting of the antagonistic human reality. Imagination envisions the conciliation of the individual with the whole, of desire with realization, of happiness with reason.¹⁶⁰

Here, and in other sections of *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse's concept of imagination and fantasy is seen as the *outcome* of artistic production. Parallel to such instances, however, is the notion that fantasy is the productive force behind artistic representation: "The truths of imagination are first realized when phantasy itself takes form, when it creates a universe of perception and comprehension—a subjective and at the same time objective universe. This occurs in *art*."¹⁶¹ This seeming confusion over the causal role of fantasy in art belies the dialectical intertwining of art and fantasy in Marcuse's aesthetics: art is both the product of imagination and is also its most sincere form of expression. Fantasy gives rise to art just as art properly expresses fantasy.

Marcuse's work with fantasy and imagination effectively expresses his synthesis of the work of Schiller, Freud, and critical theoretical aesthetics. In introducing fantasy (Freud) and imagination (Kant, Schiller) into critical theoretical aesthetics, Marcuse allows for a broader interpretation of the phenomenon of the work of art in which art is not only a socio-cultural expression with negative content, but is an expression of conscious and unconscious potentialities that attempt to bridge the divide between the ideal and the real imposed by present society. Fantasy and its expression in art is not only part of the work of mourning and the expression of suffering, but is also connected deeply to remembrance, pleasure, and the alternative realities depicted in dreams. Marcuse's constructive reading of Freud, Schiller, and Marx extends the negative dimension of life as art in constructive and more present (and not perpetually deferred) directions.

This expansion of the programmatic of critical theory can be most clearly seen in a work which pre-dates Marcuse's engagement with the Frankfurt school altogether: his dissertation on the work of the "artist-novel" (*Künstlerroman*) in 19th century German literature. There, the artist is seen to bring together the disparate spheres of existence into an ideal life embodied by the artist himself. The difficulties of the artist are problematized as follows: "[the artist] endures the curse of a culture in which Idea and reality, art and life, subject and object, stand in stark opposition to one another."¹⁶² Bridging these oppositions becomes the work of fantasy, possessed most ostensibly by the artist, who portrays the overcoming of the duality of subject and object in novel form. The ideal life of the artist is therefore envisioned as the fusion of life and art:

[T]he artistic existence and bourgeois society are no longer two life-forms, two essentially opposed unities, but the artist is integrated into the bourgeois world, art and life are united, with the result that the problematic of the artist-novel is no longer acute.¹⁶³

And, in a quotation which resonates with themes within dandyism, Marcuse cites the instance of Oscar Wilde as a fusion of life and art:

[T]hose who seek only aesthetic charms. . . who are forced to become constantly conscious spectators of their own life can never step out of their own egocentricity. . . . They can only live as "artist," as "creators of beautiful things" (Oscar Wilde). . . . Life only has meaning and value when it is seen through the medium of art, is transformed into art.¹⁶⁴

Marcuse sees in the novelists of the 19th century a profound fusion of imagination, transcendence, and existential commitment which allows them to overcome the separation and isolation of their contemporary situations. Viewed retrospectively from the vantage point of his later work, it is the artist-novelist who fuses fantasy, imagination, and a critical perspective on the world to achieve a unified and pleasurable existence.

Arguably, this practical perspective on the work of the artist as the existential synthesis of fantasy and negativity pervades the work of Marcuse throughout the rest of his career. In terms continuous with his later articulation of the role of the aesthetic and its opposition to society, the artist in Marcuse's earliest work is the exemplar of a profound negative apprehension of the community:

Hence the historical place of the artist novel within epic literary art: it is only possible if the very being of an artist means having a peculiar type of life, not congruent with that of people in general, that is, when art is no longer the immanent and necessary expression of the comprehensive life of the community.¹⁶⁵

The artist, by virtue of his appropriation of society and consequent rebellion, effectively becomes both alien and politically resistant. As Marcuse states in terms resonant with Albert Camus (see chapter five), "art was placed in the service of life, admitted to the tendencies of the day; the artist became a man of practice, a political and social fighter."¹⁶⁶

With the figure of the artist-novelist in his dissertation, Marcuse formulates an existential ideal which is latent in the rest of his work: an existential synthesis, via. the realm of the aesthetic, in which negativity, imagination, transgression, and political activism are effectively fused within an individual. The isolation generated by art and aesthetics—and later supplemented by the precision of critical theoretical aesthetics—motivates and informs the artist, who transcends his own art to become practical and socially efficacious. The use of fantasy, imagination, and resistance in the life of a revolutionary subject—in this instance, the artist—are themes which influence Marcuse's conception of the artful life thereafter. Even in Marcuse's early work, living artfully

means attending to one's conscious, subconscious, and bodily life through the use of the negative, fantastic, and metaphysical dimensions found in the work of art and aesthetics.

Breaking the Spell of Operationalization

The preceding sections presage two movements: 1) a sophistication reached in Adorno's aesthetics which bears out the critical negativity, resistance, and hope embedded in all successful works of art, thinking, and aesthetics; 2) a more pragmatic and concrete orientation to Marcuse's thought, reflected most poignantly by his demand for happiness and his admiration for the "artist-novelist" and her assimilation of the aesthetic. When brought together in the later work of Marcuse, these two observations allow for a concretized aesthetics—an artful life—which opens a space for the role of fantasy, pleasure, and political engagement while maintaining the negativity and coherence of Adorno's aesthetics.

The synthesis of Adorno's aesthetics and Marcuse's practical orientation occurs initially through his persistent attempt to link theory and praxis: "I believe that today, the utopian notion is not only a historical concept, but also a historical imperative. . . ."¹⁶⁷ It is the "historical imperative" to actualize a positive utopia which demarcates Marcuse's thought from Adorno's, though it remains reliant upon his aesthetics and its ability to indicate the possibility of a utopia. Marcuse's attempt to bring about an alteration of the present reality is not naively utopian, however. It begins with the following socio-economic observations about the tension(s) in advanced industrial society: "(1) that advanced industrial society is capable of containing qualitative change for the foreseeable future; (2) that forces and tendencies exist which may break this containment and explode

the society.”¹⁶⁸ Thus, actualization of a different society can only occur by manipulating and contradicting the tendencies within society itself. That is, revolution, as prefigured by Marx, can only occur dialectically through the appropriation and overcoming (*aufheben*) of existing modes of production and distribution.

The aims of such a revolution, given the previous examination of Adorno and Marcuse, are clear: philosophically and aesthetically, it would mean restoring the particularity of the object in human consciousness; socially and economically, it would mean altering the rationality and productive conditions that cause humans to suffer.

Marcuse expresses this desire:

Insofar as unfreedom is already present in wants and not just in their gratification, they must be the first to be liberated—not through an act of education or of the moral renewal of man but through an economic and political process encompassing the disposal over the means of production by the community, the reorientation of the productive process toward the needs and wants of the whole society, the shortening of the working day, and the active participation of the individuals in the administration of the whole.¹⁶⁹

The positive dialectical overcoming of the present reality demands a political solution which is oriented towards the equitable construction of standards of living for all members of society. Marcuse is not shy about the nature of such a political demand: “transformation requires a *universal* revolution, that is to say, a revolution that would reverse, first, the *totality* of prevailing conditions and, secondly, would replace this with a new *universal* order.”¹⁷⁰

The contours of such a revolution were sketched in various directions throughout Marcuse’s career. Yet certain definitive features emerge in Marcuse’s work which remain consistent. The first is the alteration of the means of production and its positive redirection towards more satisfying and pleasurable forms of labor:

Not that people are no longer compelled to work, but that they might be compelled to work for a different life and in very different relations, that they might be given very different goals and values, that they might have to live with a very different morality—this is the “definite negation” of the established system, the liberating alternative.¹⁷¹

Marcuse’s hope, embedded in his awareness of the excess wealth created by advanced industrial society, is that labor can be transformed into pleasurable forms of *work* in which labor-time is both minimized and personally satisfying.¹⁷² This would ostensibly liberate humans from dehumanizing forms of labor and increase the amount of free time available to workers, and, as such, would form a concrete form of liberation.¹⁷³

With such liberation, workers would be free to dispose over their own time, and would, presumably, be further liberated to choose their own leisure pursuits, as opposed to those administered by the market and the culture industry. Such an assumption rests on the premise that the administered pursuits of society are parasitic upon taxing and degrading forms of production. A liberated form of labor would, then, *prima facie* create new needs and desires:

[A liberation from society] presupposes the emergence of new needs, qualitatively different and even opposed to the prevailing aggressive and repressive needs: the emergence of a new type of man, with a vital, biological drive for liberation, and with a consciousness capable of breaking through the material as well as ideological veil of the affluent society.¹⁷⁴

The “new needs” founded by liberated humanity would not only create alternative pursuits and consciousness, but a “new type of man,” different in kind from the repressed individual who has become the hallmark of advanced industrial society. And this new person would also be the foundation for further forms of revolution and liberation:

The fetishism of the commodity world, which seems to become denser every day, can be destroyed only by men and women who have torn the technological and ideological veil which conceals what is going on,

which covers the insane rationality of the whole—men and women who have become free to develop their own needs, to build, in solidarity, their own world.¹⁷⁵

There is therefore a reciprocal entanglement in Marcuse's work between the revaluation of needs and liberation. While a relaxation of dehumanization is necessary to realize new needs and liberation, liberation is also necessary to produce the critical space required to bring about constructive social change which alters working and living conditions.

Marcuse is both hopeful and skeptical about the prospects for such change. On the one hand, as a Marxist dialectical thinker, he must contend that "the very achievements of repressive civilization seem to create the preconditions for the gradual abolition of repression."¹⁷⁶ Yet, on the other hand, as one who recognizes the negative movement of the totality against liberation, he also contends: "liberation is the most realistic, the most concrete of all historical possibilities and at the same time the most rationally and effectively repressed—the most abstract and remote possibility."¹⁷⁷ The dialectical movement of society produces both the conditions for liberation and for its counter-repression. The only bastion against the counter-movement of society, then, is not simply the cultivation of a revolutionary subject, ala Marx (who favored the European proletariat), but, rather, the cultivation of a critical consciousness which remains aware of the movement and counter-movement of society:

To prepare the ground for [liberation] makes the emancipation of *consciousness* still the primary task. Without it, all emancipation of the senses, all radical activism, remains blind, self-defeating. Political practice still depends on theory. . . : on education, persuasion—on Reason.¹⁷⁸

The revolutionary task, as Charles Reitz correctly points out,¹⁷⁹ is *pedagogical* and contingent on the ongoing liberation of consciousness and the tactical evaluation of the

means and aims of the material liberation of humanity. This calls for a continually renewed baptism in theory, without which the revolutionary aim may become futile, or, worse yet, assimilated into the very heteronomy it seeks to overcome. Yet, unlike Adorno, the turn to theory in Marcuse is initiated through *praxis*: the alteration of consciousness, found most formidably in aesthetics, is seen as functionally derivative of the need for a better life. As in Nietzsche, Marcuse sees aesthetics as instrumental to the creation of an ideal life.¹⁸⁰

The desire to reform society and its concomitant means of production and distribution therefore falls to the task of theory and the cultivation of a negative consciousness. What is at stake is the very liberation and happiness of humans in industrial society:

The vision is that of the historical movement when man calls a halt to the rat race that has been his existence, when man takes stock of what he has and what he can do with it, and decides that instead of going on with the rat race, instead of producing ever more and ever bigger for those who can and must buy it, to subvert the very mode and direction of production, and thereby of their entire life. This means, to abolish poverty, and then to devote all resources to the elimination of the spiritual and material garbage with which the established societies have covered not figuratively but literally, our mental and physical space, and to construct a peaceful and beautiful universe.¹⁸¹

The cultivation of a critical consciousness in Marcuse motivates a turn to a revolution in how we all live. A critical consciousness, forged through proper forms of thinking and seeing, is to found a way of life resistant to the material conditions under which advanced industrial societies live. And, fittingly, it is art and aesthetics which inform Marcuse's revolution in values; the aesthetic not only prefigures the possibility for an alternative reality, it participates in the actualization and conceptualization of a new world.

Art and Revolution

At the beginning of the previous section I prospectively outlined a dual movement in Marcuse's work, namely (1) the elaboration of conditions which lead to the welfare and happiness of humans, and (2) a reliance on the negativity and systematic coherence of Adorno's aesthetics, especially its advocacy for a hopeful metaphysics. As seen in the previous section, an articulation of (1) requires the formation of a critical consciousness which continually renews itself in the theoretical—and therefore negative—project. The necessary preconditions for the reformation and alteration of society are dependent upon the critical theory embedded in Adorno and Marcuse's aesthetics. That is, Marcuse's practical project of social revolution requires the theoretical coherence provided by aesthetics and its clarification of thinking.

While there are minor differences between the aesthetic theories of Adorno and Marcuse, for the purposes of this study Marcuse can arguably be seen as assuming, and then transcending, the highly developed aesthetics and epistemology of Adorno.¹⁸² Beyond this, Marcuse includes an additional imperative for artworks that distances him from Adorno: art *must* become a part of the political struggle. As he states in *Counter-Revolution and Revolt*: "But the dream must become a force of changing rather than dreaming the human condition: it must become a political force."¹⁸³ Or, in more overt language: "the work of art *transforms* the order prevailing in reality."¹⁸⁴ Marcuse clearly sees art as part of the revolutionary project by making it a principal component in the development of the critical consciousness necessary for political action. Whereas Adorno was content to allow aesthetics and negative dialectics to terminate in metaphysics, Marcuse places a political demand at the heart of aesthetics.¹⁸⁵

This move to situate art and aesthetics at the heart of the political and revolutionary task may indeed threaten the essential autonomy of artworks. Marcuse is content with such a tension, however, as the stakes of political struggle are too high to abandon the last vestige of critical thought in advanced industrial society. “Today the fight for life, the fight for Eros, is the *political* fight.”¹⁸⁶ In fact, the revolutionary project demands a non-integrated rationality and source of imagination which can guide its practical aims:

Thus, the imagination appears as rational faculty, as catalysts of radical change. What is happening is that the real possibilities of liberation, the real possibilities of creating a free and rational society are so overwhelming, so extreme, so “impossible” in terms of the status quo, and that the powers which counteract and discredit these possibilities are so strong that the effort to translate these possibilities into reality must transcend the entire irrational rationality of the status quo.¹⁸⁷

It is thus art, and its corresponding forms of reflection and intuition, which is to be seen as transcendent and crucial to undermining the present social and political reality. Indeed, art, imagination, and fantasy are the last vestiges of non-integrated rationality which are able to subvert both the material and epistemic conditioning of advanced industrial societies.

The role of art and aesthetics in undermining the present isn’t simply negative, however. As constructive and metaphysical, art is often referred to by Marcuse, in Stendahl’s phrase, as a “promesse du bonheur,”¹⁸⁸ a promise of liberation and release from repressive productivity. This constructive and affirmative component of art is still dependent upon its negative and particularistic dimension:

Art is committed to that perception of the world which alienates individuals from their functional existence and performance in society—it is committed to an emancipation of sensibility, imagination, and reason in all spheres of subjectivity and objectivity.¹⁸⁹

The emancipation and liberation provided by art create the breathing space necessary for the production and multiplication of new forms of life which are non-repressive and pleasurable. It is in this sense that Marcuse speaks adoringly of 20th century surrealism and its ability to posit a “new world” beyond the present reality: “This mind is the power which breaks through the familiar universe of experience and establishes the points and moments in which this universe bursts open and allows a glance at a new world.”¹⁹⁰ Art and aesthetics are a dual movement between negativity and positivity which posits both liberation and a new world, even if it is only, as in the case of the Surrealists, found in dreams. This reality, however, is critical to the task of creating a new consciousness within society.

Insomuch as art is conceived as part of the project of creating or informing a new consciousness, its role in the political sphere can be said to be critical but still eminently theoretical. Art maintains its autonomy by *informing* consciousness, but not by becoming political itself. As Douglas Kellner states, “Marcuse posits art more modestly as the helpmate of revolution.”¹⁹¹ Or in the words of Barry Katz:

Only indirectly, then, is art to be considered a revolutionary force: as implicit critique of the given Reality Principle, as contribution to the liberation of subjectivity, as sensuous embodiment of a transcendent order of beauty and harmony—the form of freedom in the realm of appearance.¹⁹²

As in Adorno before, art which becomes explicitly political not only relinquishes its autonomy, but becomes a part of the administered world which it is supposed to transcend. Art must therefore remain steadfastly autonomous, even in spite of its being inextricably linked with the aims of revolution:

Art obeys a necessity, and has a freedom which is its own—not those of the revolution. Art and revolution are united in “changing the world”—liberation. But in its practice, art does not abandon its own exigencies and does not quit its own dimension: it remains non-operational.¹⁹³

Maintaining the autonomy of art has another, and equally critical dimension: as autonomous, art is able to project hitherto unseen possibilities that lie outside of what is presently conceived as possible. Art transforms the aesthetically informed consciousness into a prophetic and projective role. Marcuse gives the following: “To be sure, the aesthetic transformation is *imaginary*—it must be imaginary, for what faculty other than the imagination could invoke the sensuous presence of that which is *not* (yet)?”¹⁹⁴ Or, as he wrote in a series of unpublished lecture notes:

But art can enter, as *regulative idea*, the political struggle to change the world;
-- against the fetishism of the productive forces,
-- against the continued enslavement of the individuals by their labor,
art would re-present, and continue to recall the ultimate goal of all revolution:
 the free human being,
 the pacification of the struggle for existence,
 the liberation of nature.¹⁹⁵

Marcuse’s appropriative reading of Kant’s notion of imagination is fully at work in the above, where Kant’s regulative ideas—ostensibly fashioned as a corrective against hypostatizing reason—are transformed under the aesthetic to represent future configurations and permutations of reality. Art and aesthetics are transformative of the world inasmuch as they posit future ways of being and living which have *yet* to be fulfilled. As in Adorno before, art assumes the theological role of prophecy and calling forth a proleptic order which is to be culminated in a revolutionary moment.

It is at this precise juncture, where art begins to project new possibilities of living and being, that Marcuse’s work moves from a highly theoretical and negative aesthetics

to one that embraces the practical and political dimensions of autonomous art. Art's utopian dimension is positively transformed into the ability to envision and inform the revolutionary impulse at the heart of Marcuse's Marxism. Charles Reitz summarizes this movement within Marcuse's thought from a pure aesthetics to an ethics based on the nature of the aesthetic: "*Praxis emerges from art. Both are of life, and intended for life's enhancement.*"¹⁹⁶ An informed revolution of the political and material conditions of life is contingent upon the embrace of art and its reception through aesthetics. The aesthetic lays the groundwork for acts of resistance which both contradict and seek to reform the present order.

The Second Dimension of Aesthetics: Sensuality and Pleasure

If Marcuse is to make a distinct move beyond Adorno's more theoretically-oriented aesthetics as I contend, he must make a supporting argument for the expansion of aesthetics in a more practical direction. This function is fulfilled by Marcuse's opening of the nature of aesthetics to not only include negativity and metaphysics (as in Adorno), but also *sensuality*, a more practically defined notion of the aesthetic which sublates art's negative and utopic dimensions. Marcuse gives some hint of such a position in his *Essay on Liberation*: "The term 'aesthetic,' in its dual connotation of 'pertaining to the senses,' and 'pertaining to art,' may serve to designate the quality of productive-creative process in an environment of freedom."¹⁹⁷ Here the aesthetics which are "pertaining to art" can be said to be the rightful domain of Adorno's aesthetics, which are largely an aesthetics of artworks. It is the second definition, that of "pertaining to the senses," which

distinguishes Marcuse's thought and allows his aesthetics to become more embodied and concrete. Marcuse clarifies the role of both dimensions of art in the following:

The definite negation of the established reality would be an "aesthetic" universe, "aesthetic" in the dual sense of sensibility and pertaining to art, namely the capacity of receiving the impression of Form. . . I believe that the image and imaginary realization of such a universe is the end of art, that the language of art speaks into such a universe without ever being able to reach it, and that the right and truth of art were defined and validated by the very irreality, non-existence of its objective.¹⁹⁸

Here the two spheres of art are reciprocally dependent upon one another for projecting new possibilities, new regulative ideals for society and the revolutionary imperative. An aesthetics of artworks would conceivably function to preserve autonomy and provide critical negativity, while an aesthetics of sensuality would make such a negativity operative in the world pertaining to the senses, labor, and pleasure. Marcuse's more practical orientation demands a reciprocal relationship between an aesthetics of artworks and an aesthetics of sensuality.

Marcuse deepens this second definition of the aesthetic in many of his later works, placing it at the fore of his writings on the recovery of the sensuous and pleasure in society, therefore making it central to defining the aims of the revolutionary project. He states: "It is by virtue of its intrinsic relation to sensuousness that the aesthetic function assumes its central position. The aesthetic perception is accompanied by pleasure."¹⁹⁹ Aesthetics-as-sensuality allows for Marcuse to fill in a critical lacuna in post-Marxist thought: defining the aim of revolutionary praxis in terms that are non-operational and non-economic. With an aesthetic sensuality, Marcuse can preserve the negative and utopian dimensions of the aesthetic while also advocating its positive

articulation in the form of pleasurable and non-repressive modes of life. Thus the second dimension of aesthetics becomes

a sort of gauge for a free society. A universe of human relationships no longer mediated by the market, no longer based on competitive exploitation or terror, demands a sensitivity freed from the repressive satisfactions of the unfree societies; a sensitivity receptive to forms and modes of reality which thus far have been projected only by the aesthetic imagination.²⁰⁰

Or, as Marcuse states: “The discipline of the aesthetic installs the *order of sensuousness* as against the *order of reason*.”²⁰¹ The sensuous dimension discloses possibilities not yet disclosed in the “order of [repressive] reason” and points to more hedonistic potentialities latent within the present framework. As Marcuse rightly notes, such a notion of the aesthetic would, if fulfilled, transcend both the rationality and material conditions which make the contemporary situation of repression and exhausting labor possible.

Arguably, it is this sense of the aesthetic-as-sensuality which vitiates Marcuse’s work from his sojourn with the Frankfurt school in exile until the *Aesthetic Dimension*, a work in which both senses of the aesthetic are operative in parallel and serve to reinforce one another. To this end, Marcuse states: “The truth of art is the liberation of sensuousness through its reconciliation with reason,” a concept which he finds in his readings of “classical idealist aesthetics.”²⁰² Again, the Adornian theme of art’s reconciliation with reason occurs through aesthetics; yet, in this Marcusean formulation, the “truth” of such a realization is to be discovered in the liberation of sensuousness. Douglas Kellner sees this virtual equivalence of art and sensuality (as Eros) in achieving the aims of negativity:

[I]n the totalitarian world, art and love are among the most radical oppositional forces since they produce an alternative reality completely

at odds with an oppressive reality; this difference can help reveal the horror of the totalitarian life and the need to make a break with it.²⁰³

Sensuality, as expressed in love, pleasure, and a non genitally-oriented sexuality, is both a formal expression and characteristic of aesthetics. In examining art, one finds the demand for sensuality and the liberation of the senses, an imperative which is then appropriated by aesthetics and designated as part of its essence. This dialectical reading of the second dimension of aesthetics has the added benefit of allowing a recovery of concepts of *aisthesis* from the Greek tradition²⁰⁴ as well as linking the autonomy of art and aesthetics with an ethical demand. The expansion of aesthetics to include sensuality marks a significant shift in Marcuse's thinking in which the need for political revolution is linked with the theoretical foundation laid in aesthetic negativity and its metaphysical dimension.

With this critical addendum, Marcuse's aesthetics clarifies the role of aesthetic judgment in critical theory. Aesthetics and fantasy unify accounts of thinking and forms of praxis through both negativity and the reformation of thinking as well as an attention to the body, sensuality, and the satisfaction of material needs. Aesthetics operates in both cases to constructively modify consciousness and the formation of new ways of living and being. And, more generally, Marcuse's aesthetics signifies a theoretical attempt to underwrite a form of resistance and negativity into aesthetics as a whole; to think and live aesthetically is the demand for renunciatory and sensuous forms of thought and expression.

VI: Marcuse's Aesthetic Life

"Society as a work of art" and the Search for a Revolutionary Subject

Marcuse's expansion of aesthetics to include sensuality proves critical for his entire project. By developing his notion of aesthetics-as-sensuality in parallel to a more traditional Adornian position on aesthetics-as-negativity, Marcuse effectively allows for the second dimension of aesthetics to be seen as a dialectical development out of the first dimension. This is decisive in linking theory and praxis. In this complementary way, the sensuous dimension becomes inextricably linked with the project of realizing a qualitatively different society.²⁰⁵

I believe that "living art," the "realization" of Art, can only be the event of a qualitatively different society in which a new type of men and women, no longer the subject or object of exploitation, can develop in their life and work the vision of the suppressed *aesthetic* possibilities of men and things—aesthetic not as to the specific property of certain objects (the *objet d'art*) but as forms and modes of existence corresponding to the reason and sensibility of free individuals, what Marx called the "sensuous appropriation of the world."²⁰⁶

Here, the "living art" examined by Marcuse is one which utilizes the negativity and sensuality expressed in the work of art to revolutionize the structure of society. Aesthetics is to be the guiding source for a society directed towards the fulfillment of pleasure and needs. Yet the citation of Marx here is fitting, for, in dialectical fashion, a sensual aestheticism is to inform a movement towards liberation and pleasure *through* the very tendencies of advanced industrial society. And the one tendency Marcuse consistently labels as susceptible for alteration is technology:

Further progress [in advanced industrial society] would mean the *break*, the turn of quantity [of goods] into quality [of life]. It would open the possibility of an essentially new human reality—namely, existence in free time on the basis of fulfilled vital needs. Under such conditions, the scientific project itself would be free for trans-utilitarian ends, and free for the "art of living" beyond the necessities and luxuries of domination.²⁰⁷

The “art of living” is positively interpreted here as part of altering and freely motivating the scientific project towards the revolutionary project and a more sensuous existence. A truly revolutionary praxis would transform science into an art, or, more minimally, use aesthetics to inform the aim and purpose of the technological project.

This positive renewal of the technological project through aesthetics comes to form Marcuse’s most poignant insights into life as art. If technology, as the dominant form of production and knowledge in advanced industrial society, were to be informed by aesthetics-as-sensuality, both its ends and means would be significantly altered. And, as dominant, it would alter society at large. This inferential move is what informs Marcuse’s classic concept of “society as a work of art”:

Today we can foresee the possible unity of both dimensions: *society as a work of art*. . . This would mean experimenting with possibilities of liberating and pacifying human existence—the idea of a convergence not only of technology and art but also of work and play; the idea of a possible artistic formation of the life world.²⁰⁸

The aesthetic society is invoked as one in which, like the German artist novel before, art and technology, work and play, are brought into an intense, and possibly identifying, relationship with one another.²⁰⁹ Technology would be molded and shaped by sensuality, pleasure, and play, and therefore productivity itself would be made more pleasurable and non-repressive. As Kellner notes, “art would no longer be a separate sphere cut off from social life, but would become a productive force helping to produce a new society.”²¹⁰

To be sure, this constitutes an alteration of technology itself, or, rather, a resurrection of the Greek notion of *techne*, in which production is considered tantamount to technique, stylization, and an art of creation. When mixed with Marcuse’s reading of Freud, this would imply a *techne* governed by sensuality and the overcoming of the

performance principle. “[A]rt–technique–would liberate the life-protecting and life-enhancing potentialities of matter; it would be governed by a reality principle which subjugates, on the social scale, aggressive energy to the energy of the life instincts.”²¹¹

Or, as Marcuse states earlier, a aesthetic technology would also be the grounds for liberation and a release from repression:

[I]n order to become vehicles of freedom, science and technology would have to change their present direction and goals; they would have to be reconstructed in accord with a new sensibility–the demands of the life instincts. Then one could speak of a technology of liberation, product of a scientific imagination free to project and design the forms of a human universe without exploitation and toil.²¹²

The artful society would be one in which sensuality informed the production and creation of new technologies, one in which sublimated forms of aggression were channeled into pleasurable and sensuous practices which were non-dominating. Marcuse’s artful society would be one which attempted to attend to the particularity of events while also meeting the psychological and material needs of humanity.

Illustrative as these points may be, they do not elucidate the precise means by which technology would be transformed into *techne*, that is, a mode of production informed by sensuality.²¹³ Marcuse gives some hint of this linkage when he recasts Nietzsche’s concept of the “*gaya scienza*” as such: “The rational transformation of the world [through science and technology] could then lead to a reality formed by the aesthetic sensibility of man.”²¹⁴ Aesthetics here would be seen as informing technological rationality, altering a manipulative orientation to the world into one based on feeling, pleasure, and non-domination. This comes to be expressed in many of Marcuse’s writings as the ability to “play” with objects, as opposed to dominating and coercing them: “Technical experimentation, science and technology would and could become a play with

the hitherto hidden—methodically hidden and blocked—potentialities of men and things, of society and nature.”²¹⁵ This sense of play and sensuality transforming the reason expressed by technology clearly implies a supplanting of dominating reason by art and aesthetics. The artful society becomes both the condition for, and the expression of, a technology whose rationality is grounded in the aesthetic as both sensual and negative.

The rationality of art, its ability to “project” existence, to define yet unrealized possibilities could then be envisaged as *validated by and functioning in the scientific-technological transformation of the world*. Rather than being the handmaiden of the established apparatus, beautifying its business and its misery, art would become a technique for destroying this business and this misery.²¹⁶

It is the alteration of rationality, under the impress of the aesthetic, which allows the emergence of a “society as a work of art.” In such a society, one would bear witness to a “technology and technique subservient to the needs and goals of free men.”²¹⁷ This only lays bare the conditions necessary for such a society, however, and does not outline its dialectical development. Presumably, as Kellner points out, the emergence of an artful society is to occur as artful rationality and an aesthetic *techne* are developed in parallel to one another: “And yet [Marcuse’s] dialectics of art spins into a utopian vision that as art and technology continue to converge, art can be a productive force in producing a new kind of society which will itself be a work of art.”²¹⁸ The “continued convergence” indicated by Kellner reveals the reciprocal way in which art and technology were envisioned by Marcuse: critical consciousness was to be raised through aesthetic negativity and sensuality, while technology would become aesthetic through an alteration of its rationality and ends by way of aesthetics. Art and aesthetics are thrust to the fore in raising both consciousness and reforming technology. Marcuse states the following:

Technique would then tend to become art, and art would tend to form reality: the opposition between imagination and reason, higher and lower faculties, poetic and scientific thought, would be invalidated. Emergence of a new Reality Principle: under which a new sensibility and a desublimated scientific intelligence would combine in the creation of an *aesthetic ethos*.²¹⁹

Aesthetics, and their pervasive influence in an artful society, are at the core of the reformation of technology and the cultivation of critical consciousness. Marcuse does not precisely state how such a reciprocal engagement would occur, however, and, despite the metaphysical necessity of formulating such concepts, much of his thought is skeptical about the emergence of an artful society. As a dialectical Marxist, the question of *how* such a society is to come about inevitably turns on the question of *who* is to bring it about. That is, who is the revolutionary subject that is to achieve a critical mass of aesthetic consciousness which revolutionizes society? The ability to actualize an aesthetic revolution in consciousness and technology is contingent on the definition and operation of a revolutionary subject.

Given Marcuse's critical theoretical foundation, he is inherently critical of the prospects for such a revolution, as the revolutionary subject has been continually diminished in advanced industrial societies. As he states succinctly, "Independence of thought, autonomy, and the right to political opposition are being deprived of their basic critical function in a society which seems increasingly capable of satisfying the needs of the individuals in the way in which it is organized."²²⁰ Whereas Marx's object of analysis—19th century European industrial states—could not meet the needs of its people (therefore organically creating an alienated and revolutionary class, the proletariat), 20th century Western societies are capable of meeting the needs of their citizenry, and therefore containing the need for change. Of course, the "needs" met in such a society are

“translated into administered cultural activities, sponsored by the government and the big corporations—an extension of their executive arm into the soul of the masses,”²²¹ but they are met nonetheless. This movement in advanced societies to both create the “needs” of society and to simultaneously meet them effectively creates the illusion of met need while people remain alienated, repressed, and suffering.

Nonetheless, the containment of need within advanced Western societies *is* a problem for Marcuse inasmuch as it diminishes the viability of a revolutionary subject who can cultivate a critically informed aesthetic consciousness and bring about an alteration of technological society.²²² This forms a genuine crisis in Marcuse’s thought. And thus in the 1960s and 70s, Marcuse sought to find alternative “revolutionary subjects,” even for a time departing from his Marxism by expressing his faith in the revolutionary potential of subjects “outside” the administered apparatus, namely student groups, Black revolutionaries, and women’s organizations. None of these groups, much less Marcuse’s allegiance to their revolutionary potential, lasted, however, and Marcuse’s overall project was largely hampered by his inability to wholly depart from the Marxist dialectical framework. He expresses this lament: “The new technological work-world thus enforces a weakening of the negative position of the working class: the latter no longer appears to be the living contradiction to the established society.”²²³ If the working class is no longer capable of contradicting the established order, then Marcuse’s notion of an aesthetic society, driven by an aesthetic allegiance to the future and founded on the satisfaction of need, stands in grave danger of being unrealized. If the possibilities for creating a critical mass of aesthetic consciousness is held captive, how is the aesthetic life to be actualized?

Marcuse's Marxism, I would argue, reaches an impasse at this juncture. And, as the following section shows, it is for this reason that Marcuse's work consistently vacillates between society and the individual, as both are potential revolutionary subjects, though the latter may be the last (and best) remaining option. In a move which Marcuse himself only recognizes implicitly, the demand for an aesthetic society necessitates a turn to the individual and the formation of an artful life.

The Work of the Individual

Marcuse's "artful society" aims at a positive restructuring of technology in light of an aesthetic sensuality as well as an aesthetically informed rationality. This would redirect the means and ends of production, and would conceivably redefine society in terms which were more pleasurable and equitable. Such a society would ostensibly be achieved through an aesthetically informed consciousness manifested in a large number of people who took seriously the negativity and metaphysical need at the heart of aesthetics and its reflection on thinking. This hope founders, however, on the inability to define the revolutionary subject who was to reach a critical mass of aesthetic consciousness necessary to revolutionize society.

It is with this line of argument in mind that, I would argue, Marcuse turns at multiple points throughout his career to the individual as a last vestige of hope for life as art. In an interview with Bill Moyers, Marcuse gives the following:

Radical change always started with a very small minority, and mostly with a very small minority of intellectuals. And the masses came in when the economic and political conditions were ripe, and when their consciousness had been developed to the point that they felt now they had to take action.²²⁴

Even though the traditional subject of Marxist dialectics has been effectively administered to and absorbed, Marcuse believes that the beginnings of social reformation must begin with a “very small minority,” likely intellectuals. In an earlier quotation, however, Marcuse emphasizes the individual nature of this project, one which radicalizes the intellectual and economic component of the preceding notion:

[N]o qualitative social change, no socialism, is possible without the emergence of a new rationality *and sensibility* in the individuals themselves: no radical social change without a radical change of the individual agents of change. However, this individual liberation means transcendence beyond the bourgeois individual: it means overcoming the bourgeois individual. . . while at the same time restoring the dimension of the self, of the privacy which the bourgeois culture had once created.²²⁵

The revolutionary project turns on the transformation of the individual and her reason and sensibility (as sensuality) as informed through aesthetics. The individual spoken of by Marcuse is socially committed and preparatory for change; yet, at the same time, the individual is an intensification of essentially bourgeois characteristics: private, oriented towards the self, and manifestly aware of his/her liberation. It is with this dual sense of the individual that Kellner states the following:

[Marcuse’s] emphasis on an individual revolt and self-transformation constitute a vital component of his revolutionary theory which maintains that there can be no meaningful talk about social change unless the individuals themselves are liberated from capitalist needs and consciousness and possess “radical needs” for thoroughgoing social change.²²⁶

Marcuse’s notion of the revolutionary subject clearly vacillates between the collective and the individual. But, given the incapacitation of the working and impoverished classes through the culture industry, one must turn to individuals as the seed for social change. It is individuals, and not groups, which become the critical hinge for social reformation.

Only by radicalizing the individual and her needs, then, can a revolution arise which would change the structure and relationships within society. Marcuse invests his Marxian hope for a restored and reformed future in the individual's ability to live aesthetically, rationally, and beyond the repression of advanced industrial society:

In truly dialectical fashion, it is in a new individual that a new totality of life is to emerge. The new society is to originate in the individuals themselves: not as the result of a fictitious consent or contract, not as the marketplace of competing interests and votes, but as an extension, natural as well as rational, of the needs and faculties of free men.²²⁷

Individuals are to be seen as the germ cell from which genuine and restorative revolution occurs in Marcuse's thought. This recognition is instigated not only by Marcuse's disillusionment with groups, variously defined, to embrace the aesthetic rationality and sensibility requisite for an artful society, but is also impelled by his faith that the individual, often moreso than groups, can exercise a level of aesthetic sensibility towards his/her life that groups cannot.

One such means of actualization articulated by Marcuse is the ability of the individual to determine her needs in line with aesthetics and to actualize them within her life. Charles Reitz observes, "inauthentic needs must be replaced by genuine ones, and thus a *personal determination of authentic need* is considered a *key emancipatory task* that all individuals must accomplish *on their own*."²²⁸ Of course, the "determination of authentic need" reflects the position assumed by Marcuse that most needs within society are not authentic, and, therefore, a rational determination of need most certainly involves a withdrawal from certain fabricated needs and desires. As Marcuse states, contemporary servitude to artificial needs can only be broken

through a political practice of methodical disengagement from and refusal of the Establishment, aiming at a radical transvaluation of values.

Such a practice involves a break with the familiar, the routine ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding things so that the organism may become receptive to the potential forms of a nonaggressive, nonexploitative world.²²⁹

The injunction here to practically disengage is one which must come about through a rational reflection on one's needs and how they are currently being met. As Marcuse observes, the decisions involved in practical withdrawal have aesthetic consequences: it changes the way we see, feel, and know the world around us. That is, the practical disengagement spoken of by Marcuse is preparatory for the aesthetic life and the artful society inasmuch as it creates the space for an aesthetic sensibility to emerge.

One should also take seriously the political dimension of Marcuse's dictum of practical disengagement. For, in order to withdraw from unnecessary and repressive means and ends, one must reject the political structures that gave rise to them. This indictment of the present is shown in the following:

In defense of life: the phrase has explosive meaning in the affluent society. It involves not only the protest against neo-colonial war and slaughter, the burning of draft cards at the risk of prison, the fight for civil rights, but also the refusal to speak the dead language of affluence, to wear the clean clothes, to enjoy the gadgets of affluence, to go through the education for affluence.²³⁰

The aesthetic life becomes the political life: by rejecting and withdrawing from political institutions of repression, including prevailing norms within society, one can begin to create and shape a life which is thoroughly informed by the aesthetic. Aesthetics in such a process is invoked as both the means (as negative, a refusal) and ends (a pleasurable and sensible life) of practical disengagement. One lives aesthetically inasmuch as one rationally determines needs and pleasures and selectively fulfills them at the cost of administered and totalized forms of thinking and satisfaction.

This move towards simplification and political refusal forms, as in Nietzsche before, an ascetics of pleasure and existence where one is persistently called upon to identify those elements which lend themselves most poignantly to an aesthetic existence.

Adorno gave some hint of this early on in his *Minima Moralia*:

Ascetic ideals constitute today a more solid bulwark against the madness of the profit-economy than did the hedonistic life sixty years ago against liberal repression. The amoralist may now at last permit himself to be as kind, gentle, unegoistic and open-hearted as Nietzsche already was then.²³¹

Yet it is Marcuse who realizes the practical force of the aesthetic life and what it may entail for the individual. Throughout his writing he consistently reveals the possibility of a sensibility opened up by aesthetic liberation and ascetic withdrawal from the administered world. In this quotation from his *Essay on Liberation*, he summarizes an aesthetic life which blends the political, ascetic, and practical modalities of existence:

And as such force, art would be an integral factor in shaping the quality and the “appearance” of things, in shaping the reality, the way of life. This would mean the *Aufhebung* of art: end of the segregation of the aesthetic from the real, but also end of the commercial unification of business and beauty, exploitation and pleasure. Art would recapture some of its more primitive “technical” connotations: as the art of preparing (cooking!), cultivating, growing things, giving them a form which neither violates their matter nor the sensitivity—ascend of Form as one of the necessities of being universal beyond all subjective varieties of taste, affinity, etc.²³²

Marcuse’s thought here recollects and simultaneously goes beyond Nietzsche’s attention to nutrition, place, and climate in *Ecce Homo*, as well as his more individualistic ethics expressed through the ideal type. The artful life for Marcuse draws together the negativity and sensibility of aesthetics, the alteration of reason and thinking under the demand of particularity, and the aesthetic imperative to practically withdraw from repressive components of existence. These allow for a new positive notion of life as art in which

cooking, gardening, and one's relationships with things are transformed and made mutually pleasurable and just. Labor and "beauty" are transformed into *techne* and a new *poesis* of existence which seeks to transform the everyday into sites of modification by and through the aesthetic. Marcuse's aesthetic life creates both the means for liberation and its possible expression in a renewed sensibility towards the everyday.

I would argue that Marcuse's call for a new technics of life based on sensuality and the poetic individual is the terminus of his reflections on art, the artful society, and socialist revolution in advanced industrial society. In calling for practical disengagement and the sensualization of the everyday, Marcuse has effectively extended the critical theoretical notions of aesthetics and negativity into the individual's concrete lived experience: the individual becomes "aesthetic" and resistant by consistently problematizing those acts from which she disengages or into which she enters. For those acts one does choose, they are to become more pleasurable, just, and autonomous, as is the nature of the aesthetic. In doing so, Marcuse's conception of the artful life captures the negativity, resistance, hopefulness, sensuality, and concern for justice adduced by critical theoretical aesthetics, and forms a distinct moment of resistance and reformation within life as art.

VII. Conclusion

With Marcuse's culminating concept of the artful life and its expression in the political, social, and practical dimensions of existence, the theoretical and practical trajectories of Adorno and Marcuse can be brought to bear on life as art. If art and thinking are, as Adorno contends, rightly dialectical, then both express a negative dimension which is

essential to securing the liberation necessary for an existence which is to attend to, and deconstruct, the injustices and horrors of a post-Holocaust world. In this initial sense, art, and its reflection through aesthetics, come to supplement constellational thinking and allow for objects to be released in their particularity. An aesthetic rationality would then point beyond itself to a utopian future based on forgotten possibilities within the present.

It is into this constructive dimension that I have situated Marcuse, showing that his expansion of aesthetics into the realm of sensibility allows for a more practical and political focus within aesthetic rationality and, ultimately, an aesthetic life. This comes to be expressed in his concept of the artful society, wherein technology, guided by both senses of the aesthetic, is to be reformed in a more liberating and pleasurable direction. Unfortunately, Marcuse can never fully specify the agents of such a revolution in the means and ends of production, and, as I argue, he must therefore turn to the individual as the locus of an artful life and the potential seed of the artful society. Here, the individual is seen as practically disengaging from repressive and onerous features of society, an ethos which allows for the recovery of a sensual and fulfilling existence.

In Marcuse's practical fulfillment of the Adornian project, one also sees a transformation of the "negative" moment of Nietzsche's artful life. Marcuse's artful life, as with Nietzsche, attends to daily needs and designates their affirmation or negation as vital to the task of emancipation and a fulfilling life. As such, the Greek notion of *techne* is positively recast to reflect an aesthetic sensibility towards the world, recovering an artful orientation to production and creation, including, as Nietzsche himself often did, an attention to diet, sexuality, and one's relationships. In many respects, though, the critical theoretical aesthetic life transcends the negative dimension of Nietzsche's reading of

science or critique, allowing for a dialectical interplay of artistic elements and the emergence of negativity, *Geist*, the object, and even metaphysics within a work of art. Equally important, Marcuse's aesthetics, informed by Freud, Schiller, Marx, and others, goes beyond Nietzsche's recognition of art as a "fabrication," and sees within it the possibility to inform a critical consciousness and move positively towards a sensualized existence. Both the sophistication of Adorno's aesthetics, as well as Marcuse's recognition of the importance of political concerns and the body, mark the critical theoretical advance as vital to the development of life as art.

It is for this reason that the negative dimension of aesthetic judgment within life as art is reliant upon the work of critical theory. Through its dialectical analysis of the work of art, critical theory fruitfully delineates the negative and constructive dimensions of art and the aesthetic in a way only sketched by Nietzsche. With respect to life as art, the negative, metaphysical, sensual, and practical dimensions of aesthetics opened up by Adorno and Marcuse are a *fulfillment* of the deconstructive moment of life as art signaled by Nietzsche in his analysis of *Wissenschaft*. The negative moment in life as art links an account of constellational and sensual thinking with the need for practical and embodied revolution in the everyday modalities of individual lives. Life as art opens with an effort to deconstruct and reform the modes of thought, institutions, and ways of life which limit the individual within society. This effort of resistance, as Marcuse shows, is not content with outright negativity, however, and the work of deconstruction is always performed with an eye to future configurations of reality.

Thus the emphasis on particularity and rationality in this chapter opens up the creative space for affirmation and creation in the following chapters. By tearing down the

idols of past and present, the negative moment in life as art allows one to begin to affirm and create into the future. It is with this Nietzschean move in mind that the next chapter turns to the positive dimension of life as art which stands in tension with the negative. Life as art moves from a form of deep and abiding political resistance, rationality, and practical attention to a contemplation of the universal which grounds the particular. Marcuse's fitting reflection on the Apollinian song, "Song of the Tower Warden," marks the intertwining of all resistance and affirmation, and looks forward to the affirmative space opened up through resistance:

Happiness has the last word, but it is a word of remembrance. And, in the last line, the affirmation carries a tone of sorrow—and of defiance.²³³

Endnotes

¹ This clearly diverges from Kant's articulation of "judgment" in the Third Critique, inasmuch as judgment in this instance is not seen as the epistemological link between sensibility and reason (both practical and pure), but is, rather, a way of bringing together an account of thinking and an account of acting and being. In this sense, my use of judgment is only Kantian in spirit, inasmuch as it indicates the mediating role played by aesthetics in both critical theory and phenomenology.

² See section on Adorno below.

³ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* [DoE], trans., Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 5.

⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* [ODM] (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 180.

⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* [N], trans., Jeremy Shapiro (London: Free Association Books, 1988), xix.

⁶ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* [EC] (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 94.

⁷ Marcuse, EC, 4.

⁸ Horkheimer and Adorno, DoE, 7. Also see Marcuse, EC, 109.

⁹ Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music* [PNM], trans., Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 21.

¹⁰ Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* [RR] (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), xi. Marcuse, in ODM, 183, also provides this clear point of opposition: "For philosophy is. . . the contrary of what Wittgenstein made it out to be when he proclaimed it as the renunciation of all theory, as the undertaking that 'leaves everything as it is.'"

¹¹ Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Right Listening and a New Type of Human Being," *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed., Tom Huhn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 182.

¹² Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* [ND], trans., E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum Press, 1990), 5.

¹³ See, for example, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, especially the opening section to the "Transcendental Analytic."

¹⁴ Adorno, ND, 153.

¹⁵ Adorno, ND, 98.

¹⁶ Colin Hearfield, *Adorno and the Modern Ethos of Freedom* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 147.

¹⁷ And therefore to dissolve the identity between subject and object.

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- ¹⁸ Adorno, ND, 85.
- ¹⁹ Adorno, ND, 175.
- ²⁰ Adorno, ND, 5.
- ²¹ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* [MM], trans., E.F.N. Jephcott (New York: Verso Press, 2005), 127.
- ²² Marcuse, ODM, 106.
- ²³ Henry Pickford, "The Dialectic of Theory and Praxis: On Late Adorno," in *Adorno: A Critical Reader*, eds., Nigel Gibson and Andrew Rubin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 324.
- ²⁴ See Adorno, ND, 166; also see MM, 67-8, where he also hints at a "third way" that uses a "critical element" and is the "last hope for thought."
- ²⁵ Alison Stone, "Adorno and the Disenchantment of Nature," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 32, no .2 (2006): 233.
- ²⁶ Adorno, PNM, 23.
- ²⁷ Adorno, ND, 163. Also see Allison Stone, 241, where she remarks: "Having arisen in our effort to capture what is particular in the thing, this structure of concepts provides a chart or map of the multiple aspects—the sedimented past relations—that make up the particular side of the thing. . . ."
- ²⁸ Adorno, ND, 29. Also see ND, 165-6, where Adorno states: "by gathering concepts round the central one that is sought, [models] attempt to express what that concept aims at, not to circumscribe it to operative ends."
- ²⁹ Adorno, ND, 158.
- ³⁰ Adorno, ND, 147.
- ³¹ Stone, 242-3.
- ³² Marcuse, RR, ix.
- ³³ Marcuse, RR, xii.
- ³⁴ Adorno, ND, 201. Also see MM, 150, where Adorno states: "Dialectical thought is an attempt to break through the coercion of logic by its own means."
- ³⁵ Adorno, MM, 247.
- ³⁶ Adorno, ND, 365.
- ³⁷ Adorno, MM, 33.
- ³⁸ Adorno, ND, 153.
- ³⁹ Note here the potential affinities to Heidegger's concept of "meditative thinking" in the later works, as elucidated in the following excursus.
- ⁴⁰ Theodor Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* [CM], trans., Henry Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 131.

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- ⁴¹ Adorno, ND, 3.
- ⁴² Adorno, ND, 148.
- ⁴³ Adorno, CM, 6. Also see CM, 121, where Adorno states, “Truth has no place other than the will to resist the lie of opinion.”
- ⁴⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *The New Left and the 1960s* [Vol3], Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, ed., Douglas Kellner, Vol. 3 (New York: Routledge, 2005), 76.
- ⁴⁵ Rudiger Bubner, “Concerning the Central Idea of Adorno's Philosophy,” in *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, eds., Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaat (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 152.
- ⁴⁶ Adorno, CM, 10, italics added.
- ⁴⁷ Stone, 240.
- ⁴⁸ Deborah Cook, “From the Actual to the Possible: Non-Identity Thinking,” in *Adorno and the Need in Thinking: New Critical Essays*, eds., Colin Campbell Donald Burke, Kathy Kiloh, Michael k. Palamarek, and Jonathan Short (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 176.
- ⁴⁹ Alastair Morgan, *Adorno's Concept of Life* (New York: Continuum Press, 2007), 95.
- ⁵⁰ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* [AT], trans., Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 266.
- ⁵¹ Adorno, AT, 266.
- ⁵² Interestingly, this becomes one of the key criteria for “quality” in a work of art as stated by Adorno in MM, 142: “Quality is decided by the depth at which the work incorporates the alternatives within itself, and so masters them.”
- ⁵³ Adorno, AT, 218-9.
- ⁵⁴ Adorno, AT, 219.
- ⁵⁵ Tom Huhn, “The Movement of Mimesis: Heidegger's ‘Origin of the Work of Art’ in Relation to Adorno and Lyotard,” in *Theodor W. Adorno: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, ed., Simon Jarvis (New York: Routledge, 2007), 104.
- ⁵⁶ This complete form of expression would effectively end art, however, as Adorno notes at multiple points, mirroring Hegel's assessment in the *Introduction to Aesthetics*.
- ⁵⁷ Adorno, AT, 23.
- ⁵⁸ Adorno, AT, 38.
- ⁵⁹ Adorno, PNM, 16. Also see AT, 84, where Adorno states: “art is nevertheless the truth of society insofar as in its most authentic products the irrationality of the rational world order is expressed.”
- ⁶⁰ Adorno, AT, 68.

⁶¹ Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* [AD] (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 44.

⁶² Stone, 248. Also see Adorno's use of sedimentation in this regard, in particular in PNM, 32: "The exigencies of the material imposed on the subject arise, rather, from the fact that the 'material' is itself sedimented spirit, preformed socially by human consciousness. This objective spirit of the material, as erstwhile and self-forgotten subjectivity, has its own laws of movement." And, equally, PNM, 37: "All forms of music, not just those of expressionism, are sedimented contents. In them survives what is otherwise forgotten and is no longer capable of speaking directly. . . . The forms of art register the history of humanity with more justice than do historical documents."

⁶³ As will be seen in a moment, like Hegel, this implies that all art is itself *Geist*, the sublated content of subject and object.

⁶⁴ Adorno, CM, 45.

⁶⁵ Marcuse, AD, 22-3.

⁶⁶ Adorno, AT, 231.

⁶⁷ The question of whether or not Adorno and Marcuse promote an ontology of art is well-explored in the literature, though such discussions frequently, if not invariably, neglect the dialectical nature of art adduced by both thinkers. For the most persuasive argument, see Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (London: MacMillan, 1984), 360, where, in summary, he asserts: "To overcome such one-sidedness, one must hold on to the dialectics of art as at once affirmative and negative, stabilizing and subversive, and must grasp that this is the very nature of art." Also see Douglas Kellner, "Marcuse, Art, and Liberation," in *Art and Liberation*, ed., Douglas Kellner, Vol. 4, Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse (New York: Routledge, 2007), 22. Among those who promote the theory that critical theorists espouse an ontology of art are Charles Reitz and Gerard Raulet. As Reitz states in his *Art, Alienation, and the Humanities* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 99: "In Marcuse's estimation the aesthetic dimension of philosophical thinking is also considered an *ontological* dimension. As such, it is held to be the best preserve of the negative, contradictory character of reality." Also see Raulet, "Marcuse's Negative Dialectics of Imagination," in *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader*, eds., John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb (New York: Routledge, 2004), 124: "Art is at its root a mere 'fiction'—this fact must be recorded in opposition to the vulgar-Marxist view. To be sure, this fiction is not meaningless, but its meaning consists in a general, pre- and transhistorical, indeed ontological message." Both neglect the historical dimension of art and conflate a theory which seeks the *nature* of art in advanced industrial society with an art that, according to ontology, would seek to define the nature of being. Both thinkers would categorically reject the latter assertion.

⁶⁸ Marcuse, AD, 22.

⁶⁹ Adorno, AT, 1.

⁷⁰ Adorno, AT, 6.

⁷¹ Marcuse, EC, 172.

⁷² Adorno, AT, 225.

⁷³ Christoph Menke, *The Sovereignty of Art*, trans., Neil Solomon (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 4.

⁷⁴ Adorno, AT, 226; also see AT, 227. Or, in his *Philosophy of New Music*, 13, Adorno adds, "What sustains [art] is only what denounces official culture; the latter alone serves the promotion of that barbarism over which it waxes indignant."

⁷⁵ Adorno, AT, 320.

⁷⁶ Adorno, AT, 331.

⁷⁷ Adorno, AT, 223. For the honesty to the object in art, also see AT, 11: "There is no art that does not contain in itself as an element, negated, what it repulses."

⁷⁸ Huhn, 111.

⁷⁹ Adorno, 76-7.

⁸⁰ For the virtues of dialectical art, see Adorno, "Letters to Walter Benjamin," *Aesthetics and Politics* (New York: Verso Press, 2007), 112 and 121

⁸¹ For critiques of undialectical art, see Adorno, AT, pp.19 and 354; PNM, 54ff (on twelve-tone technique and its imposition of order; "now the totality is conscious," 67; "The principle of contrast collapses." pg. 73); also see notes on Stravinsky, PNM, 105ff (Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* is authoritarian art because its collective dance is "bereft of any dialectic of universal and particular," 119). Also see Max Paddison, "Authenticity and Failure in Adorno's Aesthetics of Music," in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed., Tom Huhn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 199.

⁸² Adorno, PNM, 81. See also Morgan, 57: "Adorno is not interested in resolution or solution, but is interested in the deepening of certain fundamental contradictions, a deepening which takes place through a process of mediation." Also see Max Paddison, "Immanent Critique or Musical Stocktaking? Adorno and the Problem of Musical Analysis," *Adorno: A Critical Reader*, eds., Nigel Gibson and Andrew Rubin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 225.

⁸³ Adorno, AT, 86; also see 277.

⁸⁴ Menke, 20.

⁸⁵ Adorno, 92.

⁸⁶ Adorno, AT, 118.

⁸⁷ Adorno, AT, 89; also see 344.

⁸⁸ Adorno, AT, 276.

⁸⁹ Marcuse, AD, 54. In this chapter and the following chapters, the original German is only given when included in the translated or original edition.

⁹⁰ Marcuse, AD, 57.

⁹¹ Adorno, AT, 108.

⁹² Adorno, AT, 285.

⁹³ Menke, 24.

⁹⁴ Adorno, AT, 227.

⁹⁵ Though not sufficient to do so. Art's fetish nature also renders it outside the sphere of exchange-value.

⁹⁶ Marcuse, EC, 144.

⁹⁷ Adorno, ND, 405

⁹⁸ Adorno, AT, 234.

⁹⁹ Adorno, 34.

¹⁰⁰ Adorno, 228.

¹⁰¹ Adorno, AT, 232.

¹⁰² Adorno, AT, 18.

¹⁰³ See J.M. Bernstein, "Why Rescue Semblance? Metaphysical Experience and the Possibility of Ethics," in *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, eds., Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervart (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 195: "The question of aesthetic semblance is the question of the possibility of possibility, of a conception of possible experience that transcends what is now taken to be the parameters of possible experience." Also see 198, where he states that artworks "open a possibility of responding and relating to an object (including other subjects) that is not presently available."

¹⁰⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *Art and Liberation* [Vol4], Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, ed., Douglas Kellner, Vol. 4 (New York: Routledge, 2007), 133.

¹⁰⁵ See Martin Jay, "Is Experience Still in Crisis? Reflections on a Frankfurt School Lament," in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed., Tom Huhn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 139: "Aesthetic experience. . . is necessarily impure because it is damaged by the changes outside art to which we have already alluded: modern warfare, the replacement of narrative by information, alienating technology, and capitalist industrialization. . . . Its truth content, Adorno always emphasized, thus had to be brought out by an accompanying philosophical cum social theoretical analysis that provided the critical discursive tools that art inevitably lacked."

¹⁰⁶ Adorno, AT, 262.

¹⁰⁷ Adorno, AT, 341; also see 352.

¹⁰⁸ Adorno, ND, 14.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Kelly, *Iconoclasm in Aesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 72. Also see Paddison, "Immanent Critique," 222: "As we have seen, Adorno argues that while aesthetics must immerse itself in the particularity of individual works through analysis in order to overcome its ignorance of art, it is nevertheless a

different kind of activity to analysis. The concerns of aesthetics, Adorno insists, are to uncover the truth content of the work. . . ”

¹¹⁰ Adorno, AT, 96.

¹¹¹ Adorno, AT, 118. Also see AT, 347: “The task of a philosophy of art is not so much to explain away the element of incomprehensibility, which speculative philosophy has almost invariably sought to do, but rather to understand the incomprehensibility itself.”

¹¹² Paddison, “Immanent Critique,” 223.

¹¹³ Adorno, PNM, 100.

¹¹⁴ Adorno, AT, 353.

¹¹⁵ Bubner, 162.

¹¹⁶ Bubner, 161.

¹¹⁷ Stone, 248.

¹¹⁸ Hullot-Kentor, 194.

¹¹⁹ Marcuse, ODM, 229.

¹²⁰ Adorno, MM, 247.

¹²¹ Donald Burke, “Adorno's Aesthetics of Reconciliation: Negative Presentation of Utopia or Post-Metaphysical Pipe-Dream?,” in *Adorno and the Need in Thinking: New Critical Essays*, eds., Colin Campbell Donald Burke, Kathy Kiloh, Michael K. Palamarek, and Jonathan Short (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 250.

¹²² Adorno, AT, 312. Also see AT, 82-3, where Adorno notes the fantastical nature of art: “In each genuine artwork something appears that does not exist. It is not dreamt up out of disparate elements of the existing. Out of these elements artworks arrange constellations that become ciphers, without, however, like fantasies, setting up the enciphered before the eyes as something immediately existing. . . ”

¹²³ Kellner, “Marcuse, Art, and Liberation,” 29. Also see Kellner, “Herbert Marcuse and the Vicissitudes of Critical Theory,” in *Towards a Critical Theory of Society*, ed., Douglas Kellner, Vol. 2 (New York: Routledge, 1998), 15, where he moves more towards Marcuse's concrete notion of society: “Critical theory is thus future-oriented and has a utopian quality. Its future projections are not to be idle daydreams, but an imaginative program of social reconstruction based on an analysis of tendencies in the present society which could be developed to construct a rational society that would increase human freedom and happiness.”

¹²⁴ Adorno, ND, 397.

¹²⁵ Adorno, AT, 5.

¹²⁶ Adorno, MM, 224. Also see AT, 66, where the strength of natural beauty in artworks is “because it recollects a world without domination, one that probably never

existed; its weakness, because through this recollection it dissolves back into that amorphousness out of which genius once arose. . . ”

¹²⁷ Marcuse, ODM, 68.

¹²⁸ See Lambert Zuidervaat, “Metaphysics after Auschwitz: Suffering and Hope in Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*,” in *Adorno and the Need in Thinking: New Critical Essays*, eds., Colin Campbell, Donald Burke, Kathy Kiloh, Michael K. Palamarek, and Jonathan Short (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 147: “[T]he Adornian emphasis on suffering turns into the emphasis on hope. Or, rather, the philosophical expression of suffering receives articulation as an expectation of its removal. For Adorno, the material need within thought propels thought towards the idea of a fundamentally transformed world within which thought itself would be fundamentally transformed.”

¹²⁹ Adorno, ND, 404.

¹³⁰ Jay, 140.

¹³¹ See J.M. Bernstein, 201: “[B]ecause the promises that artworks make transcend the context of immanence, they are metaphysical; because works of art provide an experience of the absence of experience that has metaphysical import, they provide an experience of diremption of particularity from rationality. . . ”

¹³² Adorno, 376.

¹³³ Adorno, 407. It is clear, given the following sections, that Marcuse would disagree with the limitation of aesthetics to metaphysical hope alone. To this end, Adorno is alone among the critical theorists in not advocating further forms of institutional and social reform.

¹³⁴ Adorno, 375. Also see J.M. Bernstein, 208: “transcendence is, finally, not vertical but horizontal, a promise–toward a future habitation of this world.”

¹³⁵ Adorno, ND, 404, italics added.

¹³⁶ Bubner, 159.

¹³⁷ This is not without complaint on the part of Adorno. As early as *Minima Moralia*, 189, Adorno negatively characterized the practice of the “aestheticizing everyday life.” And, in his *Critical Models*, 5-6, Adorno states the following: “[Modern readers of philosophy] must know that philosophy is no longer applicable to the techniques for mastering one’s life—techniques in both the literal and figurative senses—with which philosophy was once so closely entwined.” Also see Hearfield, 161.

¹³⁸ Morgan, 136.

¹³⁹ Jurgen Habermas, “Psychic Thermidor and the Rebirth of Rebellious Subjectivity,” in *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia*, eds., Andrew Feenberg, Robert Pippin, and Charles Webel (London: MacMillan Education, 1988), 3.

¹⁴⁰ Marcuse, EC, 179.

¹⁴¹ Marcuse, EC, 189.

¹⁴² Marcuse, EC, 193.

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- ¹⁴³ Marcuse, RR, 11.
- ¹⁴⁴ Marcuse, RR, 258.
- ¹⁴⁵ Marcuse, N, 135.
- ¹⁴⁶ Marcuse, RR, 321.
- ¹⁴⁷ Marcuse, RR, 293.
- ¹⁴⁸ Marcuse, RR, 317.
- ¹⁴⁹ For a thorough examination of Marcuse's Marxism, see the classic and definitive work by Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*.
- ¹⁵⁰ In serious contradistinction with other Frankfurt thinkers, notably Adorno, who rejected the work of Freud. See Adorno, MM, 61, where he states: "Freud's unenlightened enlightenment plays into the hands of bourgeois disillusion. . . . Reason is for him a mere superstructure, not—as official philosophy maintains—on account of his psychologism, which has penetrated deeply enough into the historical moment of truth."
- ¹⁵¹ Marcuse, EC, 45.
- ¹⁵² The connections with Foucault here are sundry, and will be addressed in chapter five.
- ¹⁵³ Marcuse, EC, 48.
- ¹⁵⁴ For more on Marcuse's early thought on the pleasurable body, see his essay on hedonism in N, 176ff.
- ¹⁵⁵ See Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, 183: "Marcuse argues that in a non-repressive civilization sexuality would take on other forms besides sexual intercourse."
- ¹⁵⁶ It is interesting to note that, despite Freud's numerous writings on fantasy, Marcuse does not deal with this portion of Freud's work.
- ¹⁵⁷ Marcuse, N, 154.
- ¹⁵⁸ As in Adorno's concept of metaphysics.
- ¹⁵⁹ Marcuse, EC, 140.
- ¹⁶⁰ Marcuse, EC, 143.
- ¹⁶¹ Marcuse, EC, 144.
- ¹⁶² Marcuse, Vol4, 78.
- ¹⁶³ As quoted in Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, 28.
- ¹⁶⁴ As quoted in Kellner, "Marcuse, Art, and Liberation," 14.
- ¹⁶⁵ Marcuse, Vol4, 72.
- ¹⁶⁶ As quoted in Kellner, "Marcuse, Art, and Liberation," 14.

¹⁶⁷ Herbert Marcuse, *Towards a Critical Theory of Society* [Vol2], Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, ed., Douglas Kellner, Vol. 2 (New York: Routledge, 1998), 138.

¹⁶⁸ Marcuse, ODM, xlvii.

¹⁶⁹ Marcuse, N, 193.

¹⁷⁰ Marcuse, RR, 288.

¹⁷¹ Marcuse, N, 256. Marcuse later expresses this desire similarly in Vol2, 51: "Thus economic freedom would mean freedom *from* the economy, that is, man's freedom from being determined by economic forces and relationships: freedom from the daily struggle for existence, from earning a living."

¹⁷² See Marcuse, N, 191: "Only today, at the highest stage of development of the established order, when the objective forces making for a higher order of humanity have become mature, and only in connection with the theory and practice linked to such a transformation, may the critique of the totality of the established order also take as its object the happiness that this order provides."

¹⁷³ See Marcuse, ODM, 2: "If the individual were no longer compelled to prove himself on the market, as a free economic subject, the disappearance of this kind of freedom would be one of the greatest achievements of civilization. . . . The very structure of human existence would be altered; the individual would be liberated from the work world's imposing upon him alien needs and alien possibilities."

¹⁷⁴ Marcuse, Vol3, 81.

¹⁷⁵ Marcuse, Vol2, 158.

¹⁷⁶ Marcuse, EC, 5.

¹⁷⁷ Marcuse, EC, xv.

¹⁷⁸ Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* [CRR] (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 132. Also see AD, 32-3, "But what appears in art as remote from the praxis of change demands recognition as a necessary element in a future praxis of liberation—as the "science of the beautiful," the "science of redemption and fulfillment." Art cannot change the world, but it can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could change the world."

¹⁷⁹ See Reitz, *Art, Alienation, and the Humanities*.

¹⁸⁰ Not as an end in itself.

¹⁸¹ Marcuse, Vol2, 116-7.

¹⁸² For example, Marcuse, in ODM, 63, continues to rely on the negative dimension of art in what he calls, in the words of Whitehead, the "Great Refusal": "Whether ritualized or not, art contains the rationality of negation. In its advanced positions, it is the Great Refusal—the protest against that which is. . . . Separated from the sphere of labor where society reproduces itself and its misery, the world of art which [artists] create remains, with all its truth, a privilege and an illusion."

¹⁸³ Marcuse, CRR, 102. The opposition to Adorno's concept of "wishing" is evident here.

¹⁸⁴ Marcuse, CRR, 81.

¹⁸⁵ See Douglas Kellner, "Introduction to the Second Edition," in *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), xxxiv: "Marcuse always stresses liberation, and this thought is animated by a utopian vision that life could be as it is in art and dreams if only a revolution would take place that would eliminate its repressive features."

¹⁸⁶ Marcuse, EC, xxv.

¹⁸⁷ Marcuse, Vol2, 114.

¹⁸⁸ See, for example, Marcuse, ODM, 67.

¹⁸⁹ Marcuse, AD, 9.

¹⁹⁰ Marcuse, Vol2, 151.

¹⁹¹ Kellner, "Marcuse, Art, and Liberation," 65.

¹⁹² Barry Katz, *Herbert Marcuse and the Art of Liberation: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Verso Editions, 1982), 203.

¹⁹³ Marcuse, CRR, 105.

¹⁹⁴ Marcuse, CRR, 96.

¹⁹⁵ As quoted in Kellner, "Marcuse, Art, and Liberation," 69.

¹⁹⁶ Reitz, 188.

¹⁹⁷ Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* [EL] (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 24. Also see Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, 342.

¹⁹⁸ Marcuse, Vol4, 116. Also see Reitz, 109: "In Marcuse's estimation, aesthetic objects may become merely affirmatively charming or decorative, but the *philosophical "dimension" of the aesthetic* is thought to preserve the full potential of human experience and reality through the synoptic integration of art and life, and through the projection of an aesthetic social program that may render liberation from alienation really possible." And, equally important, Katz, 189: "'Aesthetics,' it will be recalled, always carried with it a double connotation for Marcuse, referring to the foundations of art as well as to the domain of the senses, and invokes rationality and sensuality, the Reality Principle and the Pleasure Principle."

¹⁹⁹ Marcuse, EC, 176.

²⁰⁰ Marcuse, EL, 27.

²⁰¹ Marcuse, EC, 181.

²⁰² Marcuse, EC, 184.

²⁰³ Kellner, "Marcuse, Art, and Liberation," 29.

²⁰⁴ Where “aesthetics” was oriented towards practical undertakings, such as technical work. See the exposition in chapter five on Foucault’s recovery of “aesthetics” through the Greeks.

²⁰⁵ That is, a non-operational society.

²⁰⁶ Marcuse, Vol4, 147.

²⁰⁷ Marcuse, ODM, 231.

²⁰⁸ Marcuse, Vol4, 128. Also see Marcuse, Vol3, 83: “And now I throw in the terrible concept: it would mean an “aesthetic” reality–society as a work of art. This is the most utopian, the most radical possibility of liberation today.” And, for further emphasis, EL, 46: “the transformation [to society as a work of art] is conceivable only as the way in which free men. . . shape their life in solidarity, and build an environment in which the struggle for existence loses its ugly and aggressive features.”

²⁰⁹ Here the analogy between Marcuse’s earlier concept of “fantasy” and his later work on aesthetics is most clear.

²¹⁰ Kellner, “Marcuse, Art, and Liberation,” 43. Also see Katz, 189: “the gratification of aesthetic needs and goals. . . would imply the existence of an aesthetically ordered social world, or a society in which the creative imagination has taken its place as a productive force alongside technical reason in shaping the mental and material conditions of human life.”

²¹¹ Marcuse, Vol4, 119.

²¹² Marcuse, EL, 19.

²¹³ See Kellner, “Marcuse, Art, and Liberation,” 39: “In the merger of art and technology, reason would converge with art, recapturing the affinity between art and technique stressed by the Greeks. A new technology would help create a more aestheticized reality and could be part of an art of life.”

²¹⁴ Marcuse, EL, 31.

²¹⁵ Marcuse, Vol3, 82.

²¹⁶ Marcuse, ODM, 239.

²¹⁷ Marcuse, EL, 56.

²¹⁸ Kellner, “Marcuse, Art, and Liberation,” 44.

²¹⁹ Marcuse, EL, 24. Note again the identity between art, technology, and society, a motif elaborated upon earlier in Marcuse’s dissertation.

²²⁰ Marcuse, Vol2, 50.

²²¹ Marcuse, EC, xxiii.

²²² For the search for a revolutionary subject in Marcuse’s work, see Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, 300ff.

²²³ Marcuse, ODM, 31. Also see Stephen Eric Bronner, "Between Art and Utopia: Reconsidering the Aesthetic Theory of Herbert Marcuse," in *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia*, eds., Andrew Feenberg, Robert Pippin, and Charles Webel (London: MacMillan Education, 1988), 109: "The emancipatory potential within art had therefore become divorced from that proletarian 'agent' of history which originally was to institutionalize a qualitatively different mode of life and which now found itself integrated into the status quo."

²²⁴ Marcuse, Vol3, 156.

²²⁵ Marcuse, CRR, 48.

²²⁶ Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, 279.

²²⁷ Marcuse, Vol2, 124.

²²⁸ Reitz, 146.

²²⁹ Marcuse, EL, 6.

²³⁰ Marcuse, EC, xxi.

²³¹ Adorno, MM, 97.

²³² Marcuse, EL, 32.

²³³ Marcuse, AD, 60.

Second Excursus

Heidegger on Poetic Thinking

To think is to confine yourself to a
single thought that one day stands
still like a star in the world's sky.

– Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*

I: Introduction

Overview

In chapter three Adorno and Marcuse were seen as granting exemplary status to particularity and dissonance in art and aesthetics, an emphasis which motivates the utopian impulse in Adorno's concept of "metaphysics" and Marcuse's demands for concrete social reform for an aesthetic society and individual. This move is made through the critical theoretical reading of Hegelian dialectics, in which particularity is brought to the fore, calling into question identitarian thought. By inverting the Hegelian demand for universality as subsumed under *Geist*, Adorno and Marcuse can see art as attending to and illuminating particularity while liberating and opening new perspectives for future realities. This is given emphatic force in Marcuse's concepts of "society as a work of art" and the aesthetic life of the individual, which modifies aesthetics as pleasure, reform, and an attention to the concrete realities of one's life.

My purpose in this excursus and the following chapter is to place the critical theoretical emphasis on particularity in tension with an affirmative mode of thinking and being. Just as the preceding chapter was shown to be the "resistant" moment in life as art, this excursus and the following chapter are the "affirmative" moment in life as art. This move is made, once again, in complete loyalty to the Nietzschean programmatic laid out in the introduction and chapter two. Inasmuch as the free spirit requires a deconstructive

moment, she also requires an affirmative dimension, one in which the free space created through resistance is redeemed by a unique vision of existence.

The affirmative moment in life as art is therefore the “positive” dimension of aesthetic judgment. Critical theory, the negative axis of aesthetic judgment, used art and aesthetics in a mediating role between thinking and being: aesthetics linked a particularistic form of thinking with a revolutionary and just way of being. This excursus and the following chapter employ the aesthetic in a functionally similar fashion, conjoining it to the role of thinking and placing it in direct relationship to an ethics of courage and openness to the presence of Being. Thus, whereas the previous chapter used art and aesthetics for the sake of arousing particularity and the possibility of new configurations of society and the individual, the work of phenomenology in the present chapters uses art and aesthetics as a means of opening up the necessary space for the emergence of Being. The artful life in this moment is one wherein existence is potentially affirmed.

I will outline the positive moment of aesthetic judgment in the following pages by tracing a phenomenological trajectory from Martin Heidegger to Maurice Merleau-Ponty (and his reception through Renaud Barbaras) to Jean-Luc Marion. In tracing this winding lineage of reception and modification, the “positive” will come to be seen as that which is disclosed through embodied thinking and art and is possibly received in what can only be called revelation. Because of Heidegger’s pivotal role in phenomenology as well as life as art, I present his work in this second excursus as the foundation upon which the more constructive work of chapter four builds. By doing so, I explicitly recognize that Heidegger’s contribution to life as art is both seminal and insufficient: he formulates the

fundamental methods and assumptions of the phenomenological dimension of life as art, but, as we will see below, his work lacks an adequate account of the body, vision (and therefore visual representation), and the nature of givenness in order to fully outline the ways in which phenomenology can come to be a practical, embodied, or revelatory moment in life as art. Yet it is only *through* Heidegger that one may begin to see precisely how one can potentially affirm Being in one's everyday practice. It is to this task that we now turn.

Beginnings

Despite their opposition on the role of thinking, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and the critical theorists do agree on one aspect of the normative role of thinking in contemporary society: the need to resist objectivist modes of thinking. Even Heidegger, whose response to world war and the Holocaust was often obfuscated by his persistent call to return to philosophy's proper aim—Being—consistently identified an ontology of objectivity as the reason for the ills that have plagued the West, including world war and environmental destruction.¹ Whether it be through the post-Cartesian objectification of the world through science or the “enframing” of the world through the technological, both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty consistently posit objectivist thinking as one of the primary causes for the horrors of the first half of the 20th century.

Placing the lion's share of blame at the doorstep of an ontology of objectivity is debatable, and it remains beyond the scope of this study to determine its correspondence to reality. What is important, however, is the common ground shared by both phenomenology and critical theory: one must be able to think away from objectivity in

order to begin to practice both proper philosophy and proper living. Critical theory attempts to overcome this desideratum from within, subverting the dialectic into which one is thrown. Phenomenology seeks to undermine this sense of dislocation by reawakening experiences which have been lost in objective thinking. Merleau-Ponty expresses this critical starting point well:

[S]cientific knowledge shifts the centre of gravity of experience, so that we have unlearned how to see, hear, and generally speaking, feel, in order to deduce, from our bodily organization and the world as the physicist conceives it, what we are to see, hear and feel.²

The corrective here is, of course, implicit: in order to undo the damage wrought by objectivity, phenomenology seeks to go *beyond* the object to its grounding in human sense experience or ontology. As Merleau-Ponty later states, “we must rediscover a commerce with the world and a presence to the world which is older than intelligence.”³

Merleau-Ponty echoes a sentiment which is to become a consistent, if not *the* consistent, motif of phenomenology in the 20th and 21st century: awakening one to a pre-objective apprehension of the world that opens new vistas of perception and cognition. Thus Husserl’s project is to ground a first science of phenomena upon which all other forms of knowledge are predicated. And Husserl’s student, Heidegger, calls for a recognition of that which precedes thinking itself and to which we can give only insufficient recognition in thought and poetry—Being. As Merleau-Ponty reflects on Husserl and Heidegger, the science of all sciences (Husserl) comes to be seen in therapeutic and redemptive terms:

Through meditation we must again learn of a mode of being the idea of which we have lost, the being of the “ground” (*Boden*), and that of the Earth first of all—the earth where we live, that which is this side of rest and movement, being the ground from which all rest and all movement break away, which is not made out of *Körper*, being the “source” from

which they are drawn through division, being the source which has no “place,” being that which surrounds all places, which bears all beings above nothingness, as Noah’s ark preserved the living creatures from the Flood.⁴

As was seen earlier, especially with Adorno, loss and remembrance are critical signposts for life as art, ones which mark the voyage towards metaphysics, or, as in Heidegger and other phenomenologists, to pre-objective modes of thinking, feeling, and being. James Smith expresses this motif of retrieval well: “In order to avoid returning to the impasses it is our purpose to avoid, we must return to experiences that have not yet been worked over—before the separation into ‘object’ or ‘subject,’ ‘essence’ or ‘existence.’”⁵ By going beyond objectivity in search of its ground, phenomenology seeks a more originary source for human being-in-the-world; it wishes to, as Paul Crowther states, “burrow beneath the edifices of abstract knowledge. . . with a view to expressing a more primordial contact with the world. . .”⁶ By attempting to go beyond objectivity, phenomenology opens up a positive dimension only negatively apprehended in critical theoretical aesthetics. This move, of course, runs the danger of abandoning the critical ethical and political high-ground staked out by Adorno and Marcuse, but it is necessitated by the affirmative dimension of art itself.⁷

And, like Adorno and Marcuse before, phenomenology seeks to reappraise the role of philosophy in order to stake out legitimacy for its own project. Just as Adorno sought to normatively define “philosophy” in terms of negative dialectical thinking, phenomenology seeks to dispense with philosophy as it has been historically practiced in order to renew its spirit afresh.⁸ As Merleau-Ponty states:

And in order that this openness [upon Being] take place, in order that decidedly we get out of our thoughts, in order that nothing stand between us and it, it would be correlatively necessary to empty the

Being-subject of all the phantoms with which philosophy has encumbered it.⁹

Philosophy thus takes on a dual character: that which has been practiced before phenomenology and has confused that which is secondary with that which is primary, and its normative renewal through the phenomenological project. Merleau-Ponty invokes this second meaning of philosophy in the following: “Nothing is left for our philosophy but to set out to prospect the actual world.”¹⁰ If we are to follow the cue of Merleau-Ponty and phenomenology in general, then a renewed philosophical practice must attend to the “actual world,” stripped of the “phantoms” of old, which grounds cognition or even existence at all. If anything is to be revealed through phenomenology, if it is to get beyond objects, then it will be done via. an analysis of the “world” preceding objective determination.

This is precisely the tack which this excursus and the following chapter will take. By using “world” as an interpretive entry-point into the problem of grounding a pre-reflective awareness, I will trace the complicated interplay between art and thinking in Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Marion. For the early Heidegger, the acknowledgement of a “world” is enmeshed with human practical determination and usage, a position which is radically modified after the “turn” towards a fusion of poetics and thinking which allows the world to come into apprehension. The early Heidegger’s line of thinking is resumed and transcended by Merleau-Ponty’s work on perception and the body in chapter four, a position whose holism and complexity is only superseded by Merleau-Ponty’s later work on the intertwined and processive nature of being. This final point is further radicalized by Marion’s notion of the given, which, in instances both rare and banal, can reveal the “world” through overwhelming intuition itself, even culminating in revelation.

I begin this series of running starts below with an analysis of Heidegger that puts forth his central insights into the nature of thinking and its relationship to the work of art. Because of Heidegger's unique role in life as art, the following is a straightforward reconstruction of Heidegger's work on art and thinking in both his early and later periods. These reflections will prove critical to the following chapter, where I advocate a constructive notion of embodied poetic thinking which builds on the insights of Heidegger's foundational work and opens the possibility for everyday experiences of Being and, perhaps, revelation.

II: The Early Heidegger

Heidegger's Relation to Husserl: Intentionality and *Lebenswelt*

If, as the previous section recommends, I am to uncover the positive dimension of life as art, then it is through the exploration of the concept of world in phenomenology. And, as such, any attempt to analyze the concept of "world" in phenomenology must begin with Husserl's concept of the *Lebenswelt* as first articulated in his *Ideas*.¹¹ Yet, as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Marion, and others have repeatedly noted, Husserl's attempt to explicate human experience by means of the "life world" was significantly—if not irretrievably—complicated by his captivity to consciousness as the seat of human experience.

Correlatively, if human consciousness is seen as problematic, then its phenomenological antecedent, intentionality, must be placed in question. For, in both *Ideas* and in the later *Cartesian Meditations*, it is conscious intentionality, directed towards the outside world, which grounds our experience of the life-world.

Thus Husserl's phenomenological heir, Heidegger, attempts to get behind consciousness and intentionality in order to more fully explicate the life world and its ability to ground consciousness and knowledge in general.¹² Yet to go beyond consciousness one cannot remain bound to subjective intentionality, as Husserl himself had examined it (or as it had been received by Heidegger and others). Phenomenology must renew itself through its own pledge to return to "what shows itself," to that which is outside of human intentionality. This positive redefinition of phenomenology after Husserl comes to mark phenomenology's trajectory in Heidegger and beyond:

Hence phenomenology means. . . to let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows from itself. That is the formal meaning of the type of research that calls itself "phenomenology." But this expresses nothing other than the maxim. . . : "To the things themselves!"¹³

It is only by returning, with renewed vigor and loyalty, to the Husserlian maxim of "To the things themselves!" that phenomenology is to go beyond intentionality and can therefore properly explicate the life world which forms the crux of human experience. If what "gives itself" is indeed beyond human intentionality, then it is the only sufficient starting point for examining the world.

This is no small task, however. How does one ground human experience in terms which are not captive to conscious intentionality and directedness towards objects? In short, how can one explain intuition, much less perception, in terms other than my directedness towards things-in-the-world? Arguably, answering this question is the key to beginning an explication of the human relationship with the life-world, and therefore to gaining an insight into reawakening pre-reflective awareness.

Heidegger's attempt to renew phenomenology by returning to the things themselves is a positive first move in such a direction. Only by confronting the things

themselves can one gain access to a pre-thematic realm which may get behind intentionality. As Heidegger states, “To philosophize. . . is an extra-ordinary inquiry into the extra-ordinary.”¹⁴ Furthermore, Heidegger wishes to secure the “pre-thematic realm” through ontology, that is, to equate the findings of phenomenology with its very ground. As he states, once again re-appraising the role of philosophy, “it is the authentic function of philosophy to challenge historical [Dasein] and hence, in the last analysis, being pure and simple.”¹⁵ The inquiry into the things themselves as they are confronted in the life-world should yield both a solution to the problem of intentionality as well as find its own ground.

The explication of being-in-the-world in *Being and Time*

Heidegger begins his analysis in the early works of the things themselves by privileging, as did Husserl, an exemplary being which has a unique relationship to things: humans. In his seminal early work, *Being and Time*, Heidegger refers to Dasein as “this exemplary being” that has a “certain priority”¹⁶ in his interrogation into the question of being. The reasons for this are sundry and will occupy us in the coming pages, but, for now, the most vital issue with respect to Heidegger’s interpretive preference for human beings clearly lies with his observation that humans have a special relationship to being by nature of their own being: “Da-sein is a being that does not simply occur among other beings. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned *about* its very being.”¹⁷ The “concern” noted here denotes Dasein’s intimate relationship with the *Lebenswelt* through which phenomenology can begin to interrogate the more

originary question of being. Heidegger remarks, “If no Da-sein exists, no world is ‘there’ either.”¹⁸

By privileging Dasein, Heidegger opens a critical mode of access into the disclosure and articulation of a world by human beings. For, not only do humans relate to and move within a world, they are *in* the world in a fundamental sense, the articulation of which occupies much of *Being and Time*. As Heidegger states plainly, “But *being in a world* belongs essentially to Da-sein. Thus the understanding of being that belongs to Da-sein just as originally implies the understanding of something like ‘world’ and the understanding of the being of beings accessible within the world.”¹⁹ An understanding of “world” through Dasein allows the phenomenologist to grasp our pre-reflective experience. That is, understanding Dasein’s being-in-the-world is indispensable to understanding the ground for all experience itself. “[T]he being-in-itself of innerworldly beings is ontologically comprehensible only on the basis of the phenomenon of the world.”²⁰

This hermeneutical entry point—that of the inseparability and ontological priority of Dasein and world—is further clarified by a second observation: the “world” as experienced by Dasein is to be seen and analyzed as a unified pre-reflective phenomenon. “The compound expression ‘being-in-the-world’ indicates, in the very way we have coined it, that it stands for a *unified* phenomenon. This primary datum must be seen as a whole.”²¹ Dasein does not belong to many worlds (i.e., the “work world,” the “home world,” etc.), but experiences the *Lebenswelt* as a unified phenomenon of which other “worlds” are purely derivative.²²

To gain phenomenological access to the unified phenomenon of world, Heidegger privileges a vision of humans that is distinctly pastoral and colloquial in both its scope and the examples it employs. As Heidegger states repeatedly, “The closest world of everyday Da-sein is the *surrounding world*,”²³ and, to be sure, the “surrounding world” is one marked by human habitation and the manipulation of objects. Thus the “world” and its things are, at the outset, marked by a set of meanings indicating their usability and tractability for human purposes. This consistent sense of practical and perceptual orientation grounds the *in* of being-in-the-world:

In directing itself toward . . . and in grasping something, Da-sein does not first go outside of the inner sphere in which it is initially encapsulated, but, rather, in its primary kind of being, it is always already “outside” together with some being encountered in the world already discovered.²⁴

And, in another telling passage in *Being and Time*, Heidegger states, “the closest kind of association is not mere perceptual cognition, but, rather, a handling, using, and taking care of things which has its own kind of ‘knowledge.’ . . . This being is not the object of a theoretical ‘world’-cognition; it is what is used, produced, and so on.”²⁵ Two points must be registered here: 1) Heidegger’s shift away from Husserl here is decisive: by privileging “grasping,” “handling,” and other tactile and pastoral images, human intentionality is moved away from directedness towards eidetic essence (as in the *Cartesian Meditations*) and toward a more practical understanding of the *Lebenswelt*. 2) Heidegger, in both his early and later works and contrary to Merleau-Ponty, is insistent on denying the phenomenological primacy of perception. Human being-in-the-world cannot be attained either through intentionality towards conceptual recognition (Husserl) or perceptual awareness (Merleau-Ponty), but must be predicated on Dasein’s unified

understanding of a world disclosed through objects available for human handling and manipulation (*Zuhandenheit*).

This observation is furthered by Heidegger's own recognition of the nature of objects which readily disclose the nature of world, namely, tools and equipment on-call for human purposes. "[I]t is the use-objects around us that are the nearest and the proper things. . . . [T]hings and works and ultimately all beings—are to be comprehended with the help of the Being of equipment. . . ."²⁶ "Equipmental" being becomes Heidegger's chief ontic mode of access into the deeper ontological phenomenon of human being-in-the-world. It does so primarily by pre-reflectively disclosing a network of significant and practical relationships for Dasein. One of Heidegger's chief examples in this case is a hammer: "we are subordinate to the in-order-to constitutive for the actual useful thing in our association with it. . . . The act of hammering itself discovers the specific 'handiness' of the hammer."²⁷ Hammers are handy by virtue of their ability to drive and remove nails, which reveals, even if only aconceptually or unthematically, Dasein's need to build, dwell in, and manipulate its surroundings. In handiness, Heidegger has prepared the way for a disclosure of the life-world through our orientation toward useful things and their role in a system of relevance.

To this deeper recognition of the handiness of things and their potential to disclose a system of uses, Heidegger employs the term "circumspection."²⁸ Throughout *Being and Time*, circumspection is used to designate a pre-reflective orientation towards things and their potential uses. "Circumspect overseeing does not *comprehend* what is at hand. Instead, it acquires an orientation within the surrounding world."²⁹ Of course, what

the “surrounding world” amounts to is precisely what is at issue. And, in analyzing circumspection, Heidegger begins to more fully elucidate his account of the “world”:

Circumspection moves in the relevant relations of the context of useful things at hand. It itself is again subject to the guidance of a more or less explicit view over the totality of useful things in the actual world of tools and the public surrounding world belonging to it. . . . What is essential in the overview is the primary understanding of the totality of relevance within which factual taking care always starts out.³⁰

What is decisive in Heidegger’s account of circumspection is not simply the pre-reflective vantage point it provides on the being of things, but also its ability to disclose, as in the hammer example above, a “totality of relevance” to which things belong. Tools and equipment only have meaning by virtue of their reference to practical human concerns and their relationships with the greater world. Circumspection, employed phenomenologically, allows for Heidegger to articulate the world in which Dasein finds itself.

Given Heidegger’s framing of the “world” in terms of human manipulation and practical absorption, it is unsurprising that he increasingly equates circumspection with dwelling, even in the early works:

“*Ich bin*” (I am) means I dwell, I stay near . . . the world as something familiar in such and such a way. Being as the infinitive of “I am”: that is understood as an existential, means to dwell near . . . , to be familiar with. . . . *Being-in is thus the formal existential expression of the being of Da-sein* which has the essential constitution of being-in-the-world.³¹

Heidegger here begins to accumulate a number of metaphors for the phenomenological access to the world which he intends to lay bare: dwelling, being (“I am”), and “familiarity” become synonymous with our attunement to a pre-reflective world in which relationships are maintained and disclosed through human effort. And it is to the first concept, that of dwelling, that Heidegger grants his most sustained effort; a “world,” if

we are to have access to it at all, must be seen through our practices of living and staying-near everyday objects.

It is therefore circumspection, as a phenomenological category, which opens up to Heidegger the nature of world, one which is still dependent on human intentionality (as seen through grasping and handling), but is significantly more “practical” than the world examined by Husserl. The world can best be seen as a network of interconnections and practical meanings which are disclosed through our circumspect and pre-reflective use of things. Heidegger gives summary expression to this concept in the following:

Strictly speaking, there “is” no such thing as *a* useful thing. There always belongs to the being of a useful thing a totality of useful things in which this useful thing can be what it is. A useful thing is essentially “something in order to. . .”. The different kinds of “in order to” such as serviceability, helpfulness, usability, handiness, constitute a totality of useful things.³²

The useful thing cannot be extricated from a context of practical meanings and interconnections. As a thing, it has a purpose, an “in order to,” that can only be understood by virtue of a totality of relevant connections and human intentions. It is this systemic totality of relations, disclosed through circumspection, that Heidegger calls a world.³³

Yet inasmuch as “world” comes to constitute a totality of relations for Heidegger, it also means that Dasein becomes constituted by, and constitutes, the world itself. Dasein is both enmeshed in, and disclosive of, the world. David Ferrell Krell gives expression to this dual meaning of world in Heidegger’s early work: “‘World’ is that already familiar horizon upon which everyday human existence confidently moves; it is that in which Dasein always has been and which is somehow co-disclosed in all man’s projects and possibilities.”³⁴ It is this dual notion of disclosure and within-ness which seemingly

grants the exemplary position accorded to Dasein at the beginning of *Being and Time* and many of the early works. Furthermore, within Krell's quotation lies the key to deciphering Heidegger's statement that "Da-sein *is* in terms of *what* it takes care of."³⁵ In one sense, Dasein takes care of tools, things, and others. And yet, ontologically, Dasein "takes care" (*Besorgen*) of its world through both its disclosure in circumspection and in its creation through dwelling and using. Dasein can only be understood ontologically as the continual fold of disclosure and manipulation of the world.

Heidegger attempts to draw out the consequences of this fold between disclosure and manipulation throughout his early work, especially in his frequent attempts to see "authenticity" or "resoluteness" as the ethical outgrowth of the phenomenological recognition of Dasein's being-in-the-world. Unfortunately, Heidegger's phenomenological project of disclosing and remaining within the world founders on its inability to articulate the precise relationship between Dasein and the world and how it is properly expressed. It is for this reason that Heidegger often turns to art as a concrete means of fixating the project of being-in-the-world. There, Heidegger remains committed to the concept of a world as a "totality of relevance," but the concept comes under increasing strain as he fails to clarify the ontological difference between Dasein and world, eventually subsuming one to the other. That is, Heidegger's account of art comes to both clarify Dasein's relationship to the world and draws out the tendencies inherent within his phenomenology.

The Work of Art as a Disclosure of World

This section began as an attempt to clarify Heidegger's reinterpretation of Husserl's grounding concept of the *Lebenswelt* in order to begin an analysis of the positive moment of life as art and its opening to an affirmative dimension of existence. Beginning there, Heidegger privileges Dasein, whose being is constituted by its "being-in-the-world." Dasein's being-in-the-world is subsequently clarified by means of Dasein's own preoccupation with objects on-hand for practical purposes, an ontic realization which leads to the deeper ontological understanding that Dasein's world is a system of relevance to which Dasein is both subject and the agent of disclosure. In sum, Heidegger grants that humans experience a pre-reflective world inasmuch as they are constantly engaged with things; and, in turn, the world which we experience is both molded by human practical intentions and is ready for disclosure through our circumspect use of objects.

I would argue that Heidegger's concept of the artwork in his early writings is ontologically tantamount to the concept of circumspection seen most conspicuously in *Being and Time*. Just as circumspection allows Dasein to discover a world (as a totality of relevance), the artwork similarly opens up a world. As Heidegger states in his central aesthetic work of the early period, "The Origin of the Work of Art," "To be a work means to set up a world."³⁶ And, just as circumspection reveals a world through both practical deliberation and alteration, art, "in setting up a world, does not cause the material to disappear, but rather causes it to come forth for the very first time and to come into the open region of the work's world."³⁷ Of course, any synonymy between circumspection (as a phenomenological category) and the artwork itself (as an aesthetic category) must clarify the meaning of causing a world to "come forth" in either instance.

With respect to circumspection this is clear: circumspect handling causes a world to “come forth” by means of handling, probing, and discovering an object’s “in order to,” which reveals a system of relevant associations.

Unfortunately, Heidegger is decisively more ambiguous with respect to how a world comes forth in the work of art. In one sense, the ambiguity is natural, for a world remains nonobjective and intrinsically intangible:

The *world worlds*, and is more fully in being than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves to be at home. World is never an object that stands before us and can be seen. World is the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being.³⁸

Heidegger’s use of a “world worlding” seems to imply that a world autonomously organizes itself through the work of art.³⁹ Contrary to critical theoretical aesthetics, such spontaneous self-organization seems to imply a *harmony* between the elements within a work of art, such that a world “worlds,” or is able to be brought forth.

This observation is complicated by Heidegger’s contention that a work of art “opens up a world and at the same time sets this world back again on earth, which itself only thus emerges as a native ground.”⁴⁰ Here, the world disclosed through the work of art is brought into critical relief with the earth, upon which it is said to rest and, later, is in tension with. As Heidegger states: “World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated. The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through world. . . .The opposition of world and earth is strife.”⁴¹

The introduction of “earth” at such a critical juncture in Heidegger’s elucidation of world is perplexing and yet productive, as it clearly points to his later work and the work of Merleau-Ponty and Marion. Any clarification of Heidegger’s use of “earth” must

begin with his positive identification of the term with the Greek word *physis*: “The Greeks early on called this emerging and rising in itself and in all things *physis*. It illuminates also that on which and in which man bases his dwelling. We call this ground the *earth*.”⁴² Earth is here given as the ground of the world, as that upon which “man bases his dwelling.” Yet in identifying it with *physis*, Heidegger conjures a richer variety of meanings. For, in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, *physis* is defined as “that which emerges and endures,” or as the “power that emerges.”⁴³ This latter definition goes some distance in clarifying the concept of earth as a fluid and powerful reality. And, for the purposes of the earth in a work of art, the earth/*physis* “would be that which emerges into the light, . . . to shine, to give light and therefore to appear.”⁴⁴ The earth-as-*physis* is therefore that which shines and appears in a work of art, the power which reveals itself as the ground of appearing.

Heidegger’s early concept of art thus bears witness to two emergences: the self-organizing world and the constantly emerging and over-powering earth. The former is marked by human habitation and intention, while the latter is given as the ground of such a world. This difference is not only aesthetic, however: earth is positively identified as that which defies human conceptualization and investigation.

Earth thus shatters every attempt to penetrate it. It causes every merely calculating importunity up to it to turn into destruction. . . . The earth appears openly cleared as itself only when it is perceived and preserved as that which is essentially undisclosable, that which shrinks from every disclosure and constantly keeps itself closed up.⁴⁵

Accessibility to disclosure through human intention distinguishes world from earth.

Whereas a world is the principle open to human disclosure within a work of art, the earth remains separate from the world, fluid and self-concealing within the work of art. David

Halliburton elucidates this difference well: “Earth. . . entails everything. . . which supports existence but which remains less accessible, hence less impenetrable, than the world in which that existence is at all times situated.”⁴⁶

Given the relative inaccessibility of earth, it is hard not to see it, as many commentators have, as either an implicit negative ontology or as a precursor to Heidegger’s later notions on the unnameability of Being. Others, such as Julian Young, see the concept of earth in the early work as a preliminary to Heidegger’s more obscure pronouncement of the “holy” in his later elucidations of Hölderlin’s poetry.⁴⁷ While these arguments are important, they miss a larger point which Heidegger makes consistently: a work of art is marked by the tension between its human, self-disclosing elements and those which ground humanity itself and are self-dissembling. *All art bears a duality between concealing and revealing.* If one is to catch a glimpse of earth/*physis*, then, it is only through its momentary emergence into the world in a work of art: “The essence of the earth, in its free and unhurried bearing and self-seclusion, reveals itself, however, only in the earth’s jutting into a world.”⁴⁸

Finally, the strife exhibited between world and earth in the work of art is illuminating inasmuch as it shows the critical shortcoming of Heidegger’s account of world in both his phenomenology and his aesthetics. If indeed world is in critical tension with earth/*physis* in the work of art, then the concept of world elucidated earlier is limited in terms of what it is able to disclose. The introduction of earth/*physis* as a productive aesthetic category by Heidegger reveals the fact that the world is limited in scope to human habitation and concern as revealed through circumspection. In one sense, then, art usurps phenomenology: by positing a tension between world and earth, art reveals the

shortcomings of the phenomenological method in potentially completing the *ontological* project ambitiously laid out by Heidegger in the introduction to *Being and Time*.⁴⁹

This is a tension which animates much of Heidegger's early aesthetics and, as I will argue later, forces Heidegger to begin anew with the ontological project, beginning, however, from the standpoint of ontology itself. In order to understand Heidegger's passage to ontology, it is necessary to understand the "strife" instituted by Heidegger in his reflections on the work of art and to examine the relationship between world and earth. For a closer examination, I turn to his early account of language.

Discourse, Gathering, and Poetry

If the relationship between world and earth is to be elucidated, one must turn to Heidegger's thoughts on the relationship between language and Being. In Heidegger's mind, language is the primordial means by which humans come to disclose the world and, furthermore, it is the ground of all art.

Heidegger can accord language with such a privileged role because it is ontologically primary; that is, language has a unique access to Being (and therefore the world) unrivalled by other modes of inquiry, including phenomenology. As he states: "It is in words and language that things first come into being and are."⁵⁰ Language is charged with bringing things into being and revealing them for what they are (as did circumspection, though not as clearly). In a reflecting on Hölderlin's poetry he notes the following: "Language is charged with the task of making beings manifest and preserving them as such—in the linguistic work. Language gives expression to what is most pure and most concealed, as well as to what is confused and common."⁵¹ Such pronouncements are

often succinctly formulated by Heidegger in his oft-repeated injunction that “Language is the house of Being,” a remark that no doubt shows the privilege of place accorded to language and its role in bringing forth Being.

Such a pronouncement does not spell out how language is the guardian or shepherd of Being, however, and for that one is left to unravel a series of disparate threads in Heidegger’s early works. One key is given in Heidegger’s attempt to revise the Greek notion of *logos*, which has, he feels, fallen into contemporary misuse. Instead of the usual translation of *logos* as “word” or “rationality,” Heidegger defines the *logos* as such: “to put one thing with another, to bring together, in short, to gather. . . .”⁵² At another instance Heidegger dubs the *logos* the “primal gathering principle.”⁵³ Here it is clear that language is given over as that which “gathers together” or brings together in language itself.

To this is added Heidegger’s reappraisal of the Greek notion of *techne*, which stands in similar need of reinterpretation. He states:

The Greeks called art in the true sense and the work of art *techne*, because art is what most immediately brings being to stand. . . to stand, stabilizes it in something present (the work). The work of art is a work not primarily because it is wrought, made, but because it brings about being in an essent; it brings about the phenomenon in which the emerging power, *physis*, comes to shine.⁵⁴

Here, as opposed to the notion of *techne* as technological manipulation or order⁵⁵ (a definition which even Marcuse tacitly assumes and then subverts), Heidegger favors a notion of *techne* in which Being is “brought to stand” and presented within a work. The artwork, through *techne*, becomes a chosen site wherein *physis* is allowed to appear. This notion is echoed in Heidegger’s “Origin”: “*Techne*, as knowledge experienced in the Greek manner, is a bringing forth of beings in that it *brings forth* what is present as such

out of concealment and specifically *into* the unconcealment of its appearance; *techne* never signifies the action of making.”⁵⁶ The concept of *techne* is shifted from one of making and doing to one of presentation and bringing; the essence of art is not in production, but in the presentation of Being.

To the two revised concepts of *logos* and *techne* Heidegger adds a final and synthesizing reappraisal of *poeisis*. If *techne* is to reveal Being or allow it to appear, and if *logos* is given as a principle of gathering and bringing, then poetry, in a tone of synthesis, is to name Being and call it forth out of its concealment. “Projective saying is poetry: the saying of world and earth, the saying of the arena of their strife and thus of the place of all nearness and remoteness of the gods. Poetry is the saying of the unconcealment of beings.”⁵⁷ Poetry opens up a critical site (*aletheia*, *lichtung*) wherein world and earth can be gathered and presented. Art “breaks open an open place, in whose openness everything is other than usual,”⁵⁸ so that world and earth may appear both individually and in tension with one another.

Insomuch as poetry is responsible for creating the open space in which world and earth appear, Heidegger grants that poetry is the primordial means of expressing and naming things: “poetry is a founding: a naming of being and of the essence of all things—not just any saying, but that whereby everything first steps into the open, which we then discuss and talk about in everyday language. . . . [P]oetry itself first makes language possible.”⁵⁹ In bringing together *logos* and *techne*, gathering and art, poetry becomes the ground of art and language. It “has a privileged position in the domain of the arts,”⁶⁰ over and above that accorded to other forms of expression. Ontologically, all other forms of

expression are reducible to the essence of poetry, which is responsible for bringing forth world and earth through poetic expression.

If a work of art is to creatively and autonomously bring forth both a world and earth, then it must do so by combining *logos* and *techne*, by both gathering together the elements of world and earth and presenting them within a chosen open site (the work of art itself). Heidegger's account of art *only* works if *logos* and *techne* are thought together in a creative and mutually reinforcing synthesis. And, similarly, Heidegger's account of art only works if he bases all art on the original insights of poetry, which is given preeminent access to the nature and appearance of Being.

Unfortunately, recognizing *poesis* (as *logos* and *techne*) does not yet formulate the relationship between world and earth in the work of art. It is clear on *how* world and earth come to appear in a work of art, but it leaves unanswered the question of the relationship between the two within the work of art (short of their being in "strife" with one another). In order to examine the relationship between world and earth, an examination of Heidegger's account of Being is necessary. There, the critical shortcoming(s) of Heidegger's phenomenology and aesthetics will be brought into greater relief, and, with it, a reappraisal of Heidegger's early project and its assessment of the role of thinking and art.

The Nature of Being: Poetry as Power

Poetry is given privilege of place by Heidegger inasmuch as opens access to a more originary understanding of the nature of Being. Being, however, remains an elusive concept that stands in need of clarification throughout Heidegger's work. I cannot fully

clarify Heidegger's thoughts on Being here, but, respecting the mutual interdependence between poetry and Being, I would argue a more minimal point: in beginning an illustration of Being, one gains a deeper understanding of the role of language and poetry in Heidegger's early work and, transitively, the nature of "world" in both Heidegger's phenomenology and aesthetics.

For the most part, Heidegger's early work is marked by a resolute negativity: Being remains that which is beyond any ontic determination. As he states, "Being and its structure transcend every being and every possible existent determination of a being. *Being is the transcendens pure and simple.*"⁶¹ Being is consistently given as the ground of "every possible. . . determination of a being," but it cannot be identified with things-in-the-world. Other commentators, such as Julian Young, witness in Heidegger's philosophy of art a similar move to see Being as grounding: "Being is thus 'world' and 'earth' taken together."⁶² This notion ostensibly shows Being as that which is all-encompassing and beyond any concrete determination. By tying together the more human concept of world with the more fluid and negatively determined earth, Being remains, as in many of the earlier works, both ground and occasional site of disclosure.

Yet I would argue that the more grounding concept of Being given above fails to follow the logical implications of Heidegger's own intuitions on the nature of language, poetry, and circumspection. For that, Heidegger's last major lecture before "the turn" (*die Kehre*), encapsulated in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, is arguably the natural development of his work in *Being and Time* and his aesthetics.

There, Being is consistently defined as that which "issues forth from concealment,"⁶³ and, keeping with his earlier definition of *physis*, as that which appears.

This definition, coupled with the nature of poetic language in bringing Being forth, implies a mutual relationship between Being and bringing-forth:

Being means: to stand in the light, to appear, to enter into unconcealment. Where this happens, i.e. where being prevails, apprehension prevails and happens with it; the two belong together. Apprehension is the receptive bringing-to-stand of the intrinsically permanent that manifests itself.⁶⁴

Here Being is that which enters into unconcealment, through the poetic, into apprehension. As Heidegger states, translating Parmenides: “There is a reciprocal bond between apprehension and being.”⁶⁵ Being, in order to *be*, must be apprehended and brought forth through the poetic.

As Jeff Malpas convincingly argues, this implies not only a mutual relationship between Being and apprehension in Heidegger’s thought, but one between Being and “place,” where poetry is given as the site of bringing-forth and evocation. “[B]eing and place are inextricably bound together in a way that does not allow one to be seen merely as an ‘effect’ of the other. . . being emerges only in and through place.”⁶⁶ Poetry, in gathering and conjuring, forges a clearing into which Being enters. Heidegger’s poetics becomes topological, mapping the ground in which Being appears and is apprehended.

To be sure, Heidegger’s early work equivocates on just how Being is to be brought forth in the place of disclosure opened by the poetic. In work that immediately follows *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues for “letting be” as the principal mode of allowing Being to appear in the open site cleared by the poetic. “To let be is to engage oneself with beings. . . .To let be—that is, to let beings be as the beings which they are—means to engage oneself with the open region and its openness into which every being comes to stand, bringing that openness, as it were, along with itself.”⁶⁷ Or, formulated

through the lens of freedom, letting-be appears as the nature of disclosure itself:

“Freedom, understood as letting beings be, is the fulfillment and consummation of the essence of truth in the sense of the disclosure of beings. . . .[where] truth is disclosure of beings through which an openness essentially unfolds.”⁶⁸ By letting-be, by opening a site through the poetic and actively withdrawing, Being is allowed to appear in its manifestation. This interpretation of “place” notably favors earth over the more human-oriented world in the strife revealed within poetry.

This position is arguably superseded by Heidegger’s work in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, where world is given hermeneutic privilege over-and-above the freely appearing earth. Because earth is given as that which consistently conceals and dissembles,⁶⁹ then the role of the poetic, as *logos*, is to bring it into unconcealment. Heidegger states, “because being means to come into unconcealment, this gathering has a fundamental character of opening, making manifest. *Legein* thus enters into a clear and sharp opposition to concealing and hiding.”⁷⁰ Because Being is defined as both that which is apprehended *and* that which conceals itself, then, in order to be Being at all, it must be brought out of self-concealment and into the light of apprehension.

Such a “bringing forth” is not benign, however, and Heidegger’s language when referring to the nature of such a process leans towards violence. *Logos*, for example, is defined as the “act of violence, by which being is gathered in its togetherness.”⁷¹ Or, similarly, as linguistic, Dasein is defined as the following: “being-human is *logos*, the gathering and apprehending of the being of the essent: it is the happening of that strangest of the being of all, in whom through violence, through acts of power, the overpowering is made manifest and made to stand.”⁷² Humans are the “uncanny” beings which are given

over to releasing Being from unconcealment. Because Being is fluid and self-concealing, this often, if not always, involves an act of interpretive violence in which Being is not merely called-forth, but *brought forth* in poetry or thinking. Heidegger summarizes this move well:

It is this breaking out and breaking up, capturing and subjugating that opens up the essent *as sea, as earth, as animal*. It happens only insofar as the powers of language, of understanding, of temperament, and of building are themselves mastered in violence. The violence of poetic speech, of thinking projection, of building configuration, of the action that creates states is not a function of faculties that man has, but a taming and ordering of powers by virtue of which the essent opens up as such when man moves into it.⁷³

This, arguably, is the true role of the poetic in Heidegger's early work, namely that of capturing, subjugating, and opening up beings so as to bring forth Being. Though Being itself may remain unnameable as Heidegger earlier contends, it does not remain free of Dasein's capacity to bring it forth in poetry, building, and thinking.

"Unconcealment occurs only when it is achieved by work: the work of the word in poetry, the work of stone in temple and statue, the work of the word in thought, the work of the *polis* as the historical place in which all this is grounded and preserved."⁷⁴

Heidegger consistently names poetry, thinking, and building as the primary modes by which Being is violently brought into apprehension. This is, I would argue, the natural and logical consequence of using circumspection as a phenomenological category from which the thinking and "building" of one's world is derived. Once human manipulation is privileged as the means by which a world can be seen, then, by extension, human manipulation—and often violence—becomes the means by which Being is apprehended in thinking, building, and the work of art. Humans, through the constrained use of violence, become *the* site for the forced disclosure of being. "[Dasein] means: to be posited as the

breach into which the preponderant power of being bursts in its appearing, in order that this breach itself should shatter against being.”⁷⁵

To Heidegger, extending the concepts of poetry-as-bringing-forth and circumspection as the mode of access to world allows him to reveal Dasein as the unique locus for the disclosure and revealing of Being. This should be wholly expected, given Heidegger’s explicitly stated starting point in *Being and Time* and the early works of beginning the phenomenological project with Dasein. As he states:

[M]an should be understood, within the question of being, as *the* site which being requires in order to disclose itself. Man is the site of openness, the there. The essent juts into this there and is fulfilled. . . . The perspective for the opening of being must be grounded originally in the essence of [Dasein] as such a site for the disclosure of being.⁷⁶

And yet, because of this, Heidegger fails to adequately address the nature of Being or the nature of the strife between world and earth in the work of art. With respect to Being, Heidegger’s decisive privileging of circumspection and interpretive violence threatens to obscure emerging *physis* itself: there is, simply put, no room for an ontological difference between the being who discloses and the Being which is to be disclosed.⁷⁷ And, with respect to the work of art, Heidegger’s favor towards violence shifts the interpretive dynamic towards world and away from the tension between world and earth so carefully evoked in “The Origin of the Work of Art.” In short, Heidegger’s normative pronouncement of the efficacy of interpretive violence threatens to obscure whatever ground was gained in his phenomenological description of a world in *Being and Time* and therefore the pre-reflective *Lebenswelt* which formed the starting point of his analysis.

It is arguably for this reason that Heidegger’s work takes a decisive turn after his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, one which witnesses a de-privileging of Dasein and a move

to see poetry not as a bringing-forth but as an opening into which Being *may* enter. There, the very notion of thinking, given in the earlier work as preeminently grounded on handling and pastoral themes, is re-interpreted as meditation and self-removal. It is to these themes, and their possibilities for clarifying the nature of thinking and life-world, to which we now turn.

III: Middle and Later Heidegger: Poetic Thinking and the Event

Thinking as a Calling and a Response

Heidegger's earlier work fails to clarify the life-world and the role of poetry and thinking in part because the preeminence of Dasein obscures the aim of the inquiry itself. This is shown clearly in Heidegger's troubling notion of "violence" in the lectures of 1936. As David Halliburton states, "Heidegger could not find Being in existence, that is, in *Dasein*, because Being proved to be 'other' than *Dasein*, as it proved to be other than beings that are present-at-hand or ready-to-hand."⁷⁸ Heidegger's own investigations, especially within aesthetics, led him away from the privileged locus of world and towards a tension between world and earth, or that which remains beyond circumspection. Unfortunately, this tension ultimately resolved itself in Heidegger's use of hermeneutic violence which effectively collapsed the distinction between Dasein and Being. In short, Heidegger's early work revealed that beginning with Dasein and circumspection failed to achieve sufficient clarity with regard to world, Being, and the role of art. The early work fails to secure access to the pre-reflective realm which is to be the basis for the positive moment in life as art.

Thus one sees, beginning with Heidegger's posthumously published *Contributions* from 1938, a turn to explicate Being, world, art, and thinking in terms which cautiously avoid overly privileging the human or obscuring the ontological difference between humans and Being. In contrast to the heavily equipmental images of *Being and Time*, one sees more relational observations in Heidegger's later thought: "insofar as we *are* at all, we are already in a relatedness to what gives food for thought."⁷⁹ Humans are "'thrown' from Being itself into the truth of Being," such that we can be said to be "the shepherd of Being,"⁸⁰ not the violent source of apprehension pronounced only years earlier. As Jeff Malpas observes:

It is the articulation of this "simple onefold of beings and being" that is the focus for much of Heidegger's later thinking, in which it is no longer a matter of understanding [Dasein's] transcendence as such, but rather of grasping the way [Dasein] already belongs to the truth of being.⁸¹

Humans are still within the provenance of Being through handling, using, and living, but Being and world are no longer the sole subject of human manipulation. Rather, humans "belong" to Being, are delivered over to it, and, often, are receptive (as opposed to violently active) in acknowledging or understanding Being.⁸²

The language with respect to Being and thinking in the middle and later works therefore shifts from that of circumspection to that of reception and response. This is most evident in the writings after 1950, where thought is often defined as a *response* to the gift of Being: "Everything thought-provoking *gives* us to think. But it always gives that gift just so far as the thought-provoking matter already *is* intrinsically what must be thought about."⁸³ Being is consistently hailed as the "gift" which gives itself to thought, which demands thought as a response, not as a bringing-forth or subjugation. Again, "And what it gives us to think about, the gift it gives to us, is nothing less than itself–

itself which calls on us to enter thought.”⁸⁴ Much of Heidegger’s later work plays with the linguistic duality between giftedness and Being, translated in German as *es gibt* (“there is/it gives”) and in French as *il y a* (“there is”).⁸⁵ Being is both what “is” and what gives itself for thought, and, in turn, our thought is *given* as a response to Being.

Equally important in this regard is Heidegger’s frequent use of “calling” to signify the role of the gift of Being in bringing us to thought. In almost sheer opposition to his earlier work, it is now humans that are called by Being, to which we can only reciprocate in kind:

We are now. . . to use the word “to call” [*zu heissen*] in a signification which one might paraphrase approximately with the verbs “invite, demand, instruct, direct”. . . it. . . implies an anticipatory reaching out for something that is reached by our call, through our calling.⁸⁶

Both humans and Being call to one another mutually, such that the only proper mode of thinking is one of anticipation and response. Words thus bear the characteristics of invocations and soundings, not of a breaking-up and challenging-forth. As Heidegger states late in his life, “When mortals say, and thus encounter, they respond. Every spoken word is already a response—a reply, a saying that goes to encounter, and listens.”⁸⁷ Humans are in constant dialogue with a world to which they call and which calls them to think and respond.

This reversal with respect to the nature of thinking inevitably results in a different normative articulation of the proper posture that leads to thinking itself. Instead of (or rather softening and supplementing) the images of handling, building, and bringing-forth, Heidegger prefers images which are occasionally subservient and reliant. He states, “we must submit, deliver ourselves specifically to the calling that calls on us to think after the manner of the [*logos*].”⁸⁸ In another instance, Heidegger refers to that which gives itself

to thought as a “dowry,” to which thinking “is pledged to what is there to be thought.”⁸⁹

The posture of thinking has changed: humans are to think through the gift that gives itself to thinking, to “deliver ourselves” over to it in the name of thought itself. As J. Glenn Gray summarizes, “The call of thought is thus the call to be attentive to things as they are, to let them be as they are, and to think them and ourselves together.”⁹⁰

As has been implied in the preceding paragraphs, what “gives” itself to thought is Being. “The self-giving into the open, along with the open region itself, is Being itself.”⁹¹ Whereas Being-as-*physis* was to be brought, often violently, into unconcealment in the earlier works, Being is here that which *gives itself* to thought, though thinking remains inadequate to fully articulate or grasp Being. Thus one of the principle tasks of thinking is not the thought of Being per se, but the thought of the *difference* between humans and Being:

[T]he essential nature of thinking is determined by what there is to be thought about: the presence of what is present, the Being of beings. . . . And that is the duality of beings and Being. This quality is what properly gives food for thought. And what is so given, is the gift of what is most worthy of question.⁹²

What “gives food for thought” is the duality between being and Beings, the issue obscured in Heidegger’s early work and its undue emphasis on Dasein and circumspection. Although Heidegger’s later thought may not fully thematize *how* one is to think the difference between beings and Being (see the section on *Ereignis*, below), it is vital to see that the duality between beings and Being is now the subject of proper thinking itself. One can only adequately “respond” to Being by thinking the ontological difference.

Arguably, this principle difference between Heidegger's earlier and later thought explains his later attempt to think Being by announcing the "nearness"⁹³ between humans and Being. This nearness demands an altogether different ideal for thinking in which to think Being no longer means handling, using, or revealing a world, but responding to Being and consistently "thinking" the difference between oneself and Being. To attend to Being would mean giving oneself over to the difference between thinking and Being. Heidegger's normative role of thinking turns from one of bringing forth and circumspection to one of reception and responsibility—thinking, after the later Heidegger, is to become a process of giving oneself over to the object of thought.

Meditative Thinking and Releasement

Of course, the demand to simply "think" the difference between oneself and Being is an empty one unless it is accompanied by what the end of such inquiry might be. The question of "world" in Heidegger's early work therefore shifts to one of identifying the conditions under which the ontological difference can be clarified in the later work. Whereas the early work arrived at the question of Being and art by way of world, the later work displaces the question of world in favor of the ontological difference and specifying how one begins to think Being without obscuring such a difference.

Accompanying this new demand for thinking after the turn is a reassessment of what constitutes proper thinking. The *content* of thinking is the ontological difference; yet how one properly arrives at the thought of the ontological difference remains a persistent theme for Heidegger. One way in which he addresses the question is by playing up a theme evinced earlier in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* and *Being and Time*,⁹⁴ that

of “letting-be.” In his later thought, letting-be is signified by a number of analogical expressions. In the following quotation, it is spoken of as a “step back” from calculative thinking:

The first step toward. . . vigilance is the step back from the thinking that merely represents—that is, explains—to the thinking that responds and recalls. . . . The step back takes up its residence in a co-responding which, appealed to in the world’s being by the world’s being, answers within itself to that appeal.⁹⁵

To let Being be is to “step back” from representational and manipulative thinking and to adequately respond to Being (and beings) as they come forth. In other instances the “step back” or letting be is described as a form of “meditative thinking,” which is signified by a “not thinking which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is.”⁹⁶ Of course, Heidegger is not calling for one to not-think; rather, his use of such terminology is tactical: one must begin to remove oneself from what has been previously construed as thinking in order to begin thinking anew about Being and the ontological difference.

Heidegger’s use of “meditative” thinking in the previous quotation is apt for another reason. Namely, it invokes images of focus, patience, and openness to the world, each of which is in stark contrast to calculative and manipulative thinking. As Wayne Owens states:

Proscriptively, releasement [*Gelassenheit*] means that one gives up conventional, familiar coordinations of things, thoughts, and acts. It means that we do not interpose between ourselves and the things of the world anything—in particular, familiar and canny sorts of attachments—that might disguise their always-manifold and ever-changing character.⁹⁷

Owens’ use of “releasement” here is intentional and befits Heidegger’s use of the term as a release from conventional modes of thinking which are determinative and violent. Instead, what is required of meditative thinking and the step back is a mode of thinking

which is open and non-mediated. The hallmark of meditative thinking is that it allows Being to emerge as that which is distinct from the being through which it is seen. This preserves the ontological difference in Heidegger's mind without eroding the uniqueness of the human understanding and experience of Being. Heidegger gives a nice summary:

[S]uch thinking is neither theoretical nor practical. It comes to pass before this distinction. Such thinking is, insofar as it is, recollection of Being and nothing else. . . Such thinking has no result. It has no effect. It satisfies its essence in that it is. . . For it lets Being-be.⁹⁸

The most consistent motif surrounding the notion of meditative thinking in the later works is, as seen above, that of letting Being be. Whereas the essence of thinking was previously understood as handling and use, thinking is now given as the process whereby Being is allowed to Be itself. "Thinking. . . lets itself be claimed by Being so that it can say the truth of Being. Thinking accomplishes this letting."⁹⁹ In *Was Heisst Denken* letting be is described as the process of letting-lie: "Laying [interpreted as *legen*, a cognate of *logos*], thought as a letting-lie in the widest sense, relates to what in the widest sense lies before us, and speaks without a sound: there is [*es gibt*]."¹⁰⁰ Letting be and letting-lie are clearly not phenomenologically precise terms. Yet they do specify a fundamental disposition requisite of Heidegger's later pronouncements regarding meditative thinking inasmuch as they force one to recognize that thinking, properly practiced, is to be a patient and often receptive affair marked by a fundamental openness to that which may, or may not, appear.

One should not read Heidegger's normative injunction for patience and receptivity as a passive ideal, however. Meditative thinking is actually an active process which must be constantly maintained against the threat of calculative thinking as well as the persistent withdrawal and self-concealment of Being. In this sense, Heidegger's later

modification of his earlier assessment of building (*bauen*) is fitting, for thinking-as-building reveals the fundamental activity behind meditative thinking. Heidegger speaks of the “ecstatic dwelling in the nearness of Being,” which, “Because there is something simple to be thought in this thinking it seems quite difficult to the representational thought that has been transmitted as philosophy.” The key, then, is “concealed in the step back that lets thinking enter into a questioning that experiences. . . .”¹⁰¹ Dwelling is marked by a fundamental questioning that also experiences; arguably, dwelling (and therefore its antecedent, building) *is* meditative thinking, inasmuch as it remains near Being and questions representational thinking itself. This sense of nearness and openness is evoked in Heidegger’s commentary on the nature of building: “this word *bauen*, however, *also* means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine. Such building only takes care—it tends the growth that ripens fruit of its own accord.”¹⁰²

Thinking-as-building is consistently given with the metaphors of tending, cultivating, and stewardship, active images which evoke an overall tone of safeguarding the ability for Being to appear in spite of its difference from beings. As Heidegger states, “Thus thinking is a deed. But a deed that surpasses all *praxis*.”¹⁰³ Thinking transcends *praxis* by its very nature as stewardship: thinking does not manipulate or “do,” but tends the free space into which Being may enter. Thinking dwells for Heidegger inasmuch as it remains near and safeguards the space for emerging Being.

To be sure, this clearly means for Heidegger that thinking-as-dwelling and letting-be are directly involved in the “act” of unconcealment, though such an action is never direct or forceful. “Letting” and “bringing,” both frequently used terms in the earlier

works which evoked more directive and tactile images, are used in the later works in the sense of allowing, calling, and giving—in short, granting the opportunity for Being to appear at all. “Letting shows its character in bringing into unconcealment. To let presence means: to unconceal, to bring to openness. In unconcealing prevails a giving, the giving that gives presencing, that is, Being, in letting-presence.”¹⁰⁴ Unconcealment, a term which resonated with circumspection and the violent breaking-up in 1936, is now identified through thinking as a “letting-presence,” where Being comes into the space cleared by thinking. Heidegger gives an elegant summary of the activity of thinking and its terminus in unconcealment: “Wherever man opens his eyes and ears, unlocks his heart, and gives himself over to meditating and striving, shaping and working, entreating and thanking, he finds himself everywhere already brought into the unconcealed.”¹⁰⁵

Heidegger’s later meditations on thinking remain fixed on this constellation of concepts. In trying to express Being in terms which do not sacrifice the ontological difference, Heidegger advocates a “step back” from calculative thinking, one which amounts to meditative thinking. Meditative thinking, in turn, is an active process which remains near Being and shelters its potential unconcealment in a process that both allows for its presencing and calls for its appearance. Through this line of argument, it becomes clear that, just as in the earlier works “world” signified the relational totality opened up through circumspection, Being is now the relational totality opened up through meditative thinking. Whereas Heidegger’s earlier investigations led from world to earth to the tension between world and Being, Heidegger potentially overcomes such a rift (*Riss*) by granting that it is Being itself which appears in meditative thinking. Heidegger makes this transition in thinking clear in the following passage:

For us “world” does not at all signify beings or any realm of beings but the openness of Being. Man is, and is man, insofar as he is the ek-sisting one. He stands out into the openness of Being. Being itself, which as the throw has projected the essence of man into “care,” is as this openness.¹⁰⁶

World has now been transmuted into the openness of/for Being created through meditative thinking. Or, as Heidegger states later, “what has the character of the world is the Open itself, the whole of all that is not objective.”¹⁰⁷ There is no tension between world and earth/Being in the later works because meditative thinking is not centered on a human *Lebenswelt* from which one must then “get out of” in order to arrive at Being. If the term has any significance at all in Heidegger’s later work, world must now mean the open space for the potential unconcealment of Being safeguarded by thinking.

If, as I have argued above, Heidegger is to convincingly displace the term world in favor of “the open space” and therefore to decisively shift the question of world to one of ontology and the appearance of Being, then he must elucidate the means by which meditative thinking is to “step back” and open up a space for the presencing of Being. On this note, Heidegger’s philosophy of thinking is decisively unhelpful. It is for this reason that we now turn to poetry in Heidegger’s later thought and its relationship to meditative thinking. If successful, Heidegger’s notion of poetry should open and maintain the openness requisite for the thought of the ontological difference and the appearance of a Being which grounds the affirmative moment in life as art.

Poetry and the Open

I would like to argue in the following section that Heidegger’s later account of poetry profitably supplements and enhances his intuitions on thinking, notably his insight that

meditative thinking must be able to create and maintain an open space in which Being may appear, thereby preserving the ontological difference and allowing for an affirmation of the world. In short, poetry is given in Heidegger's later work as a necessary element within our understanding of the ontological difference; it occupies a role alongside, and no less or more important than, thinking.

As in Heidegger's earlier thought, the transition from thinking to the aesthetic is made by way of Heidegger's account of language. The following quotation shows Heidegger's seamless movement from thinking to Being to language in his later thought:

But what "is" above all is Being. Thinking accomplishes the relation of Being to the essence of man. It does not make or cause the relation to Being solely as something handed over to it from Being. Such offering consists in the fact that in thinking Being comes to language. Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells.¹⁰⁸

Thinking and language are reciprocally dependent on one another inasmuch as language expresses the coming-into-appearance of Being. Language preserves and simultaneously opens onto the event where/when Being appears. Thus language, as the "house of being," becomes a critical site within which our encounter with Being is encapsulated, opened up, and preserved. As Jeff Malpas states, language becomes the "place" where Being is allowed to give itself: "I talk of language as the 'house of being,' language is already spoken of in a way that takes language to be, in some sense, a place or 'topos,' and, as such, language does not only allow the prevailing of difference, it also gathers and unifies."¹⁰⁹

Language can only be the place of Being if it is a privileged site for the appearance of Being and facilitates the letting-be requisite of thinking. It is with these hallmarks in mind that Heidegger contends, "in terms of showing, [language] understands

showing in the sense of letting appear, which for its part depends on the ruling sway of revealing (*aletheia*).”¹¹⁰ Language is a letting-appear and a revealing, qualities likely dependent on its ability to both call (*zu heissen*) and preserve what is revealed in the calling. Hence poetry, the highest art form throughout Heidegger’s work, is consistently seen as that which “lets what presences come forth into unconcealment.”¹¹¹ Language, especially in its distillation in the poetic, allows for Being to come forth through the call into a safeguarded place granted for its appearance. The poetic achieves the same aim as thinking by both calling and shepherding the appearance of being.

This is not achieved single-handedly by the poetic, however, as poetry and language are merely the opening into which Being *may* appear or reveal itself. As Heidegger states, “Even when showing is accomplished by means of our saying, such showing or referring is preceded by a thing’s letting itself be shown.”¹¹² Language and poetry are the means by which the appearance of Being is liberated and freed for the thought of the ontological difference. In this spirit, speaking is the arena where “showing holds sway. It lets what is coming to presence shine forth,¹¹³ lets what is withdrawing into absence vanish. . . .It liberates what comes to presence to its particular presencing, spirits away what is withdrawing into absence to its particular kind of absence.”¹¹⁴ Language and poetry allow for the appearance of Being by *not* violating its possibilities for manifestation or concealment. This also has the advantage, contrary to Heidegger’s earlier work, of preserving the ontological difference which is to be the central characteristic of meditative thinking.

Heidegger’s account of language thus situates language in a double bind between speaking too much (lest it violate Being) and silence (therefore abdicating the call

altogether). It is within this double bind of language that Heidegger's wishes to situate the poetic, whose only—and yet most important—responsibility is that of *naming*. In naming, the poetic calls forth that which has been named without defining or calculating its appearance. It calls attention to Being while simultaneously safeguarding its appearance. "This naming does not hand out titles, it does not apply terms, but it calls into the word. The naming calls. Calling brings closer what it calls. . . . The call does indeed call. Thus it brings the presence of what was previously uncalled into a nearness."¹¹⁵ Of course, not just any form of naming is sufficient: Heidegger's normative definition of naming is one in which that which is named is called or invited without such an invitation violating what-is-to-appear: "The naming call bids things to come into such an arrival. Bidding is inviting. It invites things in, so that they may bear upon men as things."¹¹⁶

And it is poetry which performs the task of naming and inviting more clearly than other forms of expression or naming. Poetry, by naming without describing, allows Being to appear. Heidegger likens this ability to that of painting, though he clearly sees painting as subordinate with respect to poetry: "But the poets *bring together like painters*. They let Being appear in the aspect of the visible."¹¹⁷ And, like painting, the ability to name found most purely in the poetic allows Being to come forth as appearance, as visibility. Heidegger relates the calling-into-appearance of the poetic to Plato's concept of shining forth: "The poetical brings the true into the splendor of what Plato in the *Phaedrus* calls *ta ekphanestaton*, that which shines forth most purely. The poetical thoroughly pervades every art, every revealing of essential unfolding into the beautiful."¹¹⁸ Through Heidegger's use of the Platonic "shining forth," he renders the poetic as both that which

brings into manifestation (by allowing and naming) and that which renders visible the “most pure,” that is, what is often beyond visibility itself. He gives some hint of this in a meditation on Hölderlin: “Art, as the pointing that allows the appearance of what is *invisible*, is the highest kind of showing. The ground and the summit of such showing again unfold themselves in saying as poetic song.”¹¹⁹

Heidegger’s collective thoughts on the nature of naming and bringing into visibility reveal the true aim of the poetic: that of calling forth and clearing the open space for that which is often invisible or resides in the fold between visibility and invisibility–Being. The poet becomes a conjurer of Being, calling it forth from invisibility while still presiding over its mystery. Heidegger puts the point beautifully:

[T]he poet calls all the brightness of the sights of the sky and every sound of its courses and breezes in the singing word and there makes them shine and ring. . . . The poet calls, in the sights of the sky, that which in its very self-disclosure causes the appearance of that which conceals itself, and indeed *as* that which conceals itself. In the familiar appearances, the poet calls the alien as that to which the invisible imparts itself in order to remain what it is–unknown.¹²⁰

Dwelling and the Disclosure of the Fourfold

The seminal characteristic of Heidegger’s later account of language and the poetic is the ability of naming to establish and maintain an open space into which Being may arise and become visible, if only momentarily. As Malpas notes throughout his work on Heidegger and place, this definition of the poetic designates a topological role for poetry and language such that they are preeminently defined by their ability to create a “space” (which is, nonetheless, not a space at all) where Being is secured and admired.

It is through this architectonic that Heidegger’s thoughts on dwelling, building, and the fourfold have a place in his later thought. For it is the image of dwelling, as a

place in which things are safeguarded and welcomed, which properly signifies the role of poetry. As Heidegger states, “poetry first causes dwelling to be a dwelling. Poetry is what really lets us dwell. But through what do we attain to a building place? Through building. Poetic creation, which lets us dwell, is a kind of building.”¹²¹ Dwelling denotes a state of poetic-being in which things are welcomed and cherished in a particular space. This space is “built,” or readied, by the poetic action of calling and inviting. Dwelling is thus dependent on the initial calling given by poetry, but poetry is likewise dependent on the ability of dwelling to remain near Being and to shelter its appearance. An authentic disposition to space is one in which we create an opening for Being and remain near its revealing. “To say that mortals *are* is to say that *in dwelling* they persist through spaces by virtue of their stay among things and locales. . . . [W]e always go through spaces in such a way that we already sustain them by staying constantly with near and remote locales and things.”¹²²

This essential staying-near and sheltering is most poignantly signified in Heidegger’s notion of the “fourfold,” a term which designates the ability of a dwelling to call and protect the appearance of the earth, sky, humans (who presumably prepare the dwelling), and divinities. Heidegger notes the role of humans in preparing the space into which earth, sky, and the gods may also enter: “This simple oneness of the four we call *the fourfold*. Mortals *are* in the fourfold by *dwelling*. But the basic character of dwelling is safeguarding. . . . Mortals dwell in that they save the earth. . . . To save properly means to set something free into its own essence.”¹²³ Transitivity, then, it is also poetry which prepares the open site for the arrival of the other three members of the fourfold. Poetry and dwelling allow for the fourfold to appear inasmuch as they are both an invitation and

a preserving, a form of meditative thinking translated into language and stewardship: “In saving the earth, in receiving the sky, in awaiting the divinities, in initiating mortals, dwelling appropriates as the fourfold preservation of the fourfold. . . . But things secure the fourfold *only when* they themselves *as* things are let be in their essence.”¹²⁴ By dwelling and letting-be, we “save” the earth, sky, and divinity. Dwelling poetically becomes part of the redemptive task of living affirmatively.

Even as Heidegger pronounces what evokes the fourfold and lets it appear, however, its precise nature is often quite ambiguous. The earth and the heavens (sky) are frequently given as reciprocally dependent on one another: each supports the manifestation and being of the other. “The earth, as the structure of the heavenly ones, shelters and supports the holy, the sphere of the god. The earth is earth only as the earth of heaven; the heaven is heaven only insofar as it acts downward upon the earth.”¹²⁵ Yet it is Heidegger’s notion of “divinity,” or the “gods,” which muddies the waters. Who are they? How are they “called” by the poetic? How are they grounded in the concrete pastoralist conception of dwelling continually given by Heidegger? Malpas expresses this confusion well: “Yet of the four elements that make up the fourfold, it is also the gods who clearly present the greatest difficulty for contemporary readers—here Heidegger is often taken to be at his most obviously mystical and obscure.”¹²⁶ Heidegger’s inclusion of divinity in the fourfold reveals the limits of rationality with respect to poetry, dwelling, and meditative thinking.

It is precisely the above notion—that of the limitation of rational thought and the invocation of something wholly beyond calculative thinking—that I would emphasize in Heidegger’s account of the fourfold. While many commentators have attempted to define

Heidegger's use of divinity in the later works, I believe such a preoccupation misses the point. Rather, what is at issue here is not "who" the divinities are, but rather the fact that poetic dwelling opens up a safe place into which the unexpected, the wholly Other, and the sacred may appear. Julian Young comes close to such a notion with his conception of the "holy,"¹²⁷ but Heidegger's multivalent use of "divinity," "deities," "gods," and "the holy" indicates that whatever is called and is beyond definition does not have a univocal meaning. Heidegger's tone here borders on irrationalism, but that may be the point. In calling and securing an open site, poetic dwelling remains open to what is potentially irrational or sacred. To this end, Young rightly recognizes the "Dionysian"¹²⁸ moment within Heidegger's conception of poetic dwelling: inasmuch as the call of poetry cannot predetermine *what* is called, it must be open to whatever appears, however abyssal, disfigured, or ecstatic.

Not only is the fourth member of the fourfold wholly in keeping with the logic of meditative thinking, poetry, and dwelling, then—it is wholly necessary. For, without the irrational and sacred, Heidegger would not be able to maintain the ontological difference which meditative thinking and poetic dwelling must maintain. Earth, sky, humans, and the Other(s) must be placed in an irresolvable tension with one another such that their freedom or independence is not violated. Heidegger makes this point well: "Mirroring in this appropriating-lightening way, each of the four plays to each of the others. The appropriative mirroring sets each of the four free into its own, but it binds these free ones into the simplicity of their essential being toward one another."¹²⁹ Each element of the fourfold is dependent upon the other both literally (earth and sky, mortality and divinity) and as demanded by the nature of poetic and meditative disclosure: they can neither be

isolated (and therefore separate entities) nor collapsed into one another. Thus, as Malpas states, “[no one element] can be understood as more fundamental in that gathering”¹³⁰ brought about by poetic dwelling.

Moreover, and fittingly, the reciprocal interdependence of the elements of the fourfold recovers the central concept which has guided my analysis of Heidegger to this point: the world. Just as the world in Heidegger’s earlier work indicated a “totality of relevance” in which Dasein found itself through circumspection, the fourfold opened up by and through poetic dwelling is the interdependent nexus of relations in which humans are enmeshed. Heidegger puts the point succinctly: “The appropriating mirror-play of the simple onefold of earth and sky, divinities and mortals, we call the world.”¹³¹ Or, drawing out the connections further, Halliburton elucidates the nature of fourfold in relation to Heidegger’s previous notion of world: “the world has become synonymous, as I have said, with the fourfold, which is the totality that is, has been, and will be. . . .”¹³² The fourfold, as a system of relations disclosed through the poetic, comes to be identified with the world of Heidegger’s earlier work, given primarily through circumspection and language.

Yet there are critical differences between Heidegger’s earlier concept of world and his later notion of the fourfold. First, and likely most important, is the fact that world in the earlier work is ultimately concerned with human habitation and meaning; the fourfold, on the other hand, is only partially given by human thinking and poesy, which plays a necessary, but insufficient, role in letting the other three members of the fourfold appear. This preserves the ontological difference ultimately obfuscated by the early notion of world. Secondly, world in the early works could only be given

phenomenologically through circumspection and disclosure; the fourfold, however, *gives itself* through a poetic dwelling where its appearance is secured through a poetic naming and safeguarding. With these two critical differences, Heidegger has formally shifted the world of the earlier works into the fourfold and its associated metaphors in the later works, seemingly preserving the ontological difference through poetic dwelling. Poetic dwelling becomes the means by which Being is invited and preserved in its intrinsic Otherness; artful living accedes to the possibility of “saving” Being itself. It is therefore critical to determine the nature of poetic dwelling, and its relationship to thinking in the coming pages, as it will illuminate the affirmative dimension of life as art found in the following chapter.

Appropriation and the Event: The Space Cleared by Poetic Dwelling

Heidegger’s later thought moves from meditative thinking to poetics to dwelling, each signifying the critical role of safeguarding and inviting the appearance of Being and/or the fourfold, a critically ambiguous concept that signals both the openness and potential irrationality in Heidegger’s later thought. As the preceding paragraphs show, however, the fourfold—and thus poetic dwelling—still remains within the parameters of Heidegger’s original meditation on the Husserlian theme of the *Lebenswelt*. Heidegger’s later ruminations on world are more post-metaphysical in nature, though, and reveal a fundamental disposition towards seeing the world as that-which-appears through meditative thinking and a poetic dwelling which opens itself to multiple dimensions of experience.

This more post-metaphysical dimension of Heidegger's later thought is crystallized, I would argue, in his attempt to articulate *how* earth, sky, divinities, and mortals—in sum, Being—come to appear within poetic dwelling. An opening into the “how” of such an appearance can be given is found in the following:

But thinking is an *adventure* not only as a search and an inquiry into the unthought. Thinking, in its essence as thinking of Being, is claimed by Being. Thinking is related to Being as what arrives. Thinking as such is bound to the advent of Being, to Being as advent. . . . To bring to language ever and again this advent of Being that remains, and its remaining waits for man, is the sole matter of thinking.¹³³

Being is related to thinking and is consistently defined by Heidegger as that which “arrives,” as an “advent,” and as that which “remains” in the space cleared by thinking. Similar temporal terms are applied to the relationship between the poetic and Being: “But the poets can compose that which is in advance of their poem only if they utter that which precedes everything real: what is coming. . . . The poets are, if they stand in their essence, *prophetic*.”¹³⁴ Being, again, is evoked as “what is coming,” as something hailed by the prophetic capacities of the poets. Being is related to thinking and poetry inasmuch as Being is what appears as an advent, as that which comes and remains in thought and the poem.

As an opening into the question of “how” poetry and thought safeguard the appearance of Being, Heidegger's temporal metaphors provide a critical key. Inasmuch as Being or the fourfold appear and remain, only to fall back into concealment, their arising into the space given by poetic dwelling and meditative thinking can be spoken of as an “event.” And, after Heidegger's *Contributions to Philosophy*, he uses the untranslatable term *Ereignis* (often translated as “event” or “event of appropriation”) to refer to the process whereby Being appears momentarily within a cleared space. Humans

and Being are united in this event. As he states, “thinking sees the constellation of Being and man in terms of that which joins the two—by virtue of the event of appropriation [*Ereignis*].”¹³⁵ To clarify his use of the term, Heidegger gives the following: “*Ereignis* will be translated as Appropriation or event of Appropriation. One should bear in mind, however, that ‘event’ is not simply an occurrence, but that which makes any occurrence possible.”¹³⁶ Any thought or saying of Being is predicated upon the event through which Being is allowed to appear in the clearing given by thought and poetry.

And, just as poetry and thinking bear a multitude of meanings as that which withdraws, calls, safeguards, and preserves, *Ereignis* is revealed throughout Heidegger’s work as a multivalent term signifying the event upon which the experience of Being is founded. Malpas summarizes Heidegger’s use of the term: “Heidegger himself seems to have heard [three elements] as included in ‘*Ereignis*’: the idea of event/happening, of gathering/belonging, and of disclosing/revealing.”¹³⁷ And, in summary, Malpas gives the following: “the Event [*Ereignis*] seems to refer to something like the experience of this ‘disclosive happening.’”¹³⁸ As a “disclosive happening,” *Ereignis* signifies the simultaneous coming-together of clearing/calling/safeguarding and the appearance/manifestation/withdrawal of Being. Thus Heidegger’s temporal terms have a place within his topology of *Ereignis*, though *Ereignis* is not a temporal, but rather a poetic, event. “The event of appropriation [*Ereignis*] is that realm, vibrating within itself, through which man and Being reach each other in their nature. . . .”¹³⁹

The coming-together of humans and Being in *Ereignis* signals a dependence not on one another, but on *Ereignis* itself, wherein each reaches the other in a cleared site of

disclosure. Thus, as Heidegger recognizes, thought (and hence poetry as well) is dependent on *Ereignis*:

The spring is the abrupt entry into the realm from which man and Being have already reached each other in their active nature, since both are mutually appropriated, extended as a gift, one to the other. Only the entry into the realm of this mutual appropriation [*Ereignis*] determines and defines the experience of thinking.¹⁴⁰

Heidegger here uses “mutual appropriation” as definitive of *Ereignis* and determinative of thinking. Thinking, if it is to be authentic, must remain loyal to the experience of Being. Likewise, Being is also dependent on *Ereignis* for it to “come into its own”:

Propriation [*Ereignis*], espied in the showing of the saying, can be represented neither as an event nor as a happening; it can only be experienced in the showing of the saying as that which grants. . . . Propriating is not an outcome or a result of something else; it is the bestowal whose giving reaches out in order to grant for the first time something like a “There is/It gives,” [*es gibt*] which “being” too needs if, as presencing, it is to come into its own.¹⁴¹

Ereignis “grants” Being through its being brought-together with humans in a cleared space; yet such a space is not a “space” in the classical sense, nor is it a “happening” in the temporal sense. *Ereignis*, rather, designates the irrational and non spatio-temporal site where Being and humans meet in mutual dependence upon one another for their very nature as Ground-that-gives and as thinking-being.

If any representational meaning can be given to *Ereignis*, then, it is the fact that it stands beyond any systematic attempt at definition while still remaining central to our experience of Being and the nature of thinking and poetry. Heidegger summarizes this point well in a footnote: “Yet propriation [*Ereignis*] is essentially other, other because richer than every possible metaphysical determination of Being. On the contrary, Being lets itself be thought—with a view to its essential provenance—from out of propriation.”¹⁴²

Although *Ereignis* can only be defined negatively (as the non-spatial space, the non-temporal event), it still signifies the fortuitous *happening* in which humans and Being are disclosed to one another in poetic dwelling and meditative thinking. Authentic poesy and thinking cannot be thought outside of *Ereignis*, but only through it. In this stunning move, Heidegger has reversed the anthropocentric triumphalism of the early works and made both thinking and poetry dependent upon an irrational Event in which humans and Being are brought together: Being becomes determinative of poetry and thinking—the “happening” of Being surmounts the subordinate happenings of thinking and poetry.

It is without much difficulty, then, that *Ereignis* can be seen as the moment/space upon which our experience of the fourfold/world is derived. Malpas summarizes this critical move in Heidegger’s later thought: “The character of the Event [*Ereignis*], whether in relation to an individual life or the happening of world history, is the opening up of the world in its disclosedness and concealment.”¹⁴³ This gives Heidegger’s later concept of “world” a distinctively post-metaphysical texture: the life-world is dependent upon an indeterminable happening which brings together humans and Being for mutual appropriation. And, moreover, such a happening is only given through a form of thinking and poesy which calls, withdraws, and safeguards in such a way as to give itself over to the serendipity of *Ereignis*. *Ereignis* symbolizes the irrational and contradictory opening into which one must enter in order to experience the world. To think and to poetically dwell becomes the capacity for inviting and sustaining the happening of Being.

Poetic Thinking

The preceding discussion represents a turning point in Heidegger's later philosophy. In making thinking/poetry, as well as Being, dependent on *Ereignis*, Heidegger has effectively de-privileged human being in the experience of Being. In order to experience Being, one must "enter" into *Ereignis* through meditative thinking and poetic dwelling, a posture which nonetheless does not insure the appearance of Being. This has the ostensible advantages of both preserving the ontological difference (humans and Being remain distinct and only come together in an unnameable event) and of re-orienting the earlier conception of the world towards a poetic and disclosive happening. It also has the effect of making both Heidegger's normative conception of thinking and poetry dependent upon *Ereignis* and therefore the securing and sheltering of Being's appearance.

To this point, I have rendered poetry and thinking as distinct but common enterprises aimed at clearing a space for the appearance of Being. Yet it is through *Ereignis* that one begins to see that Heidegger uses the terms interchangeably, often even identifying the task of one with the other. For example, "Every thinking that is on the trail of something is a poetizing, and all poetry a thinking. Each coheres with the other on the basis of the saying that has already pledged itself to the unsaid, the saying whose thinking is a thanking."¹⁴⁴ Or, as he states earlier in his career, "thought and poesy are in themselves the originary, the essential, and therefore also the final speech that language speaks through the mouth of man."¹⁴⁵ Both poetry and thinking are united in the project of bringing to voice the experience of the originary appearance of Being, a voice which, if we take Heidegger's thoughts on language seriously, simultaneously calls and preserves the experience of Being. Both are, in effect, united in their common fealty to *Ereignis*. As White summarizes, "every effort at thought, whether philosophical in the

traditional sense or in Heidegger's quasi-revisionist sense, requires the conjunction of thinking and poetizing."¹⁴⁶

The conjunction of poetry and thinking, however, does not mean that each becomes wholly identifiable with the other. Heidegger consistently advocates a distinction between poetry and thinking, even if they remain dedicated to a common goal and are supplementary with respect to one another. "Poetry and thinking meet each other in one and the same only when, and only as long as, they remain distinctly in the distinctness of their nature."¹⁴⁷ Such a distinction would of course maintain the preeminent role of thinking as the act of withdrawing, calling, and questioning, while poetic dwelling is a form of invitation, naming, and safeguarding that helps preserve the initial encounter with Being. As Heidegger states, "But precisely because thinking does not make poetry, but is a primal telling and speaking of language, it must stay close to poesy."¹⁴⁸ Or, reciprocally, "the poet needs the thinkers to guard and to preserve the disclosure of the holy."¹⁴⁹ Both poetry and thinking must "stay close" to one another in order to enter into *Ereignis* and the possible appearance of Being. This undoubtedly means that poetry and thinking, while distinct, are dependent upon one another. "In some respects, poetizing and thinking are identical. . . . But in other respects, there is dependency of the one on the other, that is, the one cannot be what it is without the agency of the other."¹⁵⁰

I would therefore advocate, as others have done, the conjunction of meditative thinking and poetic dwelling into a unified form of acting and being which supplies the sufficient conditions (at least from the human end) for the appearance of Being—poetic thinking. *Poetic thinking* is committed to the conjunctive task of inviting, preparing,

safeguarding, and preserving the appearance of Being. It is the means by which humans arrive at any experience of Being in Heidegger's later thought. Perotti signals this similarity of commitment: "The poet, like the thinker, is claimed by Being; poetry is a response to Being. The poet can also be said to be claimed by the gods, the heralds of the god."¹⁵¹ And, though Heidegger clearly reserves a singular place for poets in their response and relationship to divinity,¹⁵² the experience of Being given by the poetic is insufficient and in need of the preparation given by thinking. Thus one arrives, as Heidegger notes here in a poem, at the necessity of a "poetry that thinks":

The poetic character of thinking is
still veiled over. . . .

But poetry that thinks is in truth
the topology of Being.

This topology tells Being the
whereabouts of its actual
presence.¹⁵³

Poetic thinking understands the "topology" of Being, the space in which Being appears and potentially resides. If anything, this indicates the narrow road from poetic thinking to *Ereignis*, the cleared space given over to Being. Poetic thinking, as a conjunctive term, designates the task of thinking, acting, saying, and dwelling which opens itself up to something wholly other.

What the "other" is, as Heidegger consistently indicates, is beyond articulation. The nature of *Ereignis* prevents any easy identification of the nature of Being; an unnameable event cannot give rise to something that lends itself to naming. As Heidegger repeatedly states, Being, especially if it gives itself through *Ereignis*, remains beyond designation. For example, "But if man is to find his way once again into the nearness of

Being he must first learn to exist in the nameless.”¹⁵⁴ Or, “Being is farther than all beings and is yet nearer to man than every being, be it a rock, a beast, a work of art, a machine, be it an angel or God.”¹⁵⁵ Being, though it may be spoken of as the “ground” of beings, cannot be articulated or thought. What gives itself to thought remains unthinkable; the ground of thinking cannot itself be thought. Being remains the “most completely fulfilled secret of all thinking,”¹⁵⁶ which nonetheless presents itself for thinking.

Poetic thinking commits itself to thinking the “secret” which grounds all thinking and poetry. In spite of this commitment, however, it abdicates the ability to conceptualize or unify that-which-appears. It can only be named (albeit incompletely) and thought (albeit negatively). Poetic thinking therefore cannot be positively construed as having distinct content or subject-matter; rather, it is a method which only provisionally secures the means by which Being may appear.

In poetic thinking, Heidegger has effectively maintained the ontological difference which plagued his earlier work, instead privileging a “happening” for the emergence and sustenance of Being. Poetic thinking, by combining acts of thinking, poesy, and dwelling, shows itself to be a total effort dedicated to the event of disclosure. As such, it forms the basis for the positive moment of aesthetic judgment in life as art. By linking thinking and being to Being, Heidegger has shown the ways in which the artful life may be receptive to the happening of Being through certain epistemic and poetic practices.

IV: Conclusions

My examination of the relevance of Heidegger for life as art began with the preliminary problem initiated by Husserl in his *Ideas*: how are we to give an account of the world in which we find ourselves and through which we know beings? This entry point into the early phenomenology of Heidegger forced an examination of his seminal concept of being-in-the-world, which then turned to Heidegger's analysis of circumspection and its revealing of a "totality of relevance" associated with equipment and human use. This analysis was furthered by Heidegger's aesthetics, where the world of the earlier writings was placed in tension with earth, a tension which ultimately led Heidegger to see that the concept of world was limited and therefore an inadequate starting point for ontology. This conception was led to its logical conclusion in the lectures of 1936, where Heidegger's advocacy of a hermeneutic of violence ultimately led to the dissolution of the distinction between world and earth and the sacrifice of any ontological difference between Dasein and Being.

Cast into this problematic, Heidegger's later thought seeks to conceive of the ontological difference by reconceiving both thinking and art. For thinking, this means a "step back" towards a thinking which is meditative, patient, and open; for art, specifically poetry, this means a form of inviting and safeguarding the appearance of Being through naming and dwelling. Both are committed to the task of clearing a space for *Ereignis*, a singularity where both humans and Being are brought into mutual appropriation of one another. This happening can only be achieved through poetic thinking, an ascetic practice which unites poetic dwelling and thinking in common loyalty to an unnameable Being.

What Heidegger contributes to life as art is the conception of poetic thinking.

Poetic thinking is the basis for the positive dimension of aesthetic judgment, one which is

held in tension with the negative dimension of aesthetic judgment examined in chapter three. This indicates a reciprocal dependence between resistance and affirmation: the negative moment creates the necessary space for a poetic thinking which encounters Being, while the positive moment renews the necessity of resistance. Poetic thinking affirms such that negative thinking has a reason to resist. Without the experience of Being, the negative moment of life as art becomes destructive, un-animated by the experience and affirmation of Being.

As Heidegger shows, if life as art is to contain a positive moment, then such a moment must be capable of “thinking” Being without dissolving it into the being that thinks. Heidegger’s poetic thinking, forged against the findings of Husserl and Heidegger’s own early thought, allows for the “thought” of that which is positive—the world, the fourfold, or Being—while still preserving the ontological difference. This comes with some cost, however: in preserving the ontological difference, Being can only be that which is unnameable and occasionally revealed through poetic thinking and *Ereignis*.

As a normative conception of how one thinks, Heidegger’s notion of poetic thinking also has the ostensible consequence of formalizing the connection between thinking and art. Whereas in the previous chapter Adorno and Marcuse conceived of thinking and art as united through their common loyalty to particularity, Heidegger’s poetic thinking links thinking and art both functionally and ontologically. Functionally, it shows the common aim of both thinking and art as meditative practices; ontologically, it reveals the intrinsic connection between poetry and thinking in calling, encountering, and preserving Being. If life as art, as I have been contending, is to be seen as a series of

connected discourses on the linkage between thinking, art, and living, then Heidegger's conjunctive use of poetic thinking forms a concise formulation of how one is to adequately conceive of Being.

Heidegger's work is by no means complete, however, and, as the following chapter will show, poetic thinking should be profitably supplemented by Merleau-Ponty's conception of the body and Being, along with Marion's notion of revelation. If poetic thinking is to retain any meaning within life as art, it must do so in a way that accords with our understanding of both the body and the interconnected world in which we find ourselves.

Endnotes

¹ See, for example, Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?* [WCT], trans., J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1968), 83: “[A]ll men are soon placed in identical conditions of identical happiness in the identical way. . . . Yet, despite the invention of happiness, man is driven from one world war into the next. With a wink the nations are informed that peace is the elimination of war, but that meanwhile this peace which eliminates war can be secured only by war.” Also see, in Heidegger’s *Discourse on Thinking*, this observation, which calls upon the dislocatedness of modern humanity: “And those who *have* stayed on in their homeland? Often they are still more homeless than those who have been driven from their homeland. Hourly and daily they are chained to radio and television. Week after week the movies carry them into the uncommon, but often merely common, realms of the imagination, and give the illusion of a world that is no world. . . . the *rootedness*, the *autochthony*, of man is threatened today at its core!” Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking* [DoT], trans., John Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 45.

² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* [PoP], trans., Colin Smith (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 266.

³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense* [SNS], trans, Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 52.

⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology* [HLP], trans., Leonard Lawlor, eds., Leonard Lawlor and Bettina Bergo (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 9.

⁵ Michael Smith, “Merleau-Ponty’s Aesthetics,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed., Galen Johnson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 197.

⁶ Paul Crowther, “Merleau-Ponty: Perception into Art,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 22 (1982): 138. Also note the following from Robert Burch: “[Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty’s] task is to undercut or subvert the originality of the subject/object split, and their language is that of ‘origin’ and ‘stepping back.’ They seek to uncover a transcendence that is the ‘concealed source’ of experience, prior to all mere ‘beginnings.’ . . . Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger seek a more radical recovery of the origin of such meanings in the creative communion of self and world.” Robert Burch, “On the Topic of Art and Truth: Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and the Transcendental Turn,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed., Galen Johnson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 356.

⁷ As shown in Nietzsche’s early analysis of the Apollinian and Dionysian elements of tragedy.

⁸ Heidegger’s early motif of *Destruktion* is apt here.

⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* [VI], trans, Alphonso Lingis, ed., Claude Lefort (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 52.

¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, AR, 138.

¹¹ See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book*, trans., F. Kersten (Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1983).

¹² For more on Husserl and Heidegger with respect to intentionality, see Taylor Carman, "The Principle of Phenomenology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed., Charles Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 105ff.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* [BT], trans., Joan Stambaugh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 30.

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* [IM], trans., Ralph Manheim (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 13.

¹⁵ Heidegger, IM, 11. Note here that I have chosen to use Dasein instead of "humans" or "existence" or "human being-there" or any of its other typically translated variants.

¹⁶ Heidegger, BT, 5. Also see, for example, 35.

¹⁷ Heidegger, BT, 10.

¹⁸ Heidegger, BT, 334.

¹⁹ Heidegger, BT, 11.

²⁰ Heidegger, BT, 71.

²¹ Heidegger, BT, 49.

²² This recognition should also be seen as an opening for Heidegger's ontology: if the world is the ground of our experience of things in the world as a consequence of its unity, then "world" would be indissociable from Being (otherwise Being would be seen as purely transcendent of our unified apprehension of the world).

²³ Heidegger, BT, 62. Also see David Halliburton, *Poetic Thinking: An Approach to Heidegger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 4f.

²⁴ Heidegger, BT, 58.

²⁵ Heidegger, BT, 63.

²⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings* [BW], ed., David Farrell Krell (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1993), 155.

²⁷ Heidegger, BT, 65.

²⁸ See, for the first use of the term, Heidegger, BT, 65.

²⁹ Heidegger, BT, 74.

³⁰ Heidegger, BT, 328.

³¹ Heidegger, BT, 51.

³² Heidegger, BT, 64. Also note the following from 78: "Beings are discovered with regard to the fact that they are referred, as those beings which they are, to

something. They are relevant *together with* something else. The character of being of things at hand is *relevance*. To be relevant means to let something be together with something else. The relation of ‘together . . . with . . .’ is to be indicated by the term *relevance*.”

³³ See Heidegger, BT, 333: “The understanding of a totality of relevance inherent in circumspect taking care is grounded in a previous understanding of the relations of in-order-to, what-for, for-that, and for-the-sake-of-which. . . . Their unity constitutes what we call world.”

³⁴ See Krell’s marginal notes to Heidegger’s BW, 141.

³⁵ Heidegger, BT, 133.

³⁶ Heidegger, BW, 170.

³⁷ Heidegger, BW, 171.

³⁸ Heidegger, BW, 170.

³⁹ Note here the difference with Adorno’s aesthetics, where Adorno is more inclined to specify how *Geist* arises in the work of art.

⁴⁰ Heidegger, BW, 168.

⁴¹ Heidegger, BW, 174.

⁴² Heidegger, BW, 168.

⁴³ Heidegger, IM, 16 and 25, respectively.

⁴⁴ Heidegger, IM, 71.

⁴⁵ Heidegger, BW, 172.

⁴⁶ Halliburton, 28.

⁴⁷ Julian Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 38.

⁴⁸ Heidegger, BW, 194.

⁴⁹ This conception of art as self-undermining has critical affinities to Adorno’s concept of the dissonant image in artworks.

⁵⁰ Heidegger, IM, 13.

⁵¹ Martin Heidegger, *Elucidations of Holderlin's Poetry* [EHP], trans., Keith Hoeller (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000), 55.

⁵² Heidegger, IM, 124.

⁵³ Heidegger, IM, 128.

⁵⁴ Heidegger, IM, 159.

⁵⁵ See Heidegger, IM, 160.

⁵⁶ Heidegger, BW, 184.

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- ⁵⁷ Heidegger, BW, 198.
- ⁵⁸ Heidegger, BW, 197.
- ⁵⁹ Heidegger, EHP, 60.
- ⁶⁰ Heidegger, BW, 198.
- ⁶¹ Heidegger, BT, 33-4.
- ⁶² Julian Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art*, 40.
- ⁶³ Heidegger, IM, 114.
- ⁶⁴ Heidegger, IM, 139.
- ⁶⁵ Heidegger, IM, 145.
- ⁶⁶ Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 6.
- ⁶⁷ Heidegger, BW, 125.
- ⁶⁸ Heidegger, BW, 127.
- ⁶⁹ See, for example, BW, 130 and 134.
- ⁷⁰ Heidegger, IM, 170.
- ⁷¹ Heidegger, IM, 169.
- ⁷² Heidegger, IM, 171.
- ⁷³ Heidegger, IM, 157. Also see here Halliburton, 134: "[The putting-into-work of Being] is a struggle, a use of violence, for Being does not come forth on its own; it must be brought forth—almost fought forth—into manifestation. Hence *techne* constitutes a fundamental characteristic of *deinon*."
- ⁷⁴ Heidegger, IM, 191.
- ⁷⁵ Heidegger, IM, 163. Also see IM, 177: "[Dasein] has this possibility [of breaking the preponderant power of being] not as an empty evasion; no, insofar as it is, [Dasein] *is* this possibility, for as [Dasein] it must, in every act of violence, shatter against being."
- ⁷⁶ Heidegger, IM, 205.
- ⁷⁷ I am indebted here to the analysis of Jean-Luc Marion in his *Reduction and Givenness*, where the ontological difference becomes Marion's critical point of engagement with both Husserl and Heidegger, and, ultimately, the ground upon which he begins his analysis of givenness. See Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology* [RG], trans., Thomas Carlson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 130-133, and 167 for a few critical examples.
- ⁷⁸ Halliburton, 21.
- ⁷⁹ Heidegger, WCT, 36.

⁸⁰ Heidegger, BW, 234.

⁸¹ Malpas, 173.

⁸² As we will see in the chapter, this more receptive notion of humans with respect to Being has radical consequences for the affirmative moment in life as art, as life as art effectively enjoins humans to an ethics of receptivity and calling, not the forms of bringing-forth seen in Heidegger's early work.

⁸³ Heidegger, WCT, 4.

⁸⁴ Heidegger, WCT, 121.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being* [TB], trans., Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 6 as well as 10, where Heidegger claims, "what is peculiar to Being, that to which Being belongs and in which it remains retained, shows itself in the It gives and its giving as sending."

⁸⁶ Heidegger, WCT, 117.

⁸⁷ Heidegger, BW, 418.

⁸⁸ Heidegger, WCT, 165.

⁸⁹ Heidegger, WCT, 142-3.

⁹⁰ See J. Glenn Gray's introduction to *What is Called Thinking?*, xiv-v.

⁹¹ Heidegger, 238.

⁹² Heidegger, 244.

⁹³ Heidegger, BW, 245.

⁹⁴ See BT, 161, for example, where Heidegger speaks of a "reflective staying."

⁹⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* [PLT], trans., Albert Hofstadter (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1971), 179.

⁹⁶ Heidegger, DoT, 46.

⁹⁷ Daniel Owens, "Heidegger's Philosophy of Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 29, no. 2 (1989): 131.

⁹⁸ Heidegger, BW, 259.

⁹⁹ Heidegger, BW, 218.

¹⁰⁰ Heidegger, WCT, 206-7. For more on "letting be," also see WCT, 191: "To use' means, first, to let a thing be what it is and how it is. To let it be this way requires that the used thing be cared for in its essential nature—we do so by responding to the demands which the used thing makes manifest in the given instance." Note here the shift in function of the term "use" from *Being and Time*. Also see *Ibid*, 41ff and 211ff.

¹⁰¹ Heidegger, BW, 246.

¹⁰² Heidegger, BW, 349.

¹⁰³ Heidegger, BW, 262. Also see Gray, xii: “Thinking is unlike any other act insofar as it is an act at all. It is a calling in more than one sense of that richly evocative word.”

¹⁰⁴ Heidegger, TB, 5.

¹⁰⁵ Heidegger, BW, 324.

¹⁰⁶ Heidegger, BW, 252.

¹⁰⁷ Heidegger, PLT, 104. Also see James Perotti, *Heidegger on the Divine: The Thinker, the Poet and God* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1974), 81: “Man is, then, in the world as that place (*da*) where Being is cleared; man dwells in the openness of the Open (Being). The world is that wherein man dwells.”

¹⁰⁸ Heidegger, BW, 217.

¹⁰⁹ Malpas, 266.

¹¹⁰ Heidegger, BW, 401.

¹¹¹ Heidegger, BW, 326.

¹¹² Heidegger, BW, 410.

¹¹³ See paragraphs below on shining forth, especially Heidegger’s meditation on Plato’s *Phaedrus*.

¹¹⁴ Heidegger, BW, 413-4.

¹¹⁵ Heidegger, PLT, 196. Also note Heidegger’s insistence on calling in EHP, 215: “Naming unveils, reveals. Naming is the showing which allows experience. However, if this naming must take place in such a way that it withdraws from the nearness of what is to be named, then such saying of the distant, as saying into the distance, becomes calling. . . . The name must [also] veil. The naming, as the revealing call, is at the same time a concealing.”

¹¹⁶ Heidegger, PLT, 197.

¹¹⁷ Heidegger, EHP, 156. Also see the discussion on Merleau-Ponty’s privileging of painting below.

¹¹⁸ Heidegger, BW, 340. Also see, in this regard, BW, 414, where Heidegger states: “[A]ll shining and fading depend on the saying that shows. It liberates what comes to presence to its particular presencing, spirits away what is withdrawing into absence to its particular kind of absence.”

¹¹⁹ Heidegger, EHP, 186, italics added. Also note here the connection with Merleau-Ponty’s later theory of art, noted in the following chapter, of bringing the invisible into visibility.

¹²⁰ Heidegger, PLT, 223.

¹²¹ Heidegger, PLT, 213.

¹²² Heidegger, BW, 359.

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- ¹²³ Heidegger, BW, 352.
- ¹²⁴ Heidegger, BW, 353.
- ¹²⁵ Heidegger, EHP, 186.
- ¹²⁶ Malpas, 274.
- ¹²⁷ See, for example, Julian Young, "The Fourfold," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed., Charles Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 377.
- ¹²⁸ Julian Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art*, 99.
- ¹²⁹ Heidegger, PLT, 177.
- ¹³⁰ Malpas, 239.
- ¹³¹ Heidegger, PLT, 177. Also note here Julian Young, "Artwork and Sportwork: Heideggerian Reflections," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57, no. 2 (1999): 269: "In Heidegger's later philosophy. . . 'world' is identified with the fourfold."
- ¹³² Halliburton, 176.
- ¹³³ Heidegger, BW, 264.
- ¹³⁴ Heidegger, EHP, 136. Also see PLT, 139: "[The poet] arrives out of the future, in such a way that the future is present only in the arrival of his words. The more purely the arrival happens, the more its remaining occurs as present. The greater the concealment with which what is to come maintains its reserve in the foretelling saying, the purer is the arrival."
- ¹³⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference* [ID], trans., Joan Stambaugh (New York City: Harper and Row, 1969), 40.
- ¹³⁶ Heidegger, TB, 19.
- ¹³⁷ Malpas, 216.
- ¹³⁸ Malpas, 218.
- ¹³⁹ Heidegger, ID, 37.
- ¹⁴⁰ Heidegger, ID, 33.
- ¹⁴¹ Heidegger, BW, 415.
- ¹⁴² Heidegger, BW, 417n.
- ¹⁴³ Malpas, 302; Also see the diagram on page 225 of Malpas for a graphical elucidation of *Ereignis*.
- ¹⁴⁴ Heidegger, BW, 425.
- ¹⁴⁵ Heidegger, WCT, 128.
- ¹⁴⁶ David White, *Heidegger and the Language of Poetry* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 144.

¹⁴⁷ Heidegger, PLT, 216.

¹⁴⁸ Heidegger, WCT, 135. Of interest is also Heidegger's extended work in EHP with the poetry of Holderlin, where he states the following: "The thinker thinks toward what is un-homelike, what is not like home, and for him this is not a transitional phase; rather, this is his being *at home*. The poet's questioning, on the other hand, is a commemorative questioning that puts the homelike itself into poetry." Heidegger, EHP, 151.

¹⁴⁹ Perotti, 108.

¹⁵⁰ White, 144.

¹⁵¹ Perotti, 103.

¹⁵² See, for example, EHP, 90.

¹⁵³ Heidegger, PLT, 12.

¹⁵⁴ Heidegger, BW, 223.

¹⁵⁵ Heidegger, BW, 234.

¹⁵⁶ Heidegger, WCT, 174.

Chapter 4: Affirmation

Merleau-Ponty and Marion on the Thought of Being

Since perception itself is never complete, since our perspectives give us a world to express and think about that envelops and exceeds those perspectives, a world that announces itself in lightning signs as a spoken word or an arabesque, why should the expression of the world be subjected to the prose of the *senses* or of the concept? It must be poetry; that is, it must completely awaken and recall our sheer power of expressing beyond things already said or seen.

– Maurice Merleau-Ponty,
“Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence”

Thus with a mere painting, it is still not a matter of receiving a revelation; but in the face of the unforeseeable, it already admits without any doubt the greatest secret of the unseen—the fact that it gives itself. The visible always gives itself to the unforeseen, as the unforeseen. It appears as the unforeseen because it gives itself, by itself, and on the basis of itself.

– Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*

I: Introduction

My aim in this chapter, as stated in the preceding excursus, is to “think together” the insights of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Marion given their common commitment to ontology, the phenomenological method, and the intrinsic connection made by each thinker between thinking and art. Yet “thinking together” as a method also means transcending these commonalities and marking critical differences between each thinker and using areas of insight from one thinker to fill lacunae in another. This is the spirit in which I propose the phenomenology and later ontology of Merleau-Ponty and Marion should be read against *and* through that of Heidegger.

This move would constitute a more constructive elaboration of the positive dimension of aesthetic judgment outlined in the preceding excursus. If critical theory is seen as the negative dimension of aesthetic judgment, freeing up a space for creative

renewal and elaborating future possibilities, the present chapter is to be seen as an affirmative moment in life as art which lends gravity and meaning to efforts of resistance and the creation of an artful self. As we saw in Heidegger's thought, the positive dimension of aesthetic judgment outlines the possibility for the experience of Being in certain forms of thinking and living, an experience which ultimately affirms the world and gives meaning to the aesthetic task. The more constructive treatment of Merleau-Ponty and Marion in this chapter is an effort to further elaborate the possibilities and dimensions of this positive moment and how it comports with life as art as a whole. As we will see, life as art should be seen not only in terms of resistance and the creation of alternate realities, but as a concerted effort to experience and affirm the world through the various dimensions of one's life.

In Heidegger's later thought we have seen that poetic thinking provisionally outlines a means by which one can begin to think the ontological difference and the *Lebenswelt* by constructively assimilating the aim and fruits of thinking and poetry with one another. Poetic thinking, as a normative concept, works towards opening and safeguarding a space into which Being may enter. Despite this critical strength, however, Heidegger's notion of poetic thinking has three critical gaps which need to be explored in order to have a more robust notion of the positive moment within life as art. They are: 1) an insufficient account of the role of the body in the exploration and discovery of the "world" in both the early and later works; 2) a consistent privileging of poetry in Heidegger's aesthetics which leaves undeveloped particular areas of aesthetic experience; and 3), an account of Being which is wholly negative in nature. It is into these three gaps

that I wish to situate the thought of Merleau-Ponty as both a critical and supplementary voice within life as art.

Given the above, this chapter proceeds by outlining Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body, supplemented with his accounts of language and painting. As in Heidegger before, Merleau-Ponty's early phenomenology and aesthetics leads him further into ontology, and therefore this section concludes with a discussion of Merleau-Ponty's later unfinished ontology and its constructive development by Renaud Barbaras. Through this arc of argumentation, Merleau-Ponty's thought will allow for a constructive enrichment of Heidegger's phenomenology and ontology without diminishing the insights of his poetic thinking. These themes are then taken up into the work of Marion, whose account of givenness reveals the possibility for revelation in everyday life.

By combining the insights of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Marion, the positive dimension of aesthetic judgment within life as art will show the ways in which an embodied form of poetic thinking opens itself up to a rich and multi-faceted experience of a complex world. This experience holds the potential for affirming the immanent and visible world, and therefore for imbuing daily life with ecstatic meaning and the impetus for creative renewal. By combining the essence of embodied thinking, the aesthetic, and Being revealed through the conjunctive practice of embodied poetic thinking in one's daily life, the positive moment in life as art withholds the possibility of reviving a sense of mystery and sacrality within the immanent.

II: Merleau-Ponty

Beyond Husserl and Heidegger

Filling some of the critical gaps of Heidegger, as I suggest above, can only occur by retracing some of the territory—and therefore the questions—which Heidegger marked out in his early and later works. As before, the elucidation of the *Lebenswelt* and its potential elaboration through a pre-reflective realm become crucial to beginning any account of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. To this end, Merleau-Ponty, even in his later work, is clear in his attempt to demarcate the “indecisive milieu” which is the “very sphere of our life, and of our life of knowledge,”¹ an effort which no doubt has echoes of Husserl's project. Thus Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, like Heidegger and others before him, seeks to clarify the “world,” that which is given as the “*homeland* of our thoughts.”² Elucidating the phenomenological category of world remains the crucial interpretive entry point into Merleau-Ponty's thought.

Though the thematic of Merleau-Ponty's inquiry may be Husserlian in nature, his phenomenology has critical differences with the Husserlian project, the most important of which is his emphasis on the role of the body and his marked later turn to ontology. As Renaud Barbaras recommends, then, Merleau-Ponty's work should be seen, like Heidegger's before him, as a *completion* of Husserl's project.³ Completing Husserl's project, however, requires a different direction and scope than Husserl himself had imagined in either the *Ideas* or *Cartesian Meditations*. Instead of a phenomenological reduction leading to a *Lebenswelt* given through eidetic intuition, Merleau-Ponty seeks to return to the “things themselves” through perception and a renewed attempt to elaborate things as they appear concretely in our lives. This amounts to a renewal of the practice of philosophy. Merleau-Ponty is worth quoting here at some length:

The first philosophical act would appear to be to return to the world of actual experience which is prior to the objective world, since it is in it

that we shall be able to grasp the theoretical basis no less than the limits of that objective world, restore to things their concrete physiognomy, to organisms their individual ways of dealing with the world, and to subjectivity its inherence in history. Our task will be, moreover, to rediscover phenomena, the layer of living experience through which other people and things are first given to us. . . to reawaken perception and foil its trick of allowing us to forget it as a fact and as perception in the interest of the object which it presents to us and of the rational tradition to which it gives rise.⁴

Merleau-Ponty's attempt to elaborate the *Lebenswelt*—as a “first philosophical act”—turns on its ability to “restore,” “reawaken,” or “rediscover” phenomena as they appear(ed) before being concealed by reflection. This move is to be made with the utmost loyalty to Husserl's own directives, though not with the phenomenological strictures Husserl placed on the possibility of phenomena. Perception, not essence, is to become the major mode of access into the things themselves.

Using perception as an entry point into phenomenology is also in marked contrast to Heidegger, who in *Being and Time* dismissed the possibility of perception and the body as revealing the world.⁵ Instead, Heidegger is silent on the role of perception and the body in disclosing a world through circumspection: handling and seizing (both bodily phenomena) are given as sufficient conditions for disclosing a pre-reflective world that illuminates the being-in-the-world of Dasein. The question thus becomes: which is more primordial (and therefore yields better access to a grounding notion of the life-world), circumspection or perception? Merleau-Ponty's position here is clear: “Perception is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them.”⁶ Perception, for Merleau-Ponty, is antecedent to anything like circumspection; in order to have a manifest

concept of equipmental being, one must first specify the conditions for one's even noticing the existence of equipment in the first place.

I will not seek to resolve the relative merits of whether Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty yield better access to the "world," though it is clear that Merleau-Ponty's account has the ostensible advantage of grounding a phenomenon like circumspection without itself being referred to another phenomenon. Moreover, it allows for a further conceptualization of the role of the body in human being-in-the-world which lends itself to a more thoroughgoing analysis of visibility and its role in aesthetics. In the end, by beginning with perception, Merleau-Ponty is forced to advocate a novel theory of the body, art, and ontology which remains prescient for life as art and the renewal of meaning in one's daily life. It is to this developmental trajectory that I now turn.

A Phenomenology of Perception: An Opening to "World"

The Perceptual Field

Merleau-Ponty's attempt to overcome the Husserlian problematic begins at the most elemental level of human experience, that of perception. Whereas Husserl and Heidegger began with intuition and circumspection, respectively, Merleau-Ponty's early work seeks to undergird an understanding of the life-world through an analysis of perception. The movement here is even more decisively towards grounding our experience of world on a pre-reflective absorption in phenomena:

[T]he perception of our own body and the perception of external things provide an example of *non-positing* consciousness, that is, of consciousness not in possession of fully determinate objects, that of a *logic lived through* which cannot account for itself, and that of an *immanent meaning* which is not clear to itself and becomes fully aware of itself only through experiencing certain natural signs.⁷

Perception is a non-objective mode of apprehending the world, a way of *being* and “living through” prior to our positing of such a being or living in consciousness. Consciousness is to be seen as derivative from our primordial and embodied moving within the world; our initial encounter with the world is one in which meaning and full determinacy only achieve articulation at a later and unspecified moment in consciousness. Merleau-Ponty summarizes his move to see perception as primary: “By. . . the ‘primacy of perception,’ we mean that. . . perception is a nascent *logos*; that it teaches us, outside of all dogmatism, the true conditions of objectivity itself; that it summons us to the tasks of knowledge and action.”⁸

Merleau-Ponty’s assertion of perception as the primary datum through which we phenomenologically obtain the world defines the limits of his own inquiry. For, if perception is primary, then one must begin with an analysis of the perceptual field, that which circumscribes perception and opens up the possibilities for a world. As Merleau-Ponty states, “The perceptual ‘something’ is always in the middle of something else, it always forms part of a ‘field.’”⁹ The perceptual field is subsequently defined by Merleau-Ponty as the “inner diaphragm which determines. . . what our reflexes and perceptions will be able to aim at in the world, the area of our possible operations,”¹⁰ a definition which renders clear the connection between perception and the world. Perception simultaneously opens us up to, and limits, the possibilities in which we might move or find ourselves. A perceptual field, then, is what Merleau-Ponty calls a “whole perceptual context,”¹¹ a notion which has clear resonances with Heidegger’s concept of world as a “totality of relevance,” but is distinguished by its inherence in perception and the

abdication—at least provisionally—of any connection to equipment, usage, or the other pastoral hallmarks of Heidegger’s concept of circumspection.

This is not to say that Merleau-Ponty’s concept of a perceptual field lacks any connection to “meaning” or the possibilities for human value. By starting with perception and the body, however, Merleau-Ponty has reframed the constitution of “meaning” as that which allows for my movement, self-location, and embodied intention towards sights, sounds, smells, etc. Meaning, thus redefined, becomes the means by which our embodied intention is guided through the perceptual field.

When I glance rapidly about at the objects surrounding me in order to find my bearings and locate myself among them, I scarcely can be said to grasp the world in some instantaneous aspect. I identify here the door, there the window, over there my table, all of which are the props and guides of a practical intention directed elsewhere, and which are therefore given to me simply as meanings.¹²

Though Merleau-Ponty’s analysis here, and in many other instances, has resonances of Heidegger’s notion of circumspection, there are crucial differences. Objects in the world are not simply “on hand” (*Zuhandenheit*) for use and manipulation, but are given as “props and guides” for bodily movement, whether it be grasping, avoiding, or providing a perceptual context for other objects in the world. Objects form a synthetic whole within which our body must move, see, feel, and find itself. Paul Crowther gives a summary: “We find in perception not atoms of sensation or pure sense data, but nodes of ‘meaning’ which emerge as a foreground. . . against the background depth of the whole perceptual field.”¹³ Meaning has been carefully redefined by Merleau-Ponty to indicate the more primordial significance of objects, namely that of guiding and orienting our sense of embodiment and movement in the world.

This reassessment of meaning by Merleau-Ponty is most evident in his frequent citation of the instance of the German patient Schneider, who suffered a brain injury which rendered him incapable of perceiving the world without conscious direction (either from himself or from attending psychologists). As an agnosic, Schneider is unable to detect meaning within his perceptual field: the world appears to him merely as “readymade or congealed.” “For [Schneider] the world exists only as one readymade or congealed, whereas for the normal person his projects polarize the world, bringing magically to view a host of signs which guide action, as notices in a museum guide a visitor.”¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty continues, “In the normal subject the object ‘speaks’ and is significant. . . .”¹⁵ Schneider’s condition has made him unable to detect meaning and significance in the surrounding environment, an ability “normal” subjects possess without reflection or even awareness.

To this normal state of detecting meaning within a perceptual field Merleau-Ponty grants the title of “physiognomic perception,”¹⁶ a term which explicitly evokes images of detecting a “face” within objects themselves. Correlatively, meaning is found/constructed within a perceptual field by virtue of what Merleau-Ponty calls an “intentional arc,” the ability to detect within an environment structures and objects which resonate with a series of cultural, sensual, and intellectual cues.

[T]he life of desire or perceptual life—is subtended by an “intentional arc” which projects round about us our past, our future, our human setting, our physical, ideological and moral situation, or rather which results in our being situated in all these respects.¹⁷

The intentional arc is at least partially determinative of the structuring of the perceptual field and the identification of objects and groupings which bear a concrete physiognomy relevant to us as subjects. This structuring of perception gives each perceptual event a

coherent “thickness”: the perceptual event is ordered not only through spatial cues such as depth, color, and movement, but is given a meaning and value by means of an intentional arc which scans the environment for objects of relevance to a host of internal conditions.

Perception is therefore the ability to organize a perceptual field into clusters of meaning which are ready-made for awareness. As Merleau-Ponty states, “perception is just that act which creates at a stroke, along with the cluster of data, the meaning which unites them—indeed which not only discovers the meaning *which they have*, but moreover sees to it *that they have a meaning*.”¹⁸ The world outside of perception is given as “data,” as the indeterminate field of possibilities for perceptual awareness. Perception pre-reflectively organizes this data into a coherent field which has embodied meaning and structure. Inasmuch as perception is an attempt to create or find structure in a data-rich environment, it is therefore *both* a mode of delivering humans over to the world and concealing certain aspects of it. As Merleau-Ponty states, “to look at the object is to plunge oneself into it, and because objects form a system in which one cannot show itself without concealing others.”¹⁹ Or, alternatively, “My point of view is for me not so much a limitation of my experience as a way I have of infiltrating into the world in its entirety.”²⁰ Perception, “at a stroke,” limits and allows the perceiver to “infiltrate” the world. It endows the world with significance, depth, and organizational cues for movement which grant us access to the world but also limit what is shown, structured, or perceived.

By grounding perception in a pre-reflective (or even pre-aware) process of spontaneous organization, Merleau-Ponty has shifted the imperative for the definition of

world to that of defining the limits and aims of perception. If perception is to supplant intuition or circumspection as a viable first-order phenomenological category, then Merleau-Ponty must not only specify the pre-reflective nature of perception, but must also couple it to a form of intentionality which is itself pre-reflective. It is for this reason that Merleau-Ponty turns to the body.

The Role of the Body: Linking the Sexual, Cognitive, and Linguistic spheres

Given the preceding account of perception as a pre-reflective organization of data, the body enters Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as the "for/by which" of perception. Perception gives itself as that which organizes the world in order for the body to find itself in the world; it is also the means by which perception acts. By making the body the nexus of relations for (and through) which perception acts, Merleau-Ponty has shifted the source of intentionality from consciousness to the body itself.²¹ Thus, instead of intentional subjectivity, Merleau-Ponty can assert, "I am a body which rises towards the world."²² And, as a body-subject, conscious intentionality can no longer be given as a concrete substratum from which all other forms of reflection are derived; the body admits of a greater degree of fluidity and exchange between its parts than previous notions of subjectivity. "The outline of my body is a frontier which ordinary spatial relations do not cross. This is because its parts are inter-related in a peculiar way: they are not spread out side by side, but enveloped in each other."²³

This systematic recognition is carried over to Merleau-Ponty's articulation as to how the body comes to perceive the world. Perception is an embodied exchange between subjects and others in the world, not a passive process whereby data is simply "taken in"

for intuitive processing: “The perceiving subject must. . . reach out towards things to which he has, in advance, no key, and for which he nevertheless carries within himself the project, and open himself to an absolute Other which he is making ready in the depths of his being.”²⁴ Or, similarly, “the normal subject penetrates into the object by perception, assimilating its structure into his substance, and through the body the object directly regulates his movements.”²⁵ Perception is consistently given by Merleau-Ponty as a dynamic fold between “reaching out”/“penetration” and “opening oneself” or being “regulated” by another. The body is a mechanism for the fluid exchange of information that occurs between a body and the environment: its permeability and yet boundedness allows it to incorporate and give information to the world without becoming identical to it or wholly separate in substance.

Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the body thus has the phenomenological consequence of making perception a semiotic process and casting the body into a world which it both modifies and assimilates. This can be read, at least implicitly, as a re-reading of Heidegger’s concept of dwelling, where dwelling is now given as the inhabitation of, and dynamic exchange with, the world. “The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be involved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them.”²⁶ As an agent who perceives and shapes a world of meanings, our body is both the means and the agent which interacts with the world. It is our body, “as the potentiality of this or that part of the world,” which “surges towards objects to be grasped and perceives them.”²⁷ This is a movement which occurs, like the organization of structure in perception, before the injunction of conscious awareness or purpose: “. . . I do not need to lead [my body]

towards the movement's completion, it is in contact with it from the start and propels itself towards that end."²⁸

As an interactive system, the body should not be seen as a monolithic unit interacting with a dynamical environment. Rather, the body, too, is within itself interactive, uniting a host of modalities—visual, tactile, auditory, etc.—to interact with the environment. The body is the *emergent* realization of these various modalities (see below). As Merleau-Ponty states, “My perception is therefore not a sum of visual, tactile, and audible givens: I perceive in a total way with my whole being; I grasp a unique structure of the thing, a unique way of being, which speaks to all my senses at once.”²⁹ All of the senses are united by the body towards rendering and acting within the perceptual field. Each modality is indissociable from the other in interacting with the environment: all are united in a complex nexus of internal and external interaction which both detects and constructs meaning within the world.

This more systemic understanding of the body is best shown in Merleau-Ponty's analysis of sexuality and its influence on perception.³⁰ For, if Merleau-Ponty's theoretical assumption of integrated interactivity is correct, then sexuality, along with other patterns of behavior and thinking, would functionally mold one's “intentional arc” and, subsequently, one's perceptual field. Empirical evidence for such a claim is proffered by Merleau-Ponty in the form of Schneider, who “never takes any initiative sexually”³¹ as a result of his brain trauma and is therefore unable to create meaningful syntheses of his perceptual field. This evidence, coupled with other scientific studies and anecdotal evidence, leads Merleau-Ponty to contend the following:

There must be an Eros or a Libido which breathes life into an original world, gives sexual value or meaning to external stimuli and outlines for

each subject the use he shall make of his objective body. It is the very structure of perception or erotic experience which has undergone change in Schneider.³²

Schneider's case exhibits the reciprocity between perception and sexuality: if one "fails," then the other suffers as result. Consequently, the perception of normal subjects can be said to be deeply influenced by sexuality such that sexuality partially determines the perceptual field by influencing directedness towards objects and their coherent meaning.³³

One may, as Merleau-Ponty does, make a somewhat stronger claim along the following lines: perception is not simply perception infused with sexuality; rather, perception is itself "erotic perception,"³⁴ as the two are indissociable from one another. As an integrated system, the sexualized body cannot be treated merely as "a body" which happens to have sexuality and erotic perception. Rather, as Merleau-Ponty states,

There is interfusion between sexuality and existence, which means that existence permeates sexuality and *vice versa*, so that it is impossible to determine, in a given decision or action, the proportion of sexual to other motivations, impossible to label a decision or act "sexual" or "non-sexual."³⁵

Sexuality and the body are intertwined such that the coherent formation of meaning in the perceptual field is inevitably effected by one's eroticized perception. Sexuality, a phenomenon upon which most phenomenologists before Merleau-Ponty were completely silent, becomes a mode of being and dwelling (in the Heideggerian sense) which unites the various disunities of perceptual experience. Sexuality is the "general power, which the psychosomatic subject enjoys, of taking root in different settings, of establishing himself through different experiences, of gaining structures of conduct."³⁶

Merleau-Ponty's focus on sexuality and the body is not given simply in order to establish the primacy of sexuality in perception, however. Instead, it is to be seen as a powerful example of the dynamic interplay and integration between the various modalities of orientation exhibited by the body. Just as sexuality is essential to perception, so too are food, smell, history, fear, exercise, etc.³⁷ Merleau-Ponty offers the following:

Since. . . all human "functions," from sexuality to motility and intelligence, are rigorously unified in one synthesis, it is impossible to distinguish in the total being of man a bodily organization to be treated as a contingent fact, and other attributes necessarily entering into his make-up. *Everything in man is a necessity.*³⁸

Of course, the "one synthesis" of which Merleau-Ponty speaks is the body, the unit whereby all that is "necessary" within the system becomes united, amplified, and filtered. Sexuality is but one among a host of variables which enter into the complex and spontaneous process whereby we even become aware of something like a perceptual field. Thus, as Merleau-Ponty rightly asserts, "my body is not a collection of adjacent organs, but a synergic system, all the functions of which are exercised and linked together in the general action of being in the world, in so far as it is the congealed face of existence."³⁹ The body is the "fabric into which all objects are woven,"⁴⁰ a coherent and unified system of impulses, drives, and disinclinations which allow for a perceptual field to have depth, texture, and meaning. The body is not only the "for which" of perception, it is the unit of perception itself, functionally molding and filtering percepts for perceptual awareness given the datum of human experience.

The preceding analysis reveals a consistent, but rarely stated motif in Merleau-Ponty's work which will become essential to his accounts of language, and ontology—his

holism. Merleau-Ponty's account of perception has led him to an examination of the body in which the body, as the perceiving subject, should be seen as a unified whole consisting of a number of synergistic, antagonistic, and complementary modalities. As Merleau-Ponty states in his 1957 lectures, later published as *Nature*: "the organism is not a sum of instantaneous and punctual microscopic events; it is an enveloping phenomenon, with an allure of the whole, macroscopic."⁴¹ Merleau-Ponty's notion of an "allure of the whole" appears to assign a teleological role to the body: the body not only unites the various microscopic parts of which it is composed, but it exerts an agency in its own right, organizing, amplifying, and coordinating the various senses.

As a number of contemporary publications have noted, such an account of the body would clearly be termed *emergent*.⁴² As emergent, the body would not only be seen as organizing its various components, but would additionally be seen as exercising a form of causality on its various substituents. Renaud Barbaras, in his work with the *Nature* lectures, gives the following in support of the emergentist claim: "the organism is nothing *more* than the sum of its parts; there is no vital force. It is something *other* than its parts, however, inasmuch as its life is not reducible to these parts."⁴³ Or, as he states later, "When we rise to the consideration of the whole of the organism, the totality is no longer describable in physiological terms; it appears as emergent. How are we to understand this relation of totality to parts as a result? What status must we give to the totality?"⁴⁴ Unfortunately, Barbaras does not connect the two quotations above into a coherent statement with respect to the body:⁴⁵ as a totality which is irreducible to its parts, the body should be seen as ontologically separate (but not substantially so) while also dependent upon its component parts. And, furthermore, as ontologically emergent,⁴⁶ the

body exercises agency in its own right, the most vital being the structuring of the perceptual field.

By arguing for the body as an emergent entity that is implicated in perception, Merleau-Ponty has effectively shifted the phenomenological notion of thinking away from Husserl's analyses of eidetic perception and Heidegger's early concept of circumspection. Instead, thought itself is grounded by virtue of a unified bodily perception which structures the perceptual field, and, subsequently, awareness itself. "Thinking" should be seen as the body's persistent filtering and structuring of the world made ready for awareness.⁴⁷ This occurs not through a process of reflection, but through the emergent coordination of one's history, senses, drives, and rational goals by the body.

While Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body—and therefore what grounds thinking—may effectively displace previous notions of thinking by Husserl and the early Heidegger, it need not, however, replace Heidegger's concept of poetic thinking. As a concept, poetic thinking designates the ability to invite, safeguard, and preserve the disclosive happening of Being in *Ereignis*. Thought *through* Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body, poetic thinking becomes an embodied process whereby Being is not only "thought" or "meditated upon" poetically, but is invited, safeguarded, and preserved through the various interrelated dimensions of perceptual experience. Rather than replace poetic thinking, then, both Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body and Heidegger's notion of poetic thinking are mutually enriched through their confrontation with one another. One can "think poetically" through one's diet, sexuality, and structuring of the perceptual field so as to allow the appearance of Being. If either poetic thinking or the body are to have relevance as phenomenological and ontological categories, they must do so through

a mutual reinforcement that opens up unrecognized dimensions within both. In doing so, Merleau-Ponty's account of the body merges with Heidegger's ethic of poetic thinking: the body has become the locus for the happening of Being.

Merleau-Ponty's account of the body and its role in shaping the perceptual field is therefore fully complementary to Heidegger's later notion of poetic thinking. It is the body itself, and our recovery of its construction of the perceptual field, which can allow for the "step back" signaled by meditative thinking and the safeguarding and calling of the Open preserved in poetic dwelling. *Embodied poetic thinking* thus becomes a key interlocking concept which unites Merleau-Ponty's emergent account of the body and Heidegger's normative use of poetic thinking and its relation to Being. The ability to reawaken an affirmative experience of the world in life as art is forged through embodied acts which call forth and maintain the event of Being. This focus will guide the analysis of perception, ontology, and revelation in the balance of this chapter.

The World

If embodied poetic thinking is to become a critical concept within life as art, it must do so by contending with the phenomenological imperative to "think" the ontological difference. Does Merleau-Ponty's account of the body, by still focusing on human perception and its construction of the perceptual field, fall prey to the same error(s) of Heidegger's early thought? Or, similarly, does Merleau-Ponty's conception of the body obscure the object of inquiry itself, an elucidation of Being? For this we turn briefly to his account of the world and its relation to Being.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception has already given some hint of the relationship between perception and the world. Perception, through the medium of the body and its orientation towards a landscape's "physiognomy," constructively carves out a perceptual field from the surrounding environment that helps guide a subject in space.

As Merleau-Ponty states, perception is present

first of all because we have present at this moment to us a perceptual field, a surface in contact with the world, a permanent rootedness in it, and because the world ceaselessly assails and beleaguers subjectivity as waves wash round a wreck on the shore. All knowledge takes its place within the horizons opened up by perception.⁴⁸

Perception opens up a field, an impermanent horizon, upon which we may ground ourselves and our body within a space. A field, oriented toward human perception, however, need not imply a "separation" between oneself and the environment; indeed, the perceptual field is our means of being open to the world, the *only* means by which the "waves" of the world may wash upon the shore of our body.

Hence perception is a way of finding oneself in the world, of living within it and being subject to it while at the same time constructing perceptual meaning within one's limited horizons. The examples given in support of this claim by Merleau-Ponty are numerous, the best being visual distortion experiments where the subject's vision is modified using glasses. Within hours a subject's "normal" perception of the world is restructured, indicating the body's adaptation to the world and its desire to find itself within a space. Merleau-Ponty concludes: "The perceptual field corrects itself [in visual distortion experiments]. . . because I live in it, because I am borne wholly into the new spectacle and, so to speak, transfer my centre of gravity into it."⁴⁹ One effectively dwells within the world through perception: hence in experiments which modify the perceptual

field, one's body accommodates such changes and seeks to find an equilibrium within the modified field.⁵⁰

The discovery of the perceptual field, however, need not imply that the perceptual field constitutes the "world" which initiated Husserl's investigations. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty consistently distinguishes the perceptual field from the world, such that perception is demarcated as the ability to "carve out" or construct a meaningful pattern which guides the body within a *larger* sphere of significance, the world. Merleau-Ponty is worth quoting here at length:

[A]ny sensation belongs to a certain *field*. To say that I have a visual field is to say that by reason of my position I have access to and an opening upon a system of beings, visible beings, that these are at the disposal of my gaze in virtue of a kind of primordial contract and through a gift of nature, with no effort made on my part. . . . And it follows at the same time that it is always limited, that around what I am looking at a given moment is spread a horizon of things which are not seen, or which are even invisible.⁵¹

Perception is itself limited and limiting, a process of embodied engagement with the world which selects certain elements for awareness while leaving others to be "invisible."⁵² It is the constant shifting of our perceptual field which signals its incompleteness; if my perceptual field can be constantly modified, then it indicates an environment of unknown complexity "outside of" perception itself. This limitation indicates not a duality of substance, but simply a limitation of perspective, an inability for perception to fully penetrate the environment. This gives rise, as Merleau-Ponty states, to a distinction between the perceptual field and the world: "What have we then at the outset? Not a given manifold with a synthetic apperception which ranges over it and completely penetrates it, but a certain perceptual field against the background of a world."⁵³

If the perceptual field is limited, then the “background” against and through which which it operates is given as the world. Clearly this is not the *Lebenswelt* of Husserl’s work or Heidegger’s early writings: the “world” in Merleau-Ponty’s early writings is the totality against which one constructs a perceptual field, not one preeminently oriented towards human rationality or concern. Merleau-Ponty can therefore speak of the world as the “horizon latent in all our experience and itself ever-present and anterior to every determining thought”⁵⁴ without collapsing the world into the perceptual field itself. Merleau-Ponty gives a more precise definition later in *Phenomenology of Perception*: “We have the experience of a world, not understood as a system of relations which wholly determine each event, but as an open totality the synthesis of which is inexhaustible.”⁵⁵ The world for Merleau-Ponty is defined as the open totality towards which our body projects itself in the construction and modification of the perceptual field. The perceptual field is constructed *within* the world, but such a distinction is never collapsed in Merleau-Ponty’s work; the world steadfastly remains the eternal spring from which perception draws in its construction of the perceptual field.

The question of world therefore turns on how we articulate that which “lies beyond” perception. For most interpreters, Merleau-Ponty’s early work equates the world with phenomenality, that which *can* become phenomenal through perception. Yet this phenomenality remains outside of the perceptual field and conditions it. As Dillon observes, the distinction between perception and world/phenomenality need not be dualistic:

[A]lthough the *Phenomenology* [*of Perception*] contains language that sustains dualistic interpretations, its central thought is that phenomena are ontologically primary, that the phenomenal world is the fundamental reality which grounds all conceptualization including the concepts of

subject and object, and that “phenomenon” names an original order of being which must be conceived in non-dualistic terms.⁵⁶

The phenomenal world is the ground of perception and consciousness, but both are dynamically interrelated and non-substantive. What is “primary” in Merleau-Ponty’s early thought is the phenomenal world, the relational totality of things which gives rise to embodied perception. As Renaud Barbaras states succinctly, “the very *phenomenality of the whole is reality*.”⁵⁷

Merleau-Ponty’s description should make clear, then, that his phenomenology of perception can still “think” the ontological difference. Embodied perception does not subject the world to the conditions of the perceptual field, but rather opens up a perceptual field within a phenomenal reality the limits of which are endless. The world presents itself as an “open totality” within which the body must find itself, move, and create a series of meaningful cues which unreflectively guide movement. While Merleau-Ponty’s early theory of perception may, as Dillon states, sustain a more anthropocentric interpretation, it does not obscure the ontological difference between humans and the world in which they find themselves.

I would argue, then, that the concept of *embodied poetic thinking* maintains an attentiveness to the ontological difference while simultaneously evoking the images of resolutely safeguarding and preserving the appearance of Being through the body. Embodied poetic thinking allows for a more thorough characterization of the “step back” than Heidegger himself originally envisioned: by attending to the body’s perceptual recognition of the world and by safeguarding its appearance, embodied poetic thinking withdraws more fully from calculative thinking and naming than “meditative thinking” might suggest. By redefining thinking in terms of the body, poetic thinking is given as a

multivalent practice employing the various modalities of perceptual experience: the senses, sexuality, diet, movement, and the arts. Embodied poetic thinking therefore begins to approach the sensual aesthetics evoked carefully by Marcuse in the previous chapter. And, through this point of contact (the body and its attendant pleasures and sensory modalities), one may come to see the ways in which the body, as capable of both framing efforts of resistance and attitudes of affirmation, can act as the locus for life as art. The intertwining of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger in embodied poetic thinking, and its tension with the work of critical theory, shows how the body can become a bivalent nexus of both the negative and positive dimensions of aesthetic experience.

If embodied poetic thinking is to have meaning as a concept, it should not only constructively expand what is meant by “thinking,” but should also expand what is meant by “poetics” (or the nature of art) as well as the aim of such thinking, Being. If my argument for the extension of poetic thinking is to work, then it must also be supplemented by an embodied aesthetics; and, as Dillon’s above quotation indicates, Merleau-Ponty’s description of the phenomenal world opens up onto questions regarding the nature of Being. Embodied poetic thinking, then, moves to questions of aesthetics and ontology.

Merleau-Ponty’s Aesthetics

Art as The Prose of the Subject

In order to consider the possibilities for embodied poetic thinking to open up and preserve Being I would like to turn serially to Merleau-Ponty’s aesthetics and ontology. In a way complementary to the later Heidegger’s conception of poetics as a means of

calling, safeguarding, and preserving the experience of the fourfold/world/Being, Merleau-Ponty's aesthetics is seen as a means whereby humans are "volleyed forth" into a common world of expression. Additionally, language and art evince the same emergent structure discovered in the perceiving body. Art for Merleau-Ponty therefore has a dual function: 1) as a deeper means of bringing the body into contact with Being and 2) as a functional analogue to the perceiving body which helps us see our own nature as emergent subjects.

As in Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty's account of the work of art begins with an analysis of the structure of language. And, owing to Merleau-Ponty's initial purpose in *Phenomenology of Perception*, language is primordially oriented towards the expression of the world explored through perception. As Merleau-Ponty states, "The spoken word is a gesture, and its meaning, a world."⁵⁸ Or, in a remark that links language to speech and the communication of a world, he states:

[T]he intention to speak can reside only in an open experience. It makes its appearance like the boiling point of a liquid, when, in the density of being, volumes of empty space are built up and move outwards. "As soon as man uses language to establish a living relation with himself or with his fellows, language is no longer an instrument, *no longer a means; it is a manifestation, a revelation of intimate being and of the psychic link which unites us to the world and our fellow men.*"⁵⁹

Speech, and therefore language, is directed towards the intersubjective expression of the world explored by the body. It communicates the "revelation" of the world and unites us to others by creating a world of mutual experience. In effect, speech and language install in another the capacity to "see" the world felt by myself in perception and consciousness.

Language penetrates the perception of the other not by directly communicating a state of consciousness, but by "propelling" the other towards my world through the total

effect of language. “The meaning swallows up the signs. . . and bears them off into another world.”⁶⁰ Or, similarly, “it is language which propels us towards the things it signifies. In the way it works, language hides itself from us. Its triumph is to efface itself.”⁶¹ Language “propels” the other towards the intended meaning by “transcend[ing] itself as a gesture,”⁶² by allowing meaning to go beyond its signs in order to engender a total perceptual signification. Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of language is presents a structuralist interpretation in which the very structure of language allows for it throw a recipient into my world through the kenotic activity of language itself.

This move is significant for Merleau-Ponty for three reasons: 1) it makes a claim to the primordial nature of language—and therefore art—as intersubjective expression; 2) it designates the content of language as a shared world tantamount to that found in perceptual experience; and 3), it makes the communication of the world contingent on a structuralist interpretation of language where the whole is seen as irreducible to the parts. It is with this third point in mind that Merleau-Ponty consistently likens language to a “universe”⁶³ in which signs, shared meanings, and gestures create the overall impression which ultimately engenders a world which can be shared intersubjectively. As Merleau-Ponty states in his “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence” (which was later assimilated into *Prose of the World*): “language is understood only through the interaction of signs, each of which, taken separately, is equivocal or banal, and makes sense only by being combined with others.”⁶⁴

Language can only transcend itself and create meaning through the interaction of its various signs. Similar to the earlier analysis of Merleau-Ponty’s account of the role of the body in perception, this account of language is implicitly emergentist. Language

creates a “universe” of meaning through the coordinated interaction of its parts, though the whole of language is not reducible to such parts. “It is the whole which possesses meaning, not each part.”⁶⁵ “The expressive power of a sign derives from its part in a system and its coexistence with other signs. . . .”⁶⁶ Here Merleau-Ponty expresses a systematic understanding of language which sees its meaning as inherently dependent upon a coordinated and complex interrelation between its various parts, whether they be signifiatory, verbal, or historical. This leads Dillon to note that Merleau-Ponty possesses an “emergent understanding of language,”⁶⁷ one which should be seen as a natural analogue to his emergent understanding of the perceptual body.

Merleau-Ponty’s intuitions on the complex interplay between the parts of speech indicate that meaning in language—and therefore art—is an emergent property of the work of art itself. In *Visibility and Invisibility* he states, “The meaning [of speech] is not on the phrase like the butter on the bread, like a second layer of ‘psychic reality’ spread over the sound: it is the totality of what is said, the integral of all the differentiations of the verbal chain; it is given with the words for those who have ears to hear.”⁶⁸ In Merleau-Ponty’s unique formulation, meaning is not as butter is to bread, but is rather what “taste” is to bread, butter, pasta, garlic, and a glass of red wine. It is the emergent property, like perception itself, of the coordinated effects of various signs and cues embedded within language. Renaud Barbaras agrees: “Sense does not merge with signs because it is the principle that organizes and unifies them, the principle which grounds their co-presence, the complicity of each to all.”⁶⁹

At minimum, Merleau-Ponty’s structuralist and emergent understanding of language grants that there are functional similarities between language (and thus

expression) and the body (and thus perception). Both are coordinated means of understanding and creating one's place in the world. And, similarly, just as Merleau-Ponty's notion of perception redefines what it means to "think" as an embodied and pre-reflective act, his notion of language constructively redefines "expression" in terms of a holistic effort which manipulates a series of cues for intersubjective reception.

From Language to Painting to the Body

Despite Merleau-Ponty's early work on language, his most noted work on the nature of expression is distilled in his analyses of painting, especially the work of Paul Cezanne. For it is in painting, unlike language, that visibility is paramount and the link with perception and its more primordial role is explicit.

This is not to say that Merleau-Ponty's analyses of painting are disconnected from his work with language. Rather, Merleau-Ponty is clear to make a number of conceptual linkages between language and painting, as does Heidegger with language and poetry, such that one may see painting as a refinement, if not the most exemplary example, of the logic of expression found most commonly in language. Merleau-Ponty links painting to language through expression in the following passage:

[I]n short, this cumulative power of speech is only the highest point of a tacit and implicit accumulation of the same kind as that of painting. We should begin by acknowledging that in most aspects language is not different from painting. A novel achieves expression the same way as a painting.⁷⁰

What is most important about the link between language and painting is that, as modes of expression, they are both emergent in character: the elements of a painting are functionally analogous to the signs within language. In highly Adornian language,

Merleau-Ponty describes the emergent character of painting as such: “The communication between the painter and us is not founded upon a prosaic objectivity, and the constellation of signs always guides us toward a signification that was nowhere prior to itself. But these remarks apply to language.”⁷¹ It is, as was recognized in Adorno earlier, the “constellation” of signs within a painting (or any work of art) which engenders its overall meaning (*Geist*). Painting, like language, is a coordination of a series of perceptual and visible cues intended to generate an overall effect.

And, as an emergent form of expression, painting bears potent similarities to the perceiving body. “The order or field of significations which constitutes the unity of painting. . . is comparable to the order the body opens up in its relation with the world wherein every gestural instance participates in the style of the whole.”⁷² Language, painting, and perception are all expressions of a certain “style,” a means of coordinating a series of modalities or elements for an embodied effect. As stylized, painting and the perceiving body are also preeminently forms of construction and expression which can create an intersubjective consciousness of a world. In this sense, painting and perception *can*—in instances of artistic genius—merge into one unified field of expression wherein the body is brought into a system of relations through the work of art that allow a new perceptual field to be felt and lived through.

We *see* the depth, the smoothness, the softness, the hardness of objects; Cezanne even claimed that we see their odor. If the painter is to express the world, the arrangement of his colors must bear within this indivisible whole, or else his painting will only hint at things and will not give them in their imperious unity, the presence, the insurpassable plenitude which is for us the definition of the real.⁷³

Painting is to express the “imperious unity” of the perceptual field; a painting can only “propel” a viewer into a world through an ensemble of visual cues which engage the senses in a way which renders the world “real.”

Through Merleau-Ponty’s examination of painting and its relationship to language he observes that painting, as a privileged form of visual expression, is able to engage the body because, as visibly emergent, it is a distillation of the body’s means of conversing with the world.⁷⁴ In coordinating perspective, color, texture, depth, content, and the free play of imagination, painting is able to achieve *at once* what perception achieves in each moment that it constructs the perceptual field. Painting, like the body, is an expressive space which calls upon the body for its own recognition. “It is the expressive operation of the body, begun in the least perception, which amplifies into painting and art. . . . It is through our body that we have the first experience of the impalpable body of history prior to all initiation into art.”⁷⁵ Similarly, the artist himself (in this case the painter) manipulates his own body and its construction of the perceptual field in order to produce a work of art: art is a distillation of the expression and deformation of the perceptual field introduced into the world through style.⁷⁶ Art is a re-creation and arousal of the perceptual body; by coordinating a host of artistic elements, the work of art arouses in the viewer a sensation of how perception is achieved in her own body.

It is for this reason that Merleau-Ponty frequently speaks of painting, and artistic expression in general, as a privileged means for aiding a viewer to experience the primacy of embodied perception. As de Waelhens states, “painting seeks, by the disposition of its materials, not to suggest but to present the primordial world”⁷⁷ rendered through perception. Painting, by recreating the coalescing and collapse of the visual field

into meaningful syntheses of depth, perspective, and meaning, recreates the ways in which our body achieves a communion with the world. And, by means of its silence, its openness, and its resistance to objective definition, painting opens up the primordial world spoken of by Heidegger as that which is revealed through the “step back,” or *Gelassenheit*. Indeed, painting enjoys privilege of place over poetry in its openness to the originary nature of perception. Barbaras makes this point well:

By means of painting, we will be able to open up the originary signifying of language, its inscription in the world before the world transmutes this signifying into ideality. As the mute expression of our contact with the world, painting lets us see the originary presence of the world; painting leads the world back to the silence of its first signifying.⁷⁸

If anything, then, we should be able to speak of Merleau-Ponty’s analysis in roughly the same terms that we spoke of Heidegger’s theory of poesy. Painting, in recreating the collapse and simultaneous emergence of the perceptual field, expresses and evokes our body’s means of opening up mutually reinforcing modes of communication with the world. To be sure, Merleau-Ponty’s theory of painting does not bear the more ontological traces of Heidegger’s theory of poetry: painting is not expressly given as the means by which we open up the safe space (*Ereignis*) for the coming and preserving of Being. Yet, in expressing our body’s means of interacting with and through the world and by distilling the perceptual field, painting achieves a similar end—namely, the arousal of a world which is antecedent to reflection.

Art and the Role of Thinking, Part II

Given Merleau-Ponty’s well-founded emphasis on painting, I would like to suggest here that “poetic thinking” names a critical disposition and openness to an originary

phenomenon that is distinct from the perceptive subject,⁷⁹ but does not necessarily name “poetry” as the only means by which poetic thinking is achieved. What is critical in Heidegger’s concept of poetic thinking—and arguably preserved in Merleau-Ponty’s account of painting—is the critical disposition towards *poesy*, the dwelling-near and calling of Being. If this argument holds, then *embodied poetic thinking* becomes a more expansive concept, encapsulating forms of expression outside of poetry which reveal our embodied expression and communication with the environment.

To this end, it becomes imperative to establish in Merleau-Ponty’s work a link between the work of art and the expressive body. In doing so, poetic thinking for Merleau-Ponty can be redefined as not only including Heidegger’s disposition towards meditative thinking and poetic dwelling, but also a more robust conception of the body’s role in the production and reception of art. This linkage begins with Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of expression:

All perception, and all action which presupposes it, in short, every human use of the body, is already *primordial expression*. This means that perception is not that derivative labor which substitutes for what is expressed in signs given elsewhere with their meaning and rule of use but the primary operation which first constitutes signs as signs. Perception makes what is expressed dwell in signs, though not through some previous convention but through the eloquence of their very arrangement and configuration. It implants a meaning in what did not have one. . . .⁸⁰

Perception and art are both part of our “primordial expression,” the means by which perceiving subjects communicate with the world. Art is not a subset of perception, or vice versa; rather, both are part of a more expansive phenomenon dubbed by Merleau-Ponty as “primordial expression” where the subject finds her way and space within the world.

As an expressive act, then, painting can be spoken of *as* embodied perception, and therefore “thinking” once again merges with the conception of art. Merleau-Ponty contributes a critical element to this argument by analogy: “As the artist makes his style radiate into the very fibers of the material on which he is working, so I move my body without even knowing which muscles and nerve paths should intervene or where I should look for the instruments of this action.”⁸¹ Art is to the material as the body is to action. But I would argue that the connection between art and thinking can be extended beyond Merleau-Ponty’s more analogical statements: both are not only to be likened to one another, but are part of a unified field of expression such that they may be conjoined, as in Heidegger’s poetic thinking. The first clues for such an argument are given by de Waelhens: “the painter forms the first rough draft of his work in his own perception. But it is a painter’s perception. It is the deployment of a language, as is the case with all perception, but in this case of a painterly language.”⁸² The painter does not merely “employ” perception in his expression of a visual space; rather, in the painter perception and the act of painting are unified into one phenomenological field—a painterly perception—where both “acts” are indistinguishable from one another.

This line of argument would lend support to Merleau-Ponty’s often misunderstood claims regarding the nature of body in his early works. There, the body is often given as akin to a work of art: “The body is to be compared, not to a physical object but rather to a work of art. In a picture or a piece of music the idea is incommunicable by means other than the display of colours and sounds.”⁸³ Both the body and art are in an analogical relationship with one another by virtue of their participation in expressing our congress with the world. This is suggestive—though Merleau-Ponty himself does not

make this argument—of a greater affinity between art and the body such that both can be conjoined into a common form of expression—embodied aesthetic perception. This is particularly, though not exclusively, true for artists, who have unified perception and art into one mode of being—artistic perception—which coherently modifies and expresses the body’s orientation in the world.

At least on the normative level, then, I would hold that the concept of artistic embodied perception proffered implicitly by Merleau-Ponty can be used to supplement my conception of embodied poetic thinking. As such, the following concepts are contributed to embodied poetic thinking: 1) poetic thinking should now be seen not only through the ontological lens of opening and securing a space for the appearance of Being, but also as a way of seeing and inhabiting the world (see previous section); 2) correlatively, “seeing and inhabiting” is transformed by the phenomenological recognition that the body is an emergent space linking sexuality, diet, the body, etc.; 3) “seeing and inhabiting” is similarly renewed through aesthetics by virtue of the fact that art and the body, as collectively emergent phenomena, can be unified into one field, artistic perception, which sees the world as an infinite space expressed provisionally through the coordination of various aesthetic and perceptual modalities; 4) these modalities, in turn, are to be organized so as to arouse an awareness of the role of perception in organizing and deforming the indefinite world outside of perception (thereby preserving the ontological difference). Embodied poetic thinking, then, is a way of seeing and inhabiting the world whereby the various modalities of the body and perception are linked together to continually renew and preserve an original vision of a world beyond perception itself.

In recognizing the conjoinment of aesthetics and thinking in “artistic perception,” Merleau-Ponty also recognizes the role assigned to *creation* in arousing an originary experience of the world. Interpreted through the lens framework of artistic perception, creation is not simply the act of making and doing; rather, creation can be seen in a more fundamental way as the operation of perception in molding and shaping a world for perceptual or aesthetic awareness. Perception collapses the world into a coherent field of meaning as does artistic representation. And, as such, perception is itself an act of creation, an activity whereby meanings are arranged, re-ordered, and eliminated. If, as chapter three contended, life as art is to be one marked by acts of creation, then the positive moment of life as art as seen through Merleau-Ponty shows the ways in which creation can be seen not only as an overt political or social act, but also a form of receiving and preserving a vision of the world. Creation is not only constructive, but receptive: it sits on the fold between resistance and affirmation.⁸⁴

The above notion of a “world,” however, remains highly ambiguous and our investigation cannot go further without an analysis of that onto which embodied poetic thinking opens. As with Heidegger before, the normative conception of thinking and art developed in Merleau-Ponty leads to ontology. One must be able to formulate in a more-than-negative fashion that which is called and sustained through our various embodied and aesthetic practices. It is to this final analysis that I now turn, one which sheds light upon the rich and layered world onto which embodied poetic thinking opens itself.

An Opening to Ontology

Heidegger's greatest specificity with respect to Being is either negative or methodological: in the latter instance he comes closest to Being by specifying its potential appearance in a disclosive coming-together between humans and Being, *Ereignis*. This is arguably the result of his former contention that ontology can only remain negative in conception, or, equally, his persistent recognition that Being cannot be approached through beings. With Heidegger's poetic thinking we are left with an almost wholly negative *ontos* which is only potentially disclosed and remains wholly beyond formulation.

While Merleau-Ponty is similarly committed to the non-calculability of Being, his conception of Being is significantly richer than the ontology developed in Heidegger.⁸⁵ This owes itself in large part to his work in phenomenology, which ably grounded phenomena not in language, circumspection, or *Ereignis*, but in that which is visible and able to be perceived through the body. To this end, Merleau-Ponty himself saw the ontological undertaking as a natural extension of his work with phenomenology and aesthetics; indeed, as my concept of embodied poetic thinking and its roots in Heidegger suggests, ontology is the *completion* of the phenomenological project.⁸⁶ As the fulfillment of his phenomenology, ontology would not, as is the case with Heidegger, reverse the fundamental problematics of Merleau-Ponty's earlier works. Nor should it force a reconception of his aesthetics. Instead, the formulation of an ontology is the articulation of the "background" and the "world" to which Merleau-Ponty's analysis of perception constantly pointed—it is that against and through which we form a coherent and embodied form of expression in perception and art.

While I have argued that one need not see Merleau-Ponty's early work as subject to the same criticisms as Heidegger's early work (hence allowing for the retention of embodiment as a significant phenomenological category), Merleau-Ponty's later work on ontology is necessary as it fills a critical lacuna in his own project and grants that for which perception exists. It is through ontology that Merleau-Ponty is able to most adequately conceptualize the ontological difference. With this imperative in mind, Merleau-Ponty states:

[W]hat we seek is a dialectical definition of being that can be neither the being for itself nor the being in itself—rapid, fragile, labile definitions, which, as Hegel rightly said, lead us back from one to the other, . . . not outside of us and not in us, but there where the two movements cross, there where “there is” [*il y a*] something.⁸⁷

What is necessary in ontology is neither a hypostatized subject nor a dead object; neither pure perception nor the raw material for sense awareness. Instead, what is needed is an amplification of the fluidity, synergism, and complexity which marks the phenomenology of the early texts, one where Being can be spoken of as exchange, interaction, and crossing.

If Merleau-Ponty's ontology is to succeed, then, it can only do so by remaining consistent with his earlier phenomenology while still thinking the ontological difference. This is to be done, as both Merleau-Ponty and Barbaras recognize, by placing the perceiving body firmly in a world which penetrates the body and in which it must continually find itself. It is to be a world marked by exchange, complexity, and structured forms of visibility and invisibility. Such a path was indicated, although elusively, in *Phenomenology of Perception*:

[T]he question is always how I can be open to phenomena which transcend me, and which nevertheless exist only to the extent that I take

them up and live them; *how the presence to myself (Urprasenz) which establishes my own limits and conditions every alien presence is at the same time derepresentation (Entgegenwartigung) and throws me outside myself.*⁸⁸

The concepts of presence and de-presence, visibility and manifestation, and, arguably, Being, are tied directly to the questions concerning openness and how we “live” phenomena. The perceiving subject is simultaneously of the world and of herself; there is a mutual interpenetration of subject and world found in openness and living. I have indicated a potential means of answering Merleau-Ponty’s question regarding how we live phenomena and remain open through embodied poetic thinking. What remains to be articulated, then, is an adequate formulation of what is “outside myself,” the Being upon which I am cast by perception and which invades me at every moment of my experience.

The Meaning of the Visible and the Invisible

If we are to take our cue for an ontology from Merleau-Ponty’s early work in phenomenology, then an account of the nature of Being must begin with the visible. In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty gives a number of clues as to how one might begin an ontology, the most important of which is his assertion that we can define “being as that which appears,”⁸⁹ a clear indication that Being is identified with visibility and that which is only partially revealed in one’s perceptual field. In this sense, Being can be spoken of as a “vast individual from which my own experiences are taken, and which persists on the horizon of my life as the distant roar of a great city provides the background to everything we do in it.”⁹⁰ Being in the early works is the background and horizon for my perceptual life, grounding my embodied living within a perceptual field which I structure, move within, and persistently reorganize.

Merleau-Ponty roughly accepts this formulation in his *Visible and the Invisible*, though with significantly more nuance. There, in opposition to Sartre's conception of the In Itself (*en sui*) and the For Itself (*por sui*), Merleau-Ponty articulates a notion of Being which does not rely on a hypostatization of Being, but is based on the nature of vision and visibility. Thus he can assert that Being is not pure positivity (or its negation in the Other), but is a part of visibility and its potential concealment in invisibility:

What is primary is not the full and positive being upon a ground of nothingness; it is a field of appearances, each of which, taken separately, will perhaps subsequently break up or be crossed out. . . , but of which I only know that it will be replaced by another which will be the truth of the first, because there is a world, because there is something—a world, a something, which in order to be do not first have to nullify the nothing.⁹¹

Being is not a ground and a negation. In keeping with Merleau-Ponty's loyalty to perception and appearance, Being is rather to be provisionally thought of as the overlapping field of potential perceptions and appearances, constantly mixing, "crossing out," and receding from vision. Being is not pure positivity, but a field of potential vision and appearance marked by absence, fullness, and intersecting perspectives. With this conception in mind, Merleau-Ponty gives the following qualification of the nature of visibility:

[A] naked color, and in general a visible, is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision which could be only total or null, but is rather a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open, something that comes to touch lightly and makes diverse regions of the colored or visible world resound at the distances, a certain differentiation, an ephemeral modulation of this world.⁹²

Visibility, then, is constituted both spatially and temporally; as spatial, visibility can be touched, smelled, and sensed—it accedes to vision and helps to situate depth, movement, and perspective; as temporal, visibility waxes and wanes: it comes into vision and then

fades into invisibility. Visibility allows for an articulation of Being to be made which resists a pure hypostatization in which Being is seen as *purely* visible, or *pure* positivity. By grounding Being in visibility, Merleau-Ponty identifies Being with the welter of perceptual experience and the indefinite world from which it is grafted.

Merleau-Ponty further safeguards his ontology from pure positivity by adducing a concept of invisibility which owes itself in large part to the nature of visibility and is akin to Heidegger's concept of concealment. In this respect, invisibility is not the pure nihilation of the visible, but is another aspect of the same multi-dimensional world of which visibility is also a part. This interplay between visibility and invisibility is given by Merleau-Ponty:

The *comparisons* between the invisible and the visible. . . are not *comparisons* (Heidegger), they mean that the visible is pregnant with the invisible, that to comprehend fully the visible relations (house) one must go unto the relation of the visible with the invisible. . .⁹³

Visibility and invisibility form two related aspects of the world of appearance: they are related inasmuch as each is "pregnant" with the other, capable of giving birth to either invisibility or visibility.⁹⁴ Barbaras states, "It is only as a thing is considered as visible that the thing is invisible, and by the same token, the invisibility of a thing as such necessarily involves a visibility."⁹⁵ Visibility and invisibility are initially given as two interrelated aspects of a monistic universe which grounds the perceptual field: each can give way to the other without becoming pure visibility or pure negativity.

Yet to state that invisibility is merely the absence of visibility is an oversimplification of Merleau-Ponty's description of the invisible. Rather, what he gives in *Visible and the Invisible* is a multi-faceted account of invisibility wherein the "lack of

visibility” only underscores one of four definitions given by Merleau-Ponty. In his notes, Merleau-Ponty sketches the following:

The invisible is

1) what is not actually visible but could be (hidden or inactual aspects of the thing. . .)

2) what, relative to the visible, could nevertheless not be seen as a thing (the existentials of the visible, its dimensions, its non-figurative inner framework)

3) what exists only as tactile or kinesthetically, etc.

4) . . . the Cogito

I am not uniting these 4 “layers” *logically* under the category of the *in*-visible–

That is impossible first for the simple reason that since the *visible* is not an *objective positive*, the *invisible* cannot be a negation in the logical sense –

It is a question of a negation-reference (zero of . . .) or separation.⁹⁶

The invisible is given as 1) a possible visible, 2) the non-visible of a visible, 3) a felt aspect of the visible, and 4) consciousness. These four definitions in sum dismiss any purely negative definition of invisibility as a pure lack of visibility; instead, invisibility can be seen as having a positive dimension of its own right which is simply not a dimension of visual or perceptual experience. Or, alternatively, invisibility is that element of visibility which does not accede to appearance or allow itself to be visible. Barbaras places this dimension of invisibility in terms of concealment and the ability of the invisible to give rise to the visible:

The invisible is not the other of a visible conceived as positive in itself, but rather it is what makes itself visible in order to preserve its distance, its signifying power; the visible, in turn, is not then the negation of the invisible, but the element of its manifestation and, in being so, a primitive mode of ideality.⁹⁷

Invisibility “preserves its distance,” or, in Heideggerian terms, conceals itself, by making itself visible. Visibility, however, is always partial (either intrinsically so or due to the

finitude of vision), and therefore the invisible remains distant from its own appearance as visible. Invisibility therefore can be said to “ground” visibility inasmuch as visibility is the partial manifestation of a more transient and elusive source.

Merleau-Ponty’s account of the invisible is undoubtedly ambiguous, a difficulty which is due in large part to his untimely death. However, the difficulty with resolving the tension between visibility and invisibility may be more intrinsic: Merleau-Ponty is attempting to articulate how that-which-appears holds itself in reserve and remains, in a variety of ways, invisible. At times, this may take on the more superficial understanding that the invisible is merely what is not seen; at others, it may be an essential non-visibility, as part of the “framework” of the visible or as consciousness. Both are aspects of invisibility, however—as Barbaras contends—inasmuch as they give rise to the visible and do so only by concealing themselves in their appearance. The following section seeks to clarify and deepen this preliminary assessment of Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of the visible.

Folds and Unfolding

Through Merleau-Ponty’s account of visibility and invisibility, one begins to see the thematics of a Merleau-Pontian ontology. Visibility and invisibility are interconnected, giving rise to one another without displacing one another; they constitute the silences, noise, presence, and absence of the world. These crossing lines of visibility and invisibility constitute the nature of Being for Merleau-Ponty. As he states, “my own experience interconnects within itself and connects with that of the others by opening upon one sole world, by inscribing itself in one sole Being.”⁹⁸ These interconnections

form the essence of my thought and perceptual experience, which has its force “only because all my thoughts and the thought of the others are caught up in the fabric of one sole Being.”⁹⁹ The “fabric” of which Merleau-Ponty speaks is only given metaphorical or literary force in his *Visibility and Invisibility*, an inexactness which no doubt owes itself to the nature of ontological reflection. Despite this limitation, Merleau-Ponty constantly tries to express the means by which experience doubles back on itself, how one can be both that-which-is-experienced and that-which-experiences.¹⁰⁰ The same logic is applied to others: others experience me while I experience them—there is a persistent exchange of looking/looked-at, a constant interchange which reveals the deep interconnection between things and vision. Thus, as philosophers, “[we] situate ourselves in ourselves *and* in the things, in ourselves *and* in the other, at the point where, by a sort of *chiasm*, we become the others and we become world.”¹⁰¹

It is in the above sense that Merleau-Ponty’s ontology becomes preeminently *chiasmatic*, a persistent exchange of views and interlocking of perspectives. A perceiving body views another perceiving body, which returns the view with a different perspective that simultaneously reveals and conceals.¹⁰² In experiencing others, the body becomes both “subject” and “object,” though neither is substantive; instead, the body looks upon others, which return and redirect a look, constantly modifying and readjusting the gaze. This dynamic interplay forms the chiasmatic reality to which all of our perception points. As Merleau-Ponty states in his earlier work, “We are involved in the world and with others in an inextricable tangle.”¹⁰³ This “tangle” is given fuller expression in his later work, where the more developed concepts of the phenomenology of the body, language, and Merleau-Ponty’s account of nature culminate in a vision of the whole wherein every

body is a “fold” between perceiving and being-perceived, a responsive and adaptive locus amidst a tangled reality.

We say therefore that our body is a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what sees them and touches them; we say, because it is evident, that it unites these two properties within itself, and its double-belongingness to the order of “object” and to the order of the “subject” reveals to us quite unexpected relations between the two orders.¹⁰⁴

Visibility and invisibility are therefore part of the chiasmatic process of viewing and concealing, revealing and distorting. One simultaneously views and withholds oneself from being-viewed, while others do the same. There are a multitude of views, then, to which the perceiving body can be open, and a multitude of views which perception conceals at any given moment. Yet visibility and invisibility cross one another: one is the Janus-face of the other, giving itself over to invisibility or visibility at any given moment. To this system of crossings and visibles which disguise the invisible, Merleau-Ponty grants the term “flesh.” He describes it as the following:

[T]he world and I are within one another, and there is no anteriority of the *percipere* to the *percipi*, there is simultaneity or even retardation. . . . Each landscape of my life, because it is not a wandering troop of sensations or a system of ephemeral judgments but a segment of the durable flesh of the world, is qua visible, pregnant with many other visions besides my own. . .¹⁰⁵

Flesh becomes Merleau-Ponty’s expression for the system of interlocking views, the “whole” to which the fold of visibility and invisibility refers. Flesh, as a metaphorical expression which bears resonances with Merleau-Ponty’s account of the body, reveals itself to be a multi-dimensional reality that bears within itself overlapping perspectives, silences, and systems of systems.

The use of “flesh” also invokes images of mutual immanence and interpenetration. Barbaras states that “Merleau-Ponty reconceives the flesh. . . *on the basis of the act of transgression*, that is, as the actual identity of a possession and a dispossession, of a closure and an opening.”¹⁰⁶ The perceiving body is both an opening to, and a concealing of, the outside world. The world penetrates the body just as the body penetrates it.

. . . I lend [others] my body in order that they inscribe upon it and give me their resemblance, this fold, this central cavity of the visible which is my vision, these two mirror arrangements of the seeing and the visible, the touching and the touched, form a close-bound system that I count on, define a vision in general and a constant style of visibility from which I cannot detach myself. . .¹⁰⁷

The body is open inasmuch as the “transcendence of the other is inscribed in it,”¹⁰⁸ yet is also closed/closing as it conceals and distorts its own visibility and the visibility of others. Flesh signifies this playful and processive interpenetration and closure that occurs through perceiving bodies; “it is the concrete coincidence of immanence and transcendence in the phenomenon of the lived body.”¹⁰⁹ The perceiving body is locked into a system of relations where it is both penetrated and penetrating,¹¹⁰ part of others who are a part of the body itself.

Flesh, while an expression of chiasmatic reality, should not be seen as Merleau-Ponty’s complete ontology. Rather, flesh designates the crossing and interlocking of perspectives, the locus where visibility and invisibility meet. This does not exhaust reality, as Merleau-Ponty points out:

The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is no substance. To designate it, we should need the old term “element,” in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and first, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of

incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an “element” of Being.¹¹¹

Flesh is given as an “element” among other elements, or, to be more accurate, a “molecule” or composite within a monistic universe. In this sense it stands as tantamount to other dimensions of biological existence (e.g., the environment), but it remains privileged because it is flesh to which our perception opens and at which visibility and invisibility “cross.” Flesh is an expression—or style—of the world.¹¹² With this qualification, flesh should be determined as a species of the more general phenomenon of visibility/invisibility, that is, as a privileged site where visibility and invisibility meet within perception, though this is not exhaustive of the general nature of Being.¹¹³

As a concept, flesh points to the interlocking and distributed nature of the perceptual and organic world. “Flesh” arises where perspectives cross, where visibility bubbles forth from invisibility and meets another visibility. Flesh names the persistent crossing of perspectives and concealment that occurs in perceptual experience. And, inasmuch as it reveals the interpenetration of perspectives, visibility, and invisibility, then flesh also places a normative condition on embodied poetic thinking: if one is to remain open to Being (or an elemental aspect of Being), then one must both invoke, and preserve, the persistent interlocking of perspectives that is symbolized in flesh. It is in this way that embodied poetic thinking opens itself up to the reception and safeguarding of pure immanence, the crossing of visibility and invisibility in the form of flesh. The overlapping of presence and absence in Merleau-Ponty’s account of the flesh depicts the multi-faceted visible realm to which embodied poetic thinking opens, and, in turn, seeks to affirm.

Being

If flesh is announced as only an “element” of Being, then it can only be said to be a part of a deeper presence to which it owes its origin. Merleau-Ponty only names this “presence,” however, by specifying our limitation in seeing it:

[The horizon] finally makes what merits the name of being be not the horizon of “pure” being but the system of perspectives that open into it, makes the integral being be not before me, but at the intersection of my views with those of the others, at the intersection of my acts and at the intersection of my acts with those of others. . . . Far from opening upon the blinding light of pure Being, or of the Object, our life has, in the astronomical sense of the word, an atmosphere. . . ¹¹⁴

Our system of perspectives, becoming flesh, does not open onto Being, but is the being of a perceiving body, marked by sensibility, absence, and overlapping perspectives. Such a system forms our horizon, which is limited. As Merleau-Ponty states, “the horizon is what *surrounds* us, us no less than the things. But it is the horizon, not humanity, that is being. . . .”¹¹⁵ The analogies with *Phenomenology of Perception* here are striking: the horizon is tantamount to our perceptual field, the opening onto the world which our body provides us. The world is given as more encompassing, the “background,” against which we forge our embodied perception.

The analogies with *Phenomenology of Perception* are limited, though, as Merleau-Ponty has developed a set of insights in his later thought which allow him to address the impasse between the perceiving subject and the world.¹¹⁶ The key lies in his conception of visibility and invisibility, and the first hints of such a move are explicated by Barbaras:

“The sensible does not therefore designate an ultimate layer, a ‘reality,’ but a certain mode of manifestation of Being, a milieu in which Being can remain what it is, namely,

at a distance, which is the only means for it to manifest itself without becoming positivity.”¹¹⁷ Barbaras’ ontological analysis closely matches the concept of visibility and invisibility in which visibility was a manifestation of the invisible.¹¹⁸ “Sensibility” is a dimension of Being that comes into visibility, that becomes flesh. Thus Being, by analogy, is that which encompasses the coming-into-sensibility of beings but still withholds itself from full manifestation. Being is the arc of visibility and invisibility: the source of the visible but also the persistent resignation to the invisible. This working notion has the further benefit of clarifying the notion of flesh above: as both visibility *and* invisibility, Being is a more expansive concept than their crossing or expression in vision. As Barbaras states, “The philosophy of the flesh has the consequence of making the thing and the other appear as abstract moments of a deeper presence, as abstract moments of an originary fabric of visibility [and invisibility] that accepts within it several modes of crystallization.”¹¹⁹

Visibility is a “crystallization” of the invisible, a manifestation of a suite of processes, thoughts, and touchings which remain non-visible, even absent. To employ terminology employed earlier, visibility is the *emergent* property of invisibility, that which “appears” by nature of an irreducible schema of processes. Being encompasses the rising and falling, the emergence and concealment, of the visible unto the invisible within the sphere of immanence. Dillon expresses this sense of movement well: “There is one flesh, the flesh of the world, which manifests itself in manifold ways from the sentient to the nonsentient, from silence to speech, from the mundane to the symbolic, that is, throughout, the plenitude of phenomenal unfolding.”¹²⁰ Though Dillon’s analysis is restricted to flesh (as a privileged aspect of Being), he names the sense of “phenomenal

unfolding” found in Merleau-Ponty’s ontology and throughout his work. The visible emerges from the invisible, just as sense emerges from signs and silence, just as perception emerges from the emergent body and its interaction with the world. Visibility, then, is a form of *expression*, the way by which the world stylizes itself, just as the artist does in painting or the body in perception. *Ontology becomes the fullest expression of the analogies between the body and art.* And, just as expression transcends itself in order to create meaning or a perceptual field, Being “remains transcendent and distant. We can now understand why meaning has to be ‘invisible’: it cannot be read immediately in the sensible itself.”¹²¹

The ontology sketched by Merleau-Ponty is one in which visibility crosses into invisibility and vice versa. The visible incorporates the invisible, just as it also penetrates other forms of visibility. Merleau-Ponty speaks of Being, then, as a “being by porosity, pregnancy, or generality, and he before whom the horizon opens is caught up, included within it.”¹²² Being is pregnant with the possibility for visibility, an organic metaphor which resonates with the simultaneous themes of penetration, emergence, and interconnection. Being is possible only through the conjunction of visibility and invisibility, as a “transversal dimension that links all spatiotemporal events, as the axis along which the events are equivalent, like a melody, which is nothing more than the notes, but precisely as they communicate with one another.”¹²³ Barbaras’ invocation of a musical metaphor here is apt: given Merleau-Ponty’s structuralist interpretation of art, Being can similarly be seen as an organic “whole” which links the notes and caesurae within a song with one another.

By reading Merleau-Ponty's theories of perception, art, and nature onto his ontology, a view of the whole slowly emerges. Being transcends the fold of visibility and invisibility, but is also the process and logic which unites them both into a conceptual and an interdependent whole. "It is necessary, then, to picture the universe as intuited by Merleau-Ponty as a proliferation of chiasms that integrate themselves according to different levels of generality."¹²⁴ Being is inherently chiasmatic, a series of crossings between visibility and invisibility. At the same time, it is not limited to what is crystallized in vision or flesh; as invisible, it holds itself in reserve, just as in visibility it always withholds the possibility of concealment. Simply put, Being is the "carnal pulp of the world,"¹²⁵ the universe of organic happenings and non-happenings which imposes itself each moment on perceptual experience. As Merleau-Ponty states, "[Being] is nothing mysterious: it is, whatever we may say, this world, this Being that our life, our science, and our philosophy inhabit."¹²⁶ Owing to Merleau-Ponty's more perceptual and concrete orientation, Being is simply the realm of appearances and non-appearances which we inhabit and express through art and perception.

What is significant about Merleau-Ponty's ontology, aside from its internal coherence, is its conceptual unity with his notion of expression. Perception is a form of expression inasmuch as it constructs and deforms the world to form a perceptual field; art is a form of expression inasmuch as it communicates the artist's perception and creates an ordered field of appearances; and Being is a form of expression inasmuch as visibility is a stylization of invisibility, a small cut into the thickness of the world. Being stands beside art and perception as an emergent property, *the* emergent property which grounds the interconnection, presence, and absence which makes other "emergings" possible.

As it is itself a form of expression, embodied poetic thinking is akin to the expression and stylization of the world through visibility. And, because they are intrinsically related as forms of expression, embodied poetic thinking's proper aim is the immanent expression of Being in the form of visibility. If embodied poetic thinking cultivates Being through a suite of embodied processes, and if Being is itself a form of expression akin to thinking and art, then embodied poetic thinking opens itself to the expressions of the universe in visible form. That is, embodied poetic thinking, by becoming conscious of its own expression in perception, sees in the visible a trace of the invisible. As both analogy and method, embodied poetic thinking calls, reveals, and sustains the "prose of the world."

In articulating a dynamic and interrelated conception of Being which stylizes itself through visibility, Merleau-Ponty has effectively elucidated what "appears" in embodied poetic thinking: immanence. Embodied poetic thinking is therefore the critical disposition to see in the visible, felt, and unseen dimensions of experience the expression of Being as it unfolds in visibility and recedes into invisibility. In effect, embodied poetic thinking *sacralizes the everyday and the banal as an expression of the poetry of the world*. In calling and preserving the visible, embodied poetic thinking affirms the various dimensions of sensory experience as part of an organic whole which stylizes itself in perception, art, and the world itself. One comes to recover and reawaken an enchantment with the everyday by stepping back, calling, and safeguarding the visible through one's total sensory experience of the world.

Conclusions

This section began with a renewed attempt to overcome the problematic of “world” as laid out by Husserl and revisited by Heidegger in his early work through the phenomenology and ontology of Merleau-Ponty. At the fore of the problem of world is how one can come to constitute objects without falling into objectivity. How can one describe the world in which we find ourselves as a pre-reflective phenomenon before the intervention of conscious intentionality or calculative thinking?

Heidegger’s answer was to first adduce a notion of circumspection which adequately circumscribed the *Lebenswelt* but failed to acknowledge the difference between humans and Being. His second and more persuasive answer, though departing from phenomenology, terminated in a form of poetic thinking which sought to call forth and preserve a pre-reflective experience of Being through *Ereignis*. In this section I have supplemented Heidegger’s intuitions with respect to poetic thinking using Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the body, his account of painting, and his ontology. In particular, Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the body as an emergent entity which synthesizes and creates the perceptual field can be fruitfully conjoined with Heidegger’s poetic thinking to form “embodied poetic thinking,” a notion which designates an embodied attempt to cultivate the appearance of Being through the various bodily modalities. This notion is further expanded by an analysis of Merleau-Ponty’s structuralist interpretation of language and expression in painting, where the “poetic,” like perception, can now be seen as the body’s expression of the world in which it finds itself. It is also here that creation can be seen to be both resistant and affirmative, as a creative act lies at the heart of both perception and artistic expression.

The concept of a world is articulated in Merleau-Ponty's ontology through his overcoming of the more negative ontology of Heidegger and by deploying his use of perception in favor of a notion of Being which is emergent, processual, and self-concealing.¹²⁷ Being, as the whole of visibility and invisibility, allows for invisibility to "crystallize" in visibility without being wholly positive or negative—it denies substantialism just as it denies being enveloped by a subject. Visibility, like art and perception, is an expression of the indeterminate and unseen world.

It is here where "thinking together" Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty becomes most fruitful. For, where Heidegger offers a normative disposition which anticipates the experience of Being, Merleau-Ponty lends a phenomenological, aesthetic, and ontological understanding which allows for poetic thinking to become embodied, expressive, and open to the visible world in all its manifestations. Embodied poetic thinking merges these diverse streams of thought to become a moment within life as art which allows for the experience of visible Being through embodied forms of seeing and inhabiting which are attentive to the ontological difference and the pre-reflective nature of primary phenomena. Art and thinking have become conjoined in one field which opens itself to the depths of visible—and invisible—experience. The positive moment in life as art reveals the possibility for experiencing—and thereby affirming—the immanent and processual world which surrounds us.

Furthermore, in equating expression with creation, Merleau-Ponty contributes the most important component to the positive moment in life as art. Just as Nietzsche's free spirits usefully crafted illusion to affirm the world, *Merleau-Ponty reconceives creation as the process whereby we meaningfully open ourselves up to the world through*

perception and art. Perception and art are the cardinal means by which we come to inhabit—and express—our being-in-the-world. And, as such, embodied poetic thinking is itself a form of creation through which we become open to the prose of the world. This sense of creativity gives a renewed sense to Nietzsche’s concept of “useful illusion”: embodied poetic thinking, as an openness to the indefinite world outside ourselves, is one way in which we can begin to affirm the circumambient and poetic universe. Just as Adorno’s use of metaphysics and Marcuse’s use of fantasy were the means for securing a more just and pleasurable world, the creative illusions of vision and embodied living are the means for securing a vision of Being as it bursts into visibility.

As a concept and a possible way of being, embodied poetic thinking captures the conversation between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty and its contribution to the affirmative reception of Being in life as art. Embodied poetic thinking signifies the requisite withdrawal, openness to Being, expressive illusion, and conjunction of art and thinking which allow for an affirmation of the world; it articulates the desire to give oneself over to what *may* come in vision and art. The positive moment in life as art affirms and blesses the world through the receptive body and its fleeting expression of an unfolding Being.

III: Marion

The Ontological Difference and Givenness

I have been arguing throughout this chapter and the preceding excursus that the insights of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty must be thought together in order to achieve a synthesis which adequately expresses the affirmative moment in life as art. Through twin analyses

of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty's investigation in the world, I found a set of complementary ideas which culminate in the concept of embodied poetic thinking. Embodied poetic thinking can be termed "affirmative" because, through a set of bodily modalities, it calls into and preserves a multi-dimensional Being witnessed in visibility, granting it privilege of place in one's experience. In this final section I would like to argue that the Being experienced in embodied poetic thinking can be seen not only as a visible trace of the invisible but may also be seen as revelatory. That which is received through embodied poetic thinking may overflow our categories of interpretation and lead to the reframing of sense experience as a whole: revelation, as a possibility within embodied poetic thinking, is the potential for a transformative happening within life as art.¹²⁸

The entry point for such an analysis begins with a conceptual thread seen by Jean-Luc Marion in the work of both Husserl and Heidegger, and, as I will argue, in Merleau-Ponty. This thread is the notion of givenness. In the work of Heidegger, for example, one sees a series of unexplored hints that point to the nature of Being as "given." In *Being and Time*, for example, Heidegger states, "What is given and explicable in the way we encounter the phenomenon is called 'phenomenal.'"¹²⁹ Phenomena in the early works are what are "given" for circumspection and handling. The later works evince a similar trend: Being is what "gives" itself in *Ereignis*; though it is called and preserved in the open site opened up through poetic thinking, Being is ultimately that which gives itself and conceals itself. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty's early work in phenomenology consistently speaks of the imperative that reflection must recognize "the world which is given to the subject because the subject is given to himself. The real has to be described, not

construed or formed.”¹³⁰ The world gives itself to the subject in perception, just as perception gives itself to awareness. This conception of givenness is also continued in Merleau-Ponty’s later work, where invisibility gives itself through visibility, a givenness which is nonetheless fleeting.¹³¹ Summarizing Merleau-Ponty’s later thought, Barbaras states: “one must recognize as ultimate a visibility, a givenness of the world at the heart of which we give birth to one another: we are different, because the world does not gather itself beyond its thickness, because the world remains what ‘there is’ [*il y a; es gibt*]. . .”¹³² Givenness, on this reading, is a consistent, yet unargued, motif in the thought of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty in both their early phenomenology and later ontology.

And yet neither Heidegger nor Merleau-Ponty sufficiently analyze what it means for phenomena or Being to “give itself.” Both remain constrained to either human perception or an analysis of Being, the latter mode of reflection correcting for the inattention to the ontological difference in the former. It is into this thematic lacuna that Marion situates his phenomenology, calling attention to a sense of givenness which is spoken, but unacknowledged, in the phenomenological and ontological tradition. For, if Being is what gives itself in poetry, visibility, and meditative thinking, then this givenness is in demand of reflection equaling that of other modes of disclosure or appearance. For this reason, Marion demands a “third reduction” of phenomena, a “leading back to the originary giving intuition—that is, the *self*-givenness—of phenomena”¹³³ which builds upon the first reduction of Husserl (the constitution of the phenomenon as an object) and the second reduction of Heidegger (the movement from beings to Being). Arguably, only by thinking the givenness of Being can one adequately think the ontological difference between beings and Being.

I do not wish to argue here, as does Marion, that Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty's thought inadequately addresses the ontological difference. As I have shown in the preceding pages, there is good reason to think that both poetic thinking and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and ontology address the ontological difference by calling into question the relationship between beings and Being and by caring for the appearance of Being. This still leaves unanswered, though, the problem of givenness and what it might contribute to embodied poetic thinking. If embodied poetic thinking is to open itself to a Being that gives itself, then the meaning of givenness must be explicated.

In this more limited sense Marion's thought is extremely helpful, as he names and seeks to understand the nature of givenness as it has appeared—albeit unexplained—throughout the phenomenological tradition. By beginning within the lineage begun by Husserl, Marion claims that givenness is the “principle of principles”¹³⁴ within phenomenology: it explains how what appears gives itself to a subject. The nature of such giving, he claims, is unconditional: “What gives itself, insofar as given in and through reduced givenness, by definition gives itself absolutely. To give itself admits of no compromise, even if in this given one distinguishes degrees and modes: every reduced given is given or not.”¹³⁵ The “given” lends itself to phenomenality without restriction; it imposes itself on the subject through appearance absent any consideration of its reception. This implies, as Marion rightly notes, a “suspension of exchange” wherein the given gives itself without limitation: “if there is givenness, it implies the suspension of exchange; it should therefore also break with the principles of sufficient reason and identity, no less than with the four forms of causality that economy, in its metaphysical regime, follows.”¹³⁶

A break with the economy of exchange allows Marion to “bracket” (ala Husserl) the givee in the system of exchange. If what is given is given without regard to its reception, then one can speak of “givenness” without referring to the receiver of the gift. This can be formulated in another way: givenness can also exceed the intuition of the receiving subject, imposing itself on the percipient without regard to potential reception or apprehension.¹³⁷

In being immeasurable or excessive, the given overwhelms one’s intuitive ability to apprehend the gift. The gift should be considered apart from the givee because the givee is potentially unable to comprehend the gift: it may exceed every possible conceptualization. Thus the gift (or “the event”) can be spoken of as without precedent, something that goes beyond our normal frameworks for comprehension:

But one can speak of event only to the degree that it exceeds these precedents (“I’ve never seen such a thing”). The more the excess is noted, the more the event imposes. The level of eventness—if one can speak thus—is measured by the amount of the phenomenon’s excess over its antecedents.¹³⁸

This effectively means that one can phenomenologically reduce the givee with respect to the phenomenon of givenness.

Nor does givenness follow the normal economy of reciprocity with respect to the “giver.” The giver is phenomenologically separable from givenness inasmuch as what is given can be seen, felt, or experienced without reference to the giver. That is, one can phenomenologically “reduce” the giver as well as the givee. Thus givenness can be said to ground appearance unconditionally—it is subject neither to the conditions of the giver *nor* the givee. “Givenness thus goes farther than objectness and Being because it comes from farther away. Extreme figure of phenomenality, givenness precedes or overcomes

all other specification of it.”¹³⁹ Givenness, formulated as such, is an overarching concept which designates a donation that is intrinsically separable from both receiver and giver. It is a logical designation for the way in which something is given for experience. It is not a “something” or a category of beings, but is rather the principle through which things can appear. Marion makes this more universal dimension of givenness clear in the following: “absolutely nothing is, happens, appears to us, or affects us that is not first, always, and obligatorily accomplished in the mode of a *givenness*.”¹⁴⁰

If givenness is to designate the general principle of appearance without regard to the giver or the givee, then it should be understood as the condition for the appearance of Being. As Marion states, “Being, insofar as it differs from beings, appears immediately in terms of givenness.”¹⁴¹ This does not imply an identity between Being and givenness. Rather, givenness specifies the means by which Being appears at all, the general principle for its manifestation. Read against Heidegger, givenness names the means by which Being appears in *Ereignis*, though, as Marion notes, Heidegger is quick to subsume the givenness of Being (the fact that it may appear) to the disclosive happening of Being as called and preserved in poetic thinking.

Heidegger acknowledges givenness beyond or outside Being only to immediately misconstrue it by supposing that it still only gives (itself) on the side of the *Ereignis* and under its aegis. Givenness to be sure, but only as a brief transition between Being and *Ereignis*, a mere relay, provisional.¹⁴²

To truly think the ontological difference, then, one must be willing to suspend the moment of disclosive happening (*Ereignis*) and begin to think Being as it appears in the form of givenness. Givenness occurs *before* our apprehension of it in the form of appearance.

Marion's consideration of the given shows givenness to be a general category which designates the giftedness of appearances as they are separable from both giver and givee. While Heidegger's poetic thinking opens up the critical space necessary for the reception of the gift, it does not adequately comprehend the nature of givenness. In a sense, poetic thinking is too eager in its reception of Being. What is demanded of embodied poetic thinking is a posture of resolute openness to Being as it appears in the form of the gift, suspending its appearance in the form of givenness. Through this critical disposition one leaves open the possibility for the revelatory.

Givenness as Visible Emerging from the Invisible

As a purely reduced concept, Marion's notion of givenness can be seen at best as highly ambiguous. What does it mean for a gift to be "given" irrespective of giver and givee? What does it mean to see "givenness" before its disclosure in a subject? For this reason, Marion turns to the concrete phenomena of visibility and the arts in order to more fully explain the nature of givenness.

Givenness is best seen through the phenomenon of visibility, where what gives itself transforms itself into vision. That is, givenness—as a general principle—only appears by making itself visible. Marion coins this transformation of the gift into the visible "anamorphosis": "The visible arrives to the I as a gift and, reciprocally, because the phenomenon arises, offers itself, rises toward itself—and takes form in it. I will call this identification of the phenomenon that gives *itself* and the gift that shows *itself* *anamorphosis*."¹⁴³ The gift can only be acknowledged as visible, as what shows itself. Indeed, giving *is* showing.¹⁴⁴ The gift cannot be known or seen without its appearance in

the form of visibility. Otherwise, it remains an abstract principle without concretion.

Marion can therefore state that, “Givenness thus determines all the levels of phenomenality,”¹⁴⁵ as phenomenality is seen as the means by which givenness appears.

It is at this point that Marion’s thought tacitly resembles Merleau-Ponty’s later ontology. Givenness is said to come into concretion through visibility, just as invisibility comes into flesh through visibility. Marion himself gives a number of hints regarding this analogy, as he admits that visibility bears the traces of an “elsewhere” before its arising: “The arising into appearing of what gives itself in appearing always bears the mark of an ascent to the visible; this ascent, as free and autonomous coming forward, is, with effort, detected in this mark on account of its arising from an ‘elsewhere.’”¹⁴⁶ To be sure, Marion’s concept of “elsewhere” is so ambiguous that it limits any concise analogy with invisibility. This ambiguity is only further amplified in the following:

The phenomenon therefore succeeds in appearing only by passing from a first form—unformed—to a second form, which informs it as such because it fixes a figure of apparition for it. This second-level form does not merely make the phenomenon visible; above all, it distinguishes the phenomenon from others by detaching it from them as if from the depths. The second-level form refers the first-level forms to the depth of the visible and tears its phenomenon from there as from a mere background.¹⁴⁷

Phenomena pass from an “unformed” and “background” initial state to a visible state that fixes their appearance and allows for givenness to be located in perception. Givenness is designated as an amorphous initial state that accedes to a visibility which we find in intuition.

The potential analogies with Merleau-Ponty’s concept of invisibility are further taken up in Marion’s analysis of painting, where “the invisible thus constructs the visible and allots it.”¹⁴⁸ Painting, as a pure form of visibility, is still nonetheless predicated upon

an “invisibility” which gives way to structure, form, and content. Visibility for Marion, as in Merleau-Ponty, points to the invisibility, the “elsewhere” from which it arises. As Merold Westphal states, “The visible always signifies the invisible of which it is a trace.”¹⁴⁹ In acknowledging visibility as a “trace,” however, Marion has rendered the invisible as that which always escapes vision and is concealed from visibility. In doing so, Marion’s formulation of invisibility has deep resonances with Merleau-Ponty: “By *invu* I understand purely and simply what, as a matter of fact, cannot reach or yet reach visibility, even though I could in fact experiment with it as a possible visible.”¹⁵⁰ Just as in Merleau-Ponty, Marion’s notion of invisibility is that which either cannot be seen or is non-visible;¹⁵¹ invisibility is a general category which designates the unformed precursors to visibility.

Admittedly, these connections with Merleau-Ponty are unacknowledged in the work of Marion. The similitude between the two, however, admits of an analogical relationship in which givenness, as a general principle of appearance, can be likened to Merleau-Ponty’s concept of invisibility. This implies that visibility is a “crystallization” of givenness, a moment of anamorphosis from an unformed conceptual state to a concrete manifestation. The analogy falters, though, if invisibility is seen as tantamount to givenness. Givenness, unlike invisibility, states a general principle necessarily antecedent to visibility, whereas invisibility for Merleau-Ponty refers to the hidden dimensions of a concrete world which is only actualized in flesh. One is a principle or phenomenological category, while the other names a dimension of perceptual experience.

The loose analogies between givenness, invisibility, and Being (at least its giving itself as appearance) point to a similar thematics in Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and

Marion in which phenomena potentially arise out of concealment and make themselves available as appearance. In this limited and yet general sense, embodied poetic thinking remains applicable to Marion's notion of givenness: inasmuch as embodied poetic thinking names a critical bodily disposition to call, welcome, and preserve the visible (which bears a trace of the invisible), it can be placed in the service of what gives itself as visibility. This comes with a qualification, however: in order to think (or experience) the given, one must bracket one's representation of the visible (as does Marion in his phenomenology) in order to "see" givenness as a pure condition for the possibility of visibility. By limiting one's reception of visibility, the visible is allowed to reveal a trace of its initial givenness.

Revelation and Saturated Phenomena

I would argue that the amendment to embodied poetic thinking that I describe above may open up additional vistas of experience, but is not a necessary condition of embodied poetic thinking. As it was previously articulated, embodied poetic thinking sufficiently captures the disposition necessary for the reception and thought of Being. The thought of Marion, however, adds an additional condition to embodied poetic thinking which allows for the experience of givenness as a grounding concept. Namely, one must be willing to bracket one's own apprehension of visibility (i.e., suspend the deformation of visibility into the perceptual field) in order to see givenness as a pure phenomenon antecedent to subject or object.

In Marion's thought, this "bracketing" of intuition occurs in a number of ways (one being the phenomenological reduction itself), though one stands out as particularly

relevant for life as art. The most salient example given by Marion is that of “saturated phenomena,” which overwhelm conceptuality and intentionality so as to effectively reduce its role in apprehending experience.¹⁵² In saturated phenomena, “it is the concept that is deficient, [not] intuition;”¹⁵³ that is, something appears which overwhelms our ability to conceptualize or characterize it. Saturated phenomena are characterized by a “surplus of intuition, therefore of givenness, over and above intention, the concept, and the intended.”¹⁵⁴ By overwhelming our ability to represent or categorize what is given to us in intuition, saturated phenomena effectively bracket human reflection (to use Merleau-Ponty’s term). Saturated phenomena give themselves as pure intuition, as what stands outside of our representation, and therefore as a pure givenness.

Unfortunately, Marion’s primary targets in articulating the notion of saturated phenomena are largely Husserl and Heidegger. His focus is therefore on an aconceptual experience which admits of pure givenness (just as Husserl and Heidegger place the given under the strictures of conceptuality). Given the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, however, an additional challenge is deployed: in order to “bracket” human intuition, saturated phenomena must not only stand outside of conceptuality, but must also effectively bracket the formation of the perceptual field. Then, and only then, will they admit of being a “pure” visible and therefore as purely given.

Marion does give some hint of such an analysis in *Being Given*. Namely, saturated phenomena are said to “pass beyond all horizontal delimitation,”¹⁵⁵ a notion which, if “horizontal delimitation” is construed as identical to the perceptual field, would make saturated phenomena “before” or “beyond” any formation of the visual field.¹⁵⁶ Marion continues:

[N]ot only no single horizon, but no combination of horizons, could successfully tolerate the absoluteness of the phenomenon, precisely because it gives itself as absolute, that is to say, free from all analogy with common-law phenomena and from all predetermination by a network of relations, with neither precedent nor antecedent in the already seen or foreseeable.¹⁵⁷

Saturated phenomena stand outside of all predetermination and relationship. They have no precedent in one's potential "horizon" of understanding, as they overflow the sensibility and cannot be given as a unified field ready for understanding or awareness. In this sense, saturated phenomena can be understood as not only pre-conceptual, but possibly as pre-perceptive, effectively bracketing our ability to even constitute the visible as available for movement and understanding. Marion echoes this claim, though still within the thematics of conceptuality:

[H]ere the I of intentionality can neither constitute nor synthesize the intuition into an object defined by a horizon. The synthesis—if there must be one—is accomplished without and contrary to the I, as a passive synthesis, coming from the nonobject itself, which imposes its arising and its moment on and before all active intentionality of the I. . . .¹⁵⁸

Saturated phenomena arise "before" intentionality, prior to the fixing of the visible in concepts, or, in the case of Merleau-Ponty, prior to the synthesis of the perceptual field, by virtue of their overflowing our means for synthesis. Saturated phenomena stand as a possible means of presenting givenness as a pure phenomenon by bracketing our ability to place them within the context of a perceptual field.

As aconceptual or pre-perceptual, saturated phenomena stand outside of signification, language, and even intentionality. Marion states that they "must be allowed, then, to overflow with many meanings, or an infinity of meanings, each equally legitimate and rigorous, without managing either to unify them or to organize them."¹⁵⁹

Hence one ontic clue to the existence of saturated phenomena is the feeling of amazement

or surprise, the sensation that one has not experienced something before, a something which, ostensibly, overflows one's conceptual and perceptual categories of experience. "[T]he saturated phenomenon most often imposes itself thanks to amazement, in which all the intuitive givenness is accomplished by the fact that its possible parts are not counted up, therefore also not foreseen."¹⁶⁰ At other points, Marion speaks of saturated phenomena as coming in the form of "bedazzlement,"¹⁶¹ "unexpected noematic superabundance,"¹⁶² and that a saturated phenomenon "evades any analogy of experience."¹⁶³ Saturated phenomena achieve amazement by means of quantity and acausality: they appear as an overwhelming visual form without history, precedent, or forewarning.

Insomuch as the saturated phenomenon is received in awe and amazement, it can neither be conceptualized nor spoken of. It effectively eludes signification. "Such an event gives *itself*, in effect, all at once: it leaves us without a voice to speak it; it leaves us also without any other way to avoid it. . . ."¹⁶⁴ One is captive to a saturated phenomenon (otherwise one *could* find oneself in its midst), forced to reconcile with its pure givenness. By potentially overcoming one's ability to achieve any conceptual or perceptual synthesis, the saturated phenomenon achieves what phenomenology aspires to in method: a reduction of the givee such that pure givenness appears in visible form. Marion gives final expression to this sense of overcoming and awe in the midst of something purely given: "the given phenomenon arrives—crashes even—over consciousness, which receives it. It appears properly only at the moment when it explodes on the screen. Before this explosion, it simply did not appear."¹⁶⁵

The Role of the Artwork

Marion's conception of saturated phenomena designates a genus of a more general phenomenon which overflows conceptuality and brackets the givee to reveal pure givenness. In order to explore saturated phenomena as they are manifest, Marion turns most frequently to works of art as examples of saturated phenomena. In *Being Given*, the idol (i.e., a painting) is said to "stop intentionality"¹⁶⁶ by effectively presenting an image which suspends one's synthesis of the visual object. Indeed, much of Marion's work after his "discovery" of saturated phenomena is littered with references to art, especially painting, as a means by which intentionality and perception are potentially suspended through the presentation of pure vision in the work of art.

The work of art is capable of bracketing intentionality by means of its *self-reducing* nature, an argument Marion makes at multiple points. He states, "[the painting] permits the phenomenon to appear precisely inasmuch as it frees it from every thesis in the world."¹⁶⁷ By "freeing itself from every thesis" the work of art admits of no antecedents: it stands alone as a visible (or auditory) work free of conceptual predetermination. From another perspective, the work of art self-reduces because it presents itself as a purely visible object: "The idol accomplishes the phenomenological reduction of the given visible to the pure seen."¹⁶⁸ The artwork therefore achieves self-reduction by two means: 1) by escaping predetermination and 2) by presenting itself as purely visible object that autonomously organizes the visual field (without the imposition of the viewer). The latter point is crucial with respect to perception. In autonomously organizing the visual field into depth, lines, and color, the object performs the work of perception—it transforms itself into pure visibility, thereby eliminating the role of the

subject in perception. To this second point is added an amendment that applies only to painting: “The painting attains the highest saturation possible of the visible in such a restrained frame. The saturation of the visible becomes, to the one who knows how to look at it as it gives itself, really unbearable.”¹⁶⁹ By being framed, a painting achieves a maximum of visibility—and therefore saturation—within an enclosed space.

It is by means of this final point that Marion, like Merleau-Ponty before him, privileges painting as the medium of visual saturation par excellence. The painting reduces the role of the percipient by presenting a novel and autonomously self-organizing image within a confined field. As such, the painting becomes a substitute for the role of perception in bringing invisibility into visibility (anamorphosis). The painting shows the passage of the invisible to the realm of the visible. “[T]he painter adds to the visible new visibles, because he or she alone, advancing imprudently to the extreme edge of the area of uncertainty, looks out for and provokes the rising up of *invus*, the violent novelty of which no look before had been able to or had dared approach.”¹⁷⁰ Similar to Merleau-Ponty’s later account of the role of the painter (in expressing the crossing between the visible and invisible), Marion notes that the painter brings the invisible to vision. By presenting a surface with depth, texture, and form, the painter and the painting perform the act of perception in bringing a field into a coherent perceptual unity. The painting becomes the act by which givenness is transformed into visibility, though the painting, by reducing the viewer’s role in its reception, always bears a trace of its initial givenness. In this sense, the painting becomes the preeminent example of a saturated phenomenon.¹⁷¹

By distilling and autonomously substituting itself for the perceptive act, a work of art reduces the role of the viewer and overflows her ability to synthesize and constitute

the artwork. Marion thus claims that the work of art “saturates [intuition] and renders it overexposed—invisible, unreadable not by lack, but indeed by an excess of light.”¹⁷² Similarly, the painting, as a reduced visible, “presented in the pure state without any remainder of appresentation, reaches such an intensity that it often saturates the capacity of my look. . . .”¹⁷³ This leads Marion to liken the artwork to an “event,”¹⁷⁴ an identification which has clear resonances with Heidegger’s notion of *Ereignis* and, stripped of Heidegger’s more human orientation, shows the work of art to be a medium which signals a potent coming-together of humans and the more originary phenomenon of givenness.

Marion also often speaks of the artwork as a visible that unfolds in a transformative perceptual experience, altering time and space by virtue of its saturation of the viewer’s intuition. He states, “[The painting] opens an arena of space and time to all the contemplations that it gives rise to. It exposes itself as the potential sum of all that which all have seen, see, and will see there.”¹⁷⁵ The artwork becomes a unique locus in which time, space, and the horizontal field of vision are compressed into a confined arena that autonomously coalesces each into a unified form of visibility. The artwork compresses the factors that determine visibility into an intense spectacle that overwhelms and overdetermines perceptual experience: “My idol defines what I can bear of phenomenality—the maximum of intuitive intensity that I can endure while keeping my look on a distinctly visible spectacle. . . .”¹⁷⁶

Marion’s aesthetics are thus an aesthetics of saturation. The artwork, particularly a painting, automatically reduces the role of the viewer by presenting an intensified and self-organizing field of appearance. In doing so, the artwork achieves the role generally

accorded to a percipient—the construction and organization of the visual field. By spontaneously instilling vision in a viewer, the artwork achieves full saturation: the viewer is unable to conceptualize or synthesize the artwork—she is bracketed in its reception. Givenness appears as the result of a viewer held fast in the arising of invisibility into the field of visibility. In saturated phenomena, the ethical injunction in embodied poetic thinking to “safeguard” the appearance of the visible is achieved through the phenomenon itself; the visible accomplishes the work of the percipient through its very appearance.

Revelation

Marion considers other forms of saturation alongside works of art, specifically historic events, the “flesh” (a concept which has clear affinities to Merleau-Ponty’s notion), and the icon (or the face). Yet, of these four modes of saturation, the artwork remains the most characteristic example of auto-reduction and visual saturation.

There is a fifth mode of saturation, one which Marion believes synthesizes the four modes of saturation previously given, including the work of art—revelation.¹⁷⁷ Revelation is an overwhelming experience in multiple dimensions—historical, physiognomic, visual, and embodied—which brackets the givee and bears a trace of its original givenness. It stands as the preeminent phenomenon of givenness by virtue of its culminating function: “The phenomenon of revelation is therefore officially inscribed within the one and only figure of the phenomenon that, ever since the beginning and without interruption, I have been seeking—the given.”¹⁷⁸ Revelation bears all the hallmarks of saturation discussed to this point: auto-reduction, an overwhelming of

sensory intuition through excess, a consolidation of time and space into a single locus, an event, and the persistent residue of givenness. Revelation stands as an exemplar of the genus of givenness and as a possibility inscribed within experience itself.

Unlike the work of art, however, Marion's writings do not give many concrete examples of revelation, and those which are given are generally Biblical in nature. This is misleading, though, as Marion is clear that in describing "revelation" he is not attempting to explain a fact of religious existence, but of existence in general, a potential reality which synthesizes the various modalities of perceptual and embodied experience. To this end, Marion quotes Friedrich Schelling on revelation: "About this event, nothing more can be affirmed but that it occurred, it took place; it is, so to speak, the primordial fact. . . , the *factum*, the happening par excellence."¹⁷⁹ As a "happening par excellence" revelation is given as a more general feature of experience which defies signification and overwhelms conceptuality.

Nor does Marion wish to assert the apodictic reality of revelation. As a saturated phenomenon which aggregates other forms of saturated phenomena, and in keeping with the phenomenological method, Marion only wishes to outline the conditions for the possibility of the experience of revelation. That is, revelation stands as a possibility given the conditions of experience outlined by Marion, Husserl, and Heidegger. "[S]ince revelation remains a variation of saturation, itself a variation of the phenomenality of the phenomenon inasmuch as given, it still remains inscribed within the transcendental conditions of possibility."¹⁸⁰ Marion's analysis does not depend on the *fact* of revelation, but, given the phenomenal reality of other forms of saturation, it merely presents itself as a possibility within the field of experience.

Marion's proviso in the preceding quotation is critical in one other respect: even if revelation is only argued for as a possible experience of a saturated phenomenon, it is still subject to the conditions of phenomenality and appearance. Revelation must be received in the form of an intuition or an appearance. Marion argues similarly for the experience of the Holy:

The Holy is never seen, since only the visible is seen, according to the measure of the sight granted to our reach. And yet every spectacle reaches visibility only by submitting itself to the conditions of possibility of objects of visual experience, that is to say an intuition, intelligible or sensible. . . .¹⁸¹

Though the "Holy" is never seen, that which bears a trace of the Holy (perhaps revelation) can only be received by "submitting itself" to the conditions of visibility. Revelation, even as an overarching and possible concept, must undergo anamorphosis from an initial givenness to a visibility. *Only as a visible* can revelation bracket the given and bear a trace of the invisible. Otherwise, revelation would be an invisible means of bracketing visibility.

Insomuch as revelation is conditioned by visibility it also stands in both an analogical and functional relationship to the work of art. With regard to the former point, Marion frequently speaks of art in highly revelatory terms:

The painting does not amuse or entertain, does not decorate or embellish, and shows nothing—it shows itself, from itself and for itself. And thus, in this self-showing on its own terms alone, it shows us above all what this is—to show itself, to appear in full authority, full glory, like the dawn of a new world.¹⁸²

The painting, appearing in "full glory" as a trace of the given, is likened to the "dawn of a new world," a religious and ecstatic image which makes clear the analogies between aesthetic experience and the potential revelatory experience. This analogical relationship

is furthered by a parallel line of argument developed by Marion in his *Crossing of the Visible*, where a painting is seen as *leading to* a revelatory experience. The painting is not revelatory in itself, but, as visible, it points beyond itself to the “unseen,” the initial givenness that stands behind revelation and art alike:

Thus with a mere painting, it is still not a matter of receiving a revelation; but in the face of the unforeseeable, it already admits without any doubt the greatest secret of the unseen—the fact that it gives itself. The visible always gives itself to the unforeseen, as the unforeseen. It appears as the unforeseen because it gives itself, by itself, and on the basis of itself.¹⁸³

While Marion would deny a simple identification between art and revelation, he is clear to make constructive parallels between the two phenomena that show both as related and as pointers to an invisible givenness which gives birth to all visibility. Art bears a trace of the revelatory just as all saturated phenomena bear a trace of the invisible.

Of course, the analogies with art are limited in the degree to which they reveal the nature of revelation. Art is a necessary but insufficient condition for the experience of revelation. Revelation bears within it “more” than art can deliver. It is this transcendence which admits to a greater degree of saturation and overdetermination than are borne by the historical, personal, and visual dimensions of revelatory experience alone—revelation is, arguably, the emergent realization of saturation in all its forms. This sense of complete over-saturation is spoken of by Marion in the following:

In space, the saturated phenomenon swallows him with its intuitive deluge; in time, it precedes him with an always already there interpretation. The I loses its anteriority as egoic pole (polar I) and cannot yet identify itself, except by admitting the precedence of such an unconstitutable phenomenon.¹⁸⁴

Marion’s overtones are clearly Dionysian: the revelatory experience “swallows up” the percipient, strips her of her egoic identity, and pushes her to the limits of personal,

historical, and visual experience. In the experience of revelation, one is pushed beyond oneself into an experience of something greater and de-individuating; revelation, by overwhelming one's sensory intuition, achieves the reduction of the self.

Further evidence of such a submersion of identity is given at multiple points in Marion's work regarding the effects of revelatory experience. Revelation, though it can occur in everyday experience,¹⁸⁵ is a dynamic perceptive phenomenon which alters the frameworks for interpretation and feeling. One's horizons are effectively altered by the revelatory experience. "[T]he event begins a new series, in which it reorganizes the old phenomena—not without violence, but by the right that events have to open horizons."¹⁸⁶ Indeed, Marion's conceptualization of the effect of revelation is consistent with other, more theological interpretations of revelation in which revelation alters the frames for viewing and perceiving one's history, existence, and purpose: "When we speak of revelation we mean that something has happened to us in our history which conditions all our thinking and that through this happening we are enabled to apprehend what we are, what we are suffering and doing and what our potentialities are."¹⁸⁷ Despite the theological undertones in both Marion and Niebuhr, they still capture a phenomenological possibility within revelation: namely, the experience of an interpretive shift as a result of an overwhelming perceptual experience. Whatever theological conclusions one wishes to draw are effectively *post hoc*. What matters in Marion's account of revelation is the assertion of a phenomenon which overflows one's perception and, by doing so, radically alters the way in which future phenomena are perceived.

I would argue that the line of argumentation pursued to this point remains wholly in keeping with the notion of embodied poetic thinking. Inasmuch as embodied poetic

thinking does not specify the *content*, much less the potential horizon of phenomena disclosed through the bodily calling and preservation of Being, it remains open to experiences of saturation and therefore revelation. Embodied poetic thinking is agnostic as to the banal—or extraordinary—nature of phenomena. Furthermore, because of the analogical and functional relationship between works of art and revelation, a form of thinking which is “artistic” in nature remains a viable means of thinking revelation. Inasmuch as the work of art opens itself up to saturation, so too do modes of thinking which model themselves on the positive element within artworks.

In this more restricted sense, revelation stands as a possibility within embodied poetic thinking which transforms one’s interpretive frameworks for experience. Indeed, revelation is the foremost means by which visibility admits to its invisible origin—immanence, through revelation, is reinscribed with the potentiality for admitting of a greater depth than is normally perceived in vision.

The Ethics of Excess: How We “Think” the Saturated

In order to argue for embodied poetic thinking as a possible opening onto revelation, one final ethical qualification must be made. Saturated phenomena are often spoken of by Marion as requiring *submission* (or, in Heideggerian language, “openness”) on the part of the percipient. “It is therefore the saturated phenomenon as such that inverts intentionality and submits the receiver to the presence of the call.”¹⁸⁸ In the saturated phenomenon, one is given over to the work of art, face, or revelatory experience.

In order to experience the saturated phenomenon, then, what is required is an openness to submission and the possibility of being overwhelmed.

Nothing of what gives itself can show itself except to the gifted and through it—not by constitution, anticipatory resoluteness, or exposure to the Other, but by the will to see, originally derived from givenness itself. . . . [The gifted] must decide to expose himself without protection to the gaze that crosses his own and the face that sees him clearly, in a word, when he must resolve himself to love. . . .¹⁸⁹

Marion characterizes the openness to saturation here in terms of “will,” “resolution,” and the desire to expose oneself to something through an unspecified process (which I have here given as embodied poetic thinking). Thomas Carlson registers a similar ethical imperative: “Reception of the unconditionally given, in sum, might be limited not only by the finite capability of the one who receives but also by a constriction or a weakening or a turning of the will, which thus assumes a literally decisive role in staging the given in its visibility.”¹⁹⁰ The spirit of submission and openness needs to include preparing the “will” for the possibility of a givenness that exceeds one’s own sense of perception and agency. In this sense, “will” designates both an attitude and a pragmatic posture; in disposition it entails an openness and submission to what happens in the space cleared by a particular way of seeing and thinking; in practice it indicates a vigilance towards what may, or may not, appear in any given event. “[The saturated phenomenon] therefore demands of the affected that he give himself over, let himself be (re-)made, (re-)defined, and, so to speak, (un-)measured by the measure of its own excess.”¹⁹¹

This has decisive resonances with Heidegger’s conception of “releasement” (*Gelassenheit*) and meditative thinking. Inasmuch as poetic thinking is awaiting the arrival of Being in *Ereignis*, the turning of the will spoken of by Marion and Carlson evokes a posture of patience and practical vigilance necessary for the reception of revelation. These lines of continuity are further drawn by Marion’s frequent admission that submission to the possibility of saturated phenomena entails giving oneself over to

the “call” of Being: “That which gives itself gives itself only to the one who gives himself over to the call and only in the pure form of a confirmation of the call, and only in the pure form of a confirmation of the call, which is repeated because received.”¹⁹² One gives oneself over to the call of Being (and/or revelation), a call which can only be answered through confirmation, that is, reception of the event. Marion continues in *Being Given*: “By admitting itself to be the target of the call, therefore by responding with the simple interrogative ‘Me?’ the gifted opens a field for manifestation by lending itself to its reception and the retention of its impact.”¹⁹³ The confirmation of the call opens a “field for manifestation,” *Ereignis*, in which that which sent the call can be more fully received.

The only ethical response in the midst of saturation then, and therefore within embodied poetic thinking, is therefore one of minimal response, a confirmation and welcoming of that which is to appear or withdraw. The will, in its submission to whatever happens, can only adequately respond by maintaining the open site into which saturation may appear. And, in this sense, “maintaining” need only mean responding and confirming the presence of what may appear.

I would constructively define this disposition towards maintaining appearance and abiding by whatever may appear through Paul Tillich’s conception of courage. Courage, as argued for in his *Courage to Be*, is the persistent disposition to be open to the abyss (and therefore the possibility of non-being), the depths of what may or may not come in art, introspection, or revelation. This openness takes the form of affirming Being in spite of the potentiality (and often reality) of non-Being.

Courage is the self-affirmation of being in spite of the fact of non-being.
It is the act of the individual self in taking the anxiety of non-being upon

itself by affirming itself either as part of an embracing whole or in its individual selfhood. Courage always includes a risk, it is always threatened by non-being. . .¹⁹⁴

Of course, Tillich places courage within the domain of Being and non-Being; yet Tillich's concept of courage can be modified to accommodate saturated phenomena: courage is the affirmation of Being (or potentially overwhelming *positivity*) through the willingness to submit to its manifestation in forms which are banal, saturated, and visible.¹⁹⁵ This entails the critical qualities of submission, a resolution of the will, responsiveness, and the preservation of an open site for the reception of saturation. Courage indicates the resolute desire to encounter, and possibly be overwhelmed by, that which lies outside of one's comprehension and holds within itself the ability to erode one's sense of self, place, and agency.¹⁹⁶ Only through such an attitude are saturated phenomena, and therefore the possibility of revelation, possible.¹⁹⁷

Just as negative thinking and the creative envisionment of an aesthetic society and individual bear within them an ethical maxim (see Chapter 3), so too does embodied poetic thinking. Such an ethic is more abstract, however: one must courageously face that which may come in a practice of seeing and inhabiting that opens itself to the possibility of being overwhelmed by art, revelation, or other forms of vision. While it remains the task of the following chapter to elucidate what modes of seeing and inhabiting enable such a disposition, the possible content of embodied poetic thinking, and therefore revelation, remains wholly open-ended. What is met in courage and openness cannot be prescribed in advance: embodied poetic thinking is a disposition of openness towards the possible.

A Final Note on the Nature of Revelation

With the above qualification to the notion of embodied poetic thinking, one final point should be registered. Just as Marion's concept of saturation only outlines the possibility of revelation, it also precludes the possibility of drawing any direct theological conclusions from the experience of revelation or saturated phenomena in general. The phenomenological concept of revelation is a possible experience given the conditions for the possibility of experience in general, and should not be deemed a religious phenomenon with definite theological content.

This assertion runs counter to a number of commentators, whose critique of Marion can be summarized in the following: "Marion's 'religious phenomenon' is collapsed into a *theological* phenomenon; correlatively, his (albeit impossible) phenomenology of religion slides towards a very possible, very particular, theology."¹⁹⁸ Smith's commentary here has two related critiques: 1) in opening up the possibility for revelation, Marion is actually making a theological claim; 2) by privileging "revelation," Marion is emphasizing an experience particular to the Abrahamic traditions and therefore makes an implicitly theological claim.

The first point above can be addressed directly by Marion himself. He states, "phenomenology does not actually overcome metaphysics so much as it opens the official possibility of leaving it to itself."¹⁹⁹ Or, equally, "Here it is a matter of admitting only the *possibility* of the phenomenon of revelation (and not, once again, the *fact* of a Revelation). . . "²⁰⁰ Other commentators, including Merold Westphal and Kevin Hart, are also clear to separate the phenomenological project of securing the conditions for the possibility of revelation from their appropriation in theological and religious discourse.²⁰¹

Thus any claim which would make a correlation between the possibility for revelation disclosed in phenomenology and the *reality* of revelation presumed in theology runs against Marion's own claims and the nature of his inquiry into saturated phenomena.

This point is also echoed in the epistemic status that Marion assigns to revelation. Because the phenomenology of the gift can only show revelation as a possibility, it can never be asserted as reality. "I am not broaching revelation in its theological pretension to the truth, something faith alone can dare to do. I am outlining it as a possibility—in fact the ultimate possibility, the paradox of paradoxes—of phenomenality, such that it is carried out in a possible saturated phenomenon."²⁰² Only faith and its counterpart in theology can grant truth to revelation; as a possible phenomena outlined in Marion's phenomenology and anticipated in the work of Husserl and Heidegger, it simply remains a species of the "principle of principles," the givenness of phenomena and their reception in subjectivity. With this, one can draw a clear distinction between the tasks of phenomenology and theology; the latter is to explicate that which is felt in revelation, whereas the former is to outline the mere possibility of that which many experience, if only dimly or through the lens of theological reflection. "I do not *here* have to judge [a saturated phenomenon's] actual manifestation or ontic status, which remains the business proper to revealed theology."²⁰³

This line of reflection may also anticipate an answer to the second criticism above, namely that Marion's phenomenology, even by granting "revelation" as an exemplary phenomenon, inappropriately privileges Abrahamic religious experience. As Marion describes above, phenomenology only grants the possibility of revealed experience, not its reality. And, as he later asserts, it intrinsically cannot name that which

appears in the revelatory event: “it must be concluded that every phenomenon of revelation (as possibility) and especially a Revelation (as actuality) would imply the radical anonymity of what calls.”²⁰⁴ Thus, as Westphal states, what is revealed in revelation cannot be said to be God, an agent, or anything with concrete religious content: “The God who might appear in or as a saturated phenomenon is not the metaphysical God as ground of phenomena, nor is there any movement from phenomena as given to God as their giver. Marion’s theology is not onto-theology.”²⁰⁵ Revelation remains an ecstatically open-ended experience. Instead of allowing the indication of an agent (supernatural or otherwise) or even confirming the hypotheses of theology, revelation remains immune to such thought *from the inside*. Any theology gleaned from revelation is always levied as an external or after-the-fact nomination of what is insistently an unnameable experience.

If anything, what revelation grants—and can only grant—is an experience of an overwhelming givenness, an invisibility which saturates one’s perceptual field through immanent visibility. This need not be a religious experience, though it admittedly opens itself to religious interpretation and the feeling(s) generally associated with religious experience. Strictly speaking, however, revelation only gives an uninterpretable perception that shows the invisible’s ascent into the visible in a form which overwhelms sensory reception. Such an experience could easily be received as religious, but, as the section on Merleau-Ponty shows, it can also equally be seen as the vision of a multi-dimensional and emergent world which allows for visibility and invisibility in the first-place.²⁰⁶ In this instance, the aims of phenomenology and ontology merge into revealing the conditions for the experience of a dense and overlapping world that gives rise to

experience itself. Through revelation, one comes to see the ways in which visible experience can be imbued with a meaning traditionally associated with the religious.

IV: Conclusion: Embodied Poetic Thinking and Revelation

This chapter and the preceding excursus began with the imperative that, in order to conceptualize the positive moment in life as art, the insights from the post-Husserlian tradition and its reflection on a pre-reflective “world” must be thought together. In “thinking together” Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Marion, I have argued for a notion of embodied poetic thinking that is built on the mutually reinforcing insights of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, and which is supplemented by the ontology of Merleau-Ponty and phenomenology of revelation argued for by Marion. With the work of Marion, the positive moment of aesthetic judgment within life as art, summarized through the concept of embodied poetic thinking, becomes a means whereby one remains open to the possibility of a pre-reflective—and possibility revelatory—experience of the visible world. Such an experience is captured in poetry, theology, and religious ritual, but embodied poetic thinking lays bare the preconditions for such an experience. In doing so, embodied poetic thinking shows itself as a disposition towards the visible world in which immanence is affirmed and potentially seen as sacral. Embodied poetic thinking becomes a means of reinscribing a meaning traditionally associated with the religious in the immanent and poetic universe.

Through embodied poetic thinking the fields of thinking and art have become conjoined given a common alliance to the thought and preservation of Being. In Adorno and Marcuse thinking and art arose in their functional dedication to negativity and the

envisionment of alternatives for existence; in phenomenology, thinking and art are joined in the project of bringing to experience a pre-reflective experience of the world. Where critical theory relies on an inversion of dialectics from within, phenomenology attempts to go beyond dialectical thinking altogether. One grants an experience of individuation and thoughtful illusion, the other an experience of the unfolding world and a modified experience of thinking and illusion itself. Both, in turn, are discourses which attempt to alter our conceptions of philosophy, the nature of creation, and how one thinks in line with the nature of art.

There are also deep resonances with the work of Nietzsche examined in chapter two. In embodied poetic thinking one has a form of “thinking” loyal to the affirmative dimension within art and the honest illusions of Nietzsche’s free spirits. In seeing and inhabiting the world differently, one begins to express the “poetry of the world”—the way the world expresses itself through reaching visibility—in everyday life. The theme of children, a motif which occurs regularly in Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, reveals the continuity between Nietzsche and phenomenology: “The child’s ways of expression, once they have been deliberately recaptured by an artist in a genuinely creative gesture, will, on the contrary, yield us the secret resonance through which our finitude opens up to the being of the world and becomes poetry.”²⁰⁷ Yet here the “radical affirmation” of which Nietzsche spoke is not, as in Adorno and Marcuse, given in futural or political terms,²⁰⁸ but is rather the openness and courage to face an experience which may unsettle or disturb one’s present conception of reality. Affirmation is recognized in phenomenology as the disposition to faithfully abide by what may or may not appear in one’s own experience. One affirms by remaining open to what appears.

Through its ability to affirm the visible and immanent dimensions of experience, the work of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Marion constitutes the positive moment in life as art. Whereas critical theory, the negative moment of aesthetic judgment in life as art, sought to combat the present reality through dissonance and the creation of alternative modes of being and living, phenomenology wishes to affirm the present by creating forms of seeing, thinking, and inhabiting which express, and open themselves to, the unfolding nature of Being. This openness and creativity may culminate in revelation, the transformation and overflowing of one's categories of experience. Or it may simply allow for a reawakening of one's experience of the world. At its base, though, embodied poetic thinking is a potential means of opening oneself to the immanent happenings of the world and blessing their emergence through courage and respect.

Despite its advantages, embodied poetic thinking does not adequately describe how one lives in order to arrive at the happening of Being and revelation which are possibilities within life as art. Like critical theory in chapter three, it prescribes a form of judgment which links thinking and aesthetics, but it does not give concrete directives for how one is to integrate creativity, courage, and the experience of Being into one's daily life. It is therefore the task of the next chapter to specify how one sees and lives in a way which opens up the positive and negative moments of aesthetic judgment within life as art. Both critical theory and phenomenology illuminate the possible modes of realization for a more artful life, but it remains the task of an aesthetic ethics to define how the artful individual and embodied poetic thinking are manifest in the intricacies of daily life. With an aesthetic ethics, life as art becomes a means of combining the positive and negative

moments of aesthetic judgment into a creative life which affirms the past, present, and future.

Endnotes

¹ Merleau-Ponty, VI, 115. Also see Martin Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 87.

² Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 28.

³ Renaud Barbaras, "A Phenomenology of Life," in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, eds., Taylor Carman and Mark Hansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 208: ". . . Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is really a *phenomenology of life*, which means Merleau-Ponty's thought completes the project of Husserl's phenomenology. Indeed, we can say that Merleau-Ponty's main purpose, from beginning to end, is to give sense to the Husserlian *lifeworld* as it is described in the *Crisis*."

⁴ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 66.

⁵ Heidegger, BT, 101. "The spatialization of Da-sein in its 'corporeality,' which contains a problematic of its own is not to be discussed here. . . ."

⁶ Merleau-Ponty, xi.

⁷ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 57.

⁸ Merleau-Ponty as quoted in Theodore Gareats, "The Return to Perceptual Experience and the Meaning of the Primacy of Perception," in *Merleau-Ponty: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, ed., Ted Toadvine (New York: Routledge, 2006), 26.

⁹ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 4.

¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 92.

¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 9-10.

¹² Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 50.

¹³ Crowther, 139. Also see Charles Taylor, "Embodied Agency," in *Merleau-Ponty: Critical Essays*, ed., Henry Pietersema (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1990), 12, where he states: "Perception only is possible against a background sense of surrounding reality on which I am examining a part."

¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 129.

¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 151.

¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 153.

¹⁷ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 157.

¹⁸ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 42.

¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 78.

²⁰ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 384.

²¹ As I will make clear in succeeding sections, this conception of the self as a body-subject is crucial for life as art. The subject in life as art is not a solely rational

agent, but is a body-subject enmeshed in a series of competing environments and discourses which the agent must bring into an aesthetic unity.

²² Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 87.

²³ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 112.

²⁴ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 380.

²⁵ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 152. Also see Carman, "Sensation," 71: "Perception is not just a mental or psychological effect in the mind, then, but the body's intelligent orientation in the world."

²⁶ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 94.

²⁷ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 121.

²⁸ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 108.

²⁹ Merleau-Ponty, SNS, 50. Also see PoP, 137: "there is not in the normal subject a tactile experience and also a visual one, but an integrated experience to which it is impossible to gauge the contribution of each sense."

³⁰ This has clear consequences for the thought of Michel Foucault as well as for life as art.

³¹ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 155.

³² Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 180.

³³ See Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 182: "We discover both that sexual life is one more form of original intentionality, and also bring to view the vital origins of perception, motility and representation by basing all these 'processes' on an 'intentional arc' which gives way in the patient, and which, in the normal subject, endows experience with its degree of vitality and fruitfulness."

³⁴ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 181.

³⁵ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 196.

³⁶ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 183.

³⁷ See, for example, the following from PoP, 185: "we must eat and breathe before perceiving and awakening to relational living, belonging to colours and lights through sight, to sounds through hearing, to the body of another through sexuality, before arriving at the life of human relations."

³⁸ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 197, italics added.

³⁹ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 272.

⁴⁰ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 273.

⁴¹ Merleau-Ponty's *Nature* lectures as quoted in Mark Hansen, "The Embryology of the (in)Visible," *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, eds., Taylor Carman and Mark Hansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 238.

⁴² With particular reference to the emergent body, see, in particular, Philip Clayton's use of the self as a "psycho-somatic" unity in his recent *Adventures in the Spirit: God, World, and Divine Action*, ed., Zachary Simpson (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008). For general references on emergence, see *Re-Emergence of Emergence*, eds., Philip Clayton and Paul Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Harold Morowitz, *The Emergence of Everything* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Terence Deacon, *The Symbolic Species* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), Robert Laughlin, *A Different Universe* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), and Philip Clayton, *Mind and Emergence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴³ Barbaras, "A Phenomenology of Life," 216.

⁴⁴ Merleau-Ponty as quoted in Barbaras, "A Phenomenology of Life," 223.

⁴⁵ This is likely owing to Barbaras' disconnection from the contemporary debates regarding emergence.

⁴⁶ See here the work of Philip Clayton, especially his *Mind and Emergence*, who summarizes emergence by quoting el-Hani and Pereira (in the "Introduction" to *Re-Emergence of Emergence*, 2):

1. *Ontological physicalism*: All that exists in the space-time world are the basic properties recognized by physics and their aggregates.

2. *Property emergence*: When aggregates of material particles attain an appropriate level of organizational complexity, genuinely novel properties emerge in these complex systems.

3. *The irreducibility of emergence*: Emergent properties are irreducible to, and unpredictable from, the lower-level phenomena from which they emerge.

4. *Downward causation*: Higher-level entities causally affect their lower-level constituents.

In the same volume he also defines emergence as follows: "to say that a given system is emergent is to say that *it is explanatorily, causally, and hence ontologically irreducible to the systems out of which it has evolved.*" (Philip Clayton, "Emergence from Quantum Physics to Religion: A Critical Appraisal," in *Re-Emergence*, 310) The *sine qua non* of ontological emergence is clearly the condition of downward causation; that is, an emergent property (in this instance, the body) must perform work (the collapse of the perceptual field) that its constituent parts cannot perform as a mereological sum. Also interesting with respect to ontological emergence is the work of Michael Silberstein, who deems conscious brain states to be ontologically emergent with respect to the brain. See, especially, his "In Defense of Ontological Emergence and Mental Causation," in *Re-Emergence of Emergence*, eds., Philip Clayton and Paul Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 203-26.

⁴⁷ This conception of "thinking" as the pre-reflective process of coordinating and creating a coherent field that enables awareness has clear antecedents in the biologism of the nineteenth century and, most importantly, the thought of Nietzsche. See, for example, Nietzsche, GS, 111: "The course of logical ideas and inferences in our brain

today corresponds to a process [both historical and bodily] and a struggle among impulses that are, taken singly, very illogical and unjust. We generally experience only the result of this struggle because this primeval mechanism now runs its course so quickly and is so well concealed.”

⁴⁸ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 241.

⁴⁹ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 293.

⁵⁰ Taylor Carman, “Sensation,” 51, gives a nice summary of this concept: “What Merleau-Ponty calls the ‘phenomenal field’ is neither a representation nor a locus of representations, but a dimension of our bodily embeddedness in a perceptually coherent environment, a primitive aspect of our openness onto the world.” Also see here Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology*, 146: “One must keep in mind that the body also has an interrogative function: it is a questioning of the world, and its motility is a response to the questions the world raises.”

⁵¹ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 251.

⁵² See the following section on ontology for a further elaboration of the concept of invisibility.

⁵³ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 280.

⁵⁴ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 106.

⁵⁵ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 255. Also see Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 450: “The world around us must be, not a system of objects which we synthesize, but a totality of things, open to us, towards which we project ourselves.” Also of interest in this regard is Merleau-Ponty’s later thought, often hailed as a resolution to the problems presented in his earlier work, namely the articulation of the “world” which lay outside of human perception. Yet between *Phenomenology of Perception* and *Visibility and Invisibility* there is tremendous consonance between his earlier and later concepts of world. For example, see VI, 8, where Merleau-Ponty states, “Thus in perception we witness the miracle of a totality that surpasses what one thinks to be its conditions or its parts, that from afar holds them under its power, as if they existed only on its threshold and were destined to lose themselves in it.” Or, similarly, see VI, 218: “The ‘World’ is this whole where each ‘part,’ when one takes it for itself, suddenly opens unlimited dimensions—becomes a *total part*.” This suggests, as I will later argue, that Merleau-Ponty’s later work is not a “turning away” from his earlier work, but a completion of it, filling critical lacunae opened up by his phenomenology, namely how one is to think of the world. This clearly pushes Merleau-Ponty’s project towards ontology.

⁵⁶ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology*, 149.

⁵⁷ Barbaras, “A Phenomenology of Life,” 225.

⁵⁸ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 214.

⁵⁹ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 228. Also see Mikel Dufrenne, “Eye and Mind,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed., Galen Johnson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 257: “speaking itself might be

understood as a type of seeing: the speaking subject. . . is in language as he is in the world, he harmonizes with its thickness as he does with the flesh of the sensuous, he lives in it by inhabiting it.”

⁶⁰ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 212.

⁶¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World* [PW], trans., John O'Neill, ed., Claude Lefort (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971), 10. Also see, in this regard from the same volume, 12: “and like a whirlwind [signs] sweep me along toward the other meaning with which I am going to connect.”

⁶² Merleau-Ponty, PW, 141.

⁶³ See, for example, PW, 32 and Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting* [AR], ed., Galen Johnson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 80.

⁶⁴ Merleau-Ponty, AR, 79-80.

⁶⁵ Merleau-Ponty, PW, 28.

⁶⁶ Merleau-Ponty, PW, 36. Also see PW, 42, where Merleau-Ponty states the following: “[Signs] succeed in conveying signification only through their assembly, just as communication passes from the whole of spoken language to the whole of understood language.”

⁶⁷ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, 207.

⁶⁸ Merleau-Ponty, VI, 155.

⁶⁹ Renaud Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon: Merleau-Ponty's Ontology* [BP], trans., Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 289.

⁷⁰ Merleau-Ponty, PW, 88.

⁷¹ Merleau-Ponty, PW, 152.

⁷² Merleau-Ponty, PW, 81.

⁷³ Merleau-Ponty, AR, 65.

⁷⁴ This undoubtedly privileges vision in the construction of the perceptual field, a move which Merleau-Ponty clearly extends in his later *Visibility and Invisibility*. I would argue that the privileging of vision here is outside the logic of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body, but such a critique should not damage his aesthetics of painting.

⁷⁵ Merleau-Ponty, PW, 83.

⁷⁶ See Merleau-Ponty, AR, 123: “The painter ‘takes his body with him,’ says Valéry. . . . It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings.” Also see, in this respect, AR, 91: “That convergence of all the visible and intellectual vectors of the painting toward the same meaning, *x*, is already sketched out in the painter's perception. It begins as soon as he perceives—that is, as soon as he arranges

certain gaps or fissures, figures and grounds, a top and a bottom, a norm and a deviation, in the inaccessible fullness of things.”

⁷⁷ Alphonse de Waelhens, "Merleau-Ponty: Philosopher of Painting," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed., Galen Johnson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 187.

⁷⁸ Barbaras, BP, 66.

⁷⁹ This would ostensibly preserve the demand for something like *Ereignis*, where Being is called, invoked, and “happens,” but is not submitted to the interpretive measures of the perceiving subject.

⁸⁰ Merleau-Ponty, PW, 78.

⁸¹ Merleau-Ponty, PW, 77.

⁸² de Waelhens, 178.

⁸³ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 174, as well as PoP, 175: “It is in this sense that our body is to be comparable to a work of art. It is a nexus of living meanings, not the law for a certain number of covariant terms.” Also see here the excellent summary by Linda Singer, "Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed., Galen Johnson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 241: “Part of [Merleau-Ponty’s] intent is to establish an explicit analogy between the lived body and the work of art on the ground that both are expressive fields which are capable of radiating significances with transcend them, and of intertwining with other significances in the world.”

⁸⁴ See the following chapter for a more complete analysis of the role of creation in life as art which employs both the themes of resistance and affirmation/revelation.

⁸⁵ Unfortunately, Merleau-Ponty’s most explicit work on ontology, later published as *The Visible and the Invisible*, was not completed. I must therefore turn to others more often than I would usually permit in order to “complete” his own thought, provisional as it is. The work of Renaud Barbaras is of particular importance in this regard, as his work has consistently sought to advance Merleau-Ponty’s own ontology through his own analyses of desire and the phenomenology of life. Barbaras will appear frequently in the text that follows, and, arguably, much of what is considered “Merleau-Ponty’s ontology” can be partially attributed to Barbaras.

⁸⁶ See Merleau-Ponty, VI, 176. Also see Barbaras, BP, 77: “we must not see Merleau-Ponty’s ontology as opposed to the phenomenological enterprise; on the contrary, it is its fulfillment.”

⁸⁷ Merleau-Ponty, VI, 95.

⁸⁸ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 423.

⁸⁹ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 462.

⁹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 382.

⁹¹ Merleau-Ponty, VI, 88.

⁹² Merleau-Ponty, VI, 132.

⁹³ Merleau-Ponty, VI, 216. Also see VI, 247: "One has to understand that it is the visibility itself that involves a non-visibility—In the very measure that I see, I do not know *what* I see (a familiar person is not defined), which does not mean that there would be a *nothing* [ala Sartre] there, but that the *Wesen* in question is that of a ray of the world tacitly touched. . . . The invisible of the visible. It is its belongingness to a ray of the world. . . ."

⁹⁴ See, in this regard, Barbaras, BP, 166, where he states, "Visibility must be grounded on an invisibility which, in order to bring the visible to presence, must be on the side of what it nonetheless negates," as well as the following section summarizing Merleau-Ponty's ontology.

⁹⁵ Renaud Barbaras, "Life and Perceptual Intentionality," *Research in Phenomenology* 33 (2003): 158.

⁹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, VI, 257.

⁹⁷ Barbaras, BP, 235.

⁹⁸ Merleau-Ponty, VI, 110.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ See, in this regard, Merleau-Ponty's lengthy account of the phenomenon of "touch-touching" in *Visibility and Invisibility*.

¹⁰¹ Merleau-Ponty, VI, 160.

¹⁰² Michael Smith, 198, states this theme well: "That body—but also the lived world that is a prolongation of it—is a chiasma, an intertwining of movement, sight and touch, a narcissism of seeing visibility, the reversibility of inside and outside, the formative milieu of subject and object; it is the 'barbaric Principle,' prior to all objectivity—termed 'flesh.'"

¹⁰³ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, 528.

¹⁰⁴ Merleau-Ponty, VI, 137. Also see VI, 135: "The body interposed is not itself a thing, an interstitial matter, a connective tissue, but a *sensible for itself*, which means, not that absurdity: color that sees itself, surface that touches itself—but this paradox: a set of colors and surfaces inhabited by a touch, a vision, hence an *exemplar sensible*, which offer to him who inhabits it and senses it the wherewithal to sense everything that resembles himself on the outside. . . ." Also see Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, 169: "my seeing is continuous with my being seen; I could not be one without the other, and there is no line of demarcation that can be drawn between the being of my body as subject and that of my body as object."

¹⁰⁵ Merleau-Ponty, VI, 123.

¹⁰⁶ Barbaras, BP, 30.

¹⁰⁷ Merleau-Ponty, VI, 146.

¹⁰⁸ Barbaras, BP, 32.

¹⁰⁹ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, 146.

¹¹⁰ I believe that Merleau-Ponty's play on sexual metaphors, though unstated, is intentional. And, given his previous examination of the role of sexuality in the perceiving body, it makes clear that "penetration/penetrated" is a figurative means of drawing attention to the openness and agency of the body in the perceptive process.

¹¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, VI, 139.

¹¹² Inasmuch as it devises a system of overlapping perspectives within the greater milieu of Being.

¹¹³ This is contradictory to the reading Barbaras, who identifies flesh with Being. As he states in BP, 307, "The flesh ultimately designates neither the perceiving body nor the expressive gesture, but rather the place where they come together as they differentiate themselves from each other. There is a flesh of this corporeal flesh and of this glorious flesh which is synonymous with Being." Also see *Ibid.*, 259. Yet the "crossing of perspectives" can and should be read as "elemental" in the sense evoked by Merleau-Ponty above—a limited and stylized element within a multi-dimensional world. Thus flesh is analogously related to Being as perception is to the world, that is, as a "slice" of something greater or a stylization of something indeterminate.

¹¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty, VI, 84.

¹¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty, VI, 237.

¹¹⁶ While, notably, still preserving the ontological difference.

¹¹⁷ Barbaras, BP, 304.

¹¹⁸ This definition plays on each dimension of invisibility given by Merleau-Ponty above.

¹¹⁹ Barbaras, BP, 264.

¹²⁰ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, 223.

¹²¹ Françoise Dastur, "Perceptual Faith and the Invisible," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 25, no. 1 (1994): 48.

¹²² Merleau-Ponty, VI, 149. Dillon, in *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, 242, expresses this point well: "The flesh of the world articulates itself through itself. Becoming happens. Forms emerge from the indefinite which was pregnant with them; they emerge, combine, recede, and give way to new forms. . . . The earth moves and mountains rise, only to be carved by glaciers and eroded by rain."

¹²³ Barbaras, "A Phenomenology of Life," 229. Similarly, see Barbaras, BP, 306: "Being is everything because everything has its advent in it, because every thing, every organ, every field can, in it, communicate with the others; but to that degree it is nothing *itself* because this participation is the means for everything to preserve its distance and its determination."

¹²⁴ Barbaras, BP, 307.

¹²⁵ Glen Mazis, "Matter, Dream, and the Murmurs among Things," in *Merleau-Ponty: Difference, Materiality, Painting*, ed., Veronique M. Foti (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1996), 80.

¹²⁶ Merleau-Ponty, VI, 117.

¹²⁷ See, in this regard, Barbaras, BP, 319: "Thus, Merleau-Ponty's ontology in no way attests to an accord with Heidegger. It seems to us, on the contrary, that it is situated beyond Heidegger's interrogation insofar as it constitutes a critique in action of what the thought of Being as Being retains that is still abstract and unilateral." That is, Merleau-Ponty's analysis transcends Heidegger's inasmuch as it denies Heidegger's more abstract concept of Being in favor of an ontology built on visibility and a potential transferability to the sciences.

¹²⁸ Note here my use of revelation as 1) a sensory experience which 2) overflows one's categories of experience and 3) leads to a transformation of one's interpretive frameworks for experience itself.

¹²⁹ Heidegger, BT, 32. Also see Heidegger's frequent use of *es gibt* in the previous excursus.

¹³⁰ Merleau-Ponty, PoP, xi.

¹³¹ Also see in this regard Merleau-Ponty's use of "there is" [*il y a*] (see, for example, AR, 122), a clear play on the dual meaning in German of *es gibt*, which can be translated as both "there is" and "what gives." This play in meaning is also employed by Heidegger, whose later work, especially *What is Called Thinking?*, consistently uses *es gibt* in the dual sense of what gives itself and what "is."

¹³² Barbaras, BP, 263. I have selected only a few examples here of givenness in the work of both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, but would argue that each systemically problematizes givenness without explicating it fully. Heidegger, as Marion points out, is especially inattentive to the problematic of givenness to which his own work points.

¹³³ Kevin Hart, "Introduction," *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed., Kevin Hart (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 13. Hart's analysis is especially helpful in illuminating the connections between the work of Husserl, Heidegger, and Marion.

¹³⁴ This is a somewhat disputed quotation from Husserl's *Investigations*.

¹³⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* [BG], trans., Jeffrey Kosky. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 17.

¹³⁶ Marion, BG, 76. The allusion here to the work of Derrida is intentional, and Marion's work has clear resonances with the notion of "responsibility" evoked in Derrida's later work, especially *The Gift of Death*, trans., David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹³⁷ See Marion, BG, 60: "But givenness gives without obligation for such a subject, one that it defines because it is not measured by it, exceeds it, and perhaps, saturates it without measure. Where the transcendental fixes a measure, givenness

exceeds immeasurably, such that a possible subject can refer to it only by an essential unmeasuredness.”

¹³⁸ Marion, BG, 171. Also see BG, 167: “*the event does not have an adequate cause* and cannot have one. Only in this way can it advance on the wings of a dove: unforeseen, unusual, unexpected, unheard of, and unseen.”

¹³⁹ Marion, BG, 39.

¹⁴⁰ Marion, BG, 53.

¹⁴¹ Marion, BG, 34.

¹⁴² Marion, BG, 37.

¹⁴³ Marion, BG, 117.

¹⁴⁴ See Marion, BG, 70.

¹⁴⁵ Marion, BG, 26. Also see Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies in Saturated Phenomena* [IE], trans., Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 23: “I thus conclude that no appearing is excepted from the fold of givenness, even if it does not always accomplish the phenomenal unfolding in it entirely. . . . there can be indefinite degrees of givenness but no exception from it.”

¹⁴⁶ Marion, BG, 122.

¹⁴⁷ Marion, BG, 123-4.

¹⁴⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible* [CV], trans., James Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 7.

¹⁴⁹ Merold Westphal, “Vision and Voice: Phenomenology and Theology in the Work of Jean-Luc Marion,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 60, nos. 1-3 (2006): 135.

¹⁵⁰ Marion, IE, 109.

¹⁵¹ See the preceding discussion of Merleau-Ponty.

¹⁵² That is, saturated phenomena are auto-reducing, effecting the reduction through their own excess, not through the agency of the givee.

¹⁵³ Marion, BG, 198.

¹⁵⁴ Marion, BG, 199.

¹⁵⁵ Marion, BG, 210.

¹⁵⁶ In the case of saturated phenomena, the excess of the phenomenon would render the formation of the visible field impossible through quantity.

¹⁵⁷ Marion, BG, 211.

¹⁵⁸ Marion, BG, 226.

¹⁵⁹ Marion, IE, 112.

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- ¹⁶⁰ Marion, BG, 202.
- ¹⁶¹ Marion, BG, 203.
- ¹⁶² Marion, IE, 116.
- ¹⁶³ Marion, BG, 206. Also see Marion, RG, 201, and Hart, 23, where he states that saturated phenomena “take me by surprise, giving me an experience of finitude that is not always welcome.”
- ¹⁶⁴ Marion, IE, 44.
- ¹⁶⁵ Marion, BG, 151.
- ¹⁶⁶ Marion, BG, 229.
- ¹⁶⁷ Marion, BG, 52.
- ¹⁶⁸ Marion, IE, 75. Also see IE, 68: “Here is the painting: the non-physical space where the visible alone abolishes *l’invu* (the invisible by default) and reduces the phenomenon to pure visibility. . . . the painting reduces itself to what shows itself. . . .”
- ¹⁶⁹ Marion, IE, 67.
- ¹⁷⁰ Marion, IE, 69. Also see CV, 26: “If the painter rules over the access of the unseen to the visible, his gift thus has nothing to do his vision of the visible but with his divination of the unseen [*l’invu*].”
- ¹⁷¹ See Marion, CV, 32: “The whole mastery consists, precisely, in ultimately letting the unseen burst into the visible by surprise, unpredictably.”
- ¹⁷² Marion, BG, 198.
- ¹⁷³ Marion, IE, 63. Also see CV, 32: “The authentic painting fulfills the expectation of the painter and the visitor, strictly speaking, by surprising it, disorienting it, and flooding it.”
- ¹⁷⁴ Marion, BG, 48.
- ¹⁷⁵ Marion, IE, 72.
- ¹⁷⁶ Marion, IE, 61.
- ¹⁷⁷ Marion, BG, 235.
- ¹⁷⁸ Marion, BG, 236.
- ¹⁷⁹ Marion, BG, 141.
- ¹⁸⁰ Marion, BG, 235.
- ¹⁸¹ Marion, CV, 66-7.
- ¹⁸² Marion, CV, 43.
- ¹⁸³ Marion, CV, 45.
- ¹⁸⁴ Marion, BG, 217.

¹⁸⁵ See, in reference to the “everydayness” of saturated phenomena, Jean-Luc Marion, “The Banality of Saturation [BS],” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed., Kevin Hart (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 390ff.

¹⁸⁶ Marion, BG, 172.

¹⁸⁷ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), 138.

¹⁸⁸ Marion, BG, 267.

¹⁸⁹ Marion, BG, 307.

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Carlson, “Blindness and the Decision to See: On Revelation and Reception in Jean-Luc Marion,” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed., Kevin Hart (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 161.

¹⁹¹ Marion, BS, 405.

¹⁹² Marion, RG, 197-8.

¹⁹³ Marion, BG, 287.

¹⁹⁴ Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (Glasgow: William Collins and Sons, 1984), 151. The intimate connection between being and non-being is given in the following formulation from the above, 41: “Speaking of courage as a key to the interpretation of being-itself, one could say that this key, when it opens the door to being, finds, at the same time, being and the negation of being and their unity.”

¹⁹⁵ This would clearly modify Tillich’s concept of non-Being to include the negation of visibility detailed by Merleau-Ponty above. In this sense, “non-Being” and its anticipation through courage would be a commitment to the possibility of the concealment of Being or its resignation to invisibility.

¹⁹⁶ For Tillich this erosion of self comes in the form of non-Being, but Marion’s notion of saturated phenomena withholds the possibility that overwhelming positivity may also transform one’s sense of self or place.

¹⁹⁷ See Marion, BG, 320: “To let phenomena appear demands not imposing a horizon on them, whatever the horizon might be, since it would exclude some of them.”

¹⁹⁸ James Smith, “Liberating Religion from Theology: Marion and Heidegger on the Possibility of a Phenomenology of Religion,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 46, no. 1 (1999): 18.

¹⁹⁹ Marion, BG, 4.

²⁰⁰ Marion, BG, 242. Also see Marion’s explicit separation between phenomenology and theology, BS, 385.

²⁰¹ See, for example, Westphal, 129: “for [Marion] as for Heidegger it is a question of possibility rather than legitimacy,” as well as Hart, 35: “[Marion] deals with revelation as possibility because that is all that phenomenology can do, and indeed must do, if the phenomenality of revelation is to be respected.”

²⁰² Marion, BG, 5.

²⁰³ Marion, BG, 236.

²⁰⁴ Marion, BG, 297.

²⁰⁵ Westphal, 128.

²⁰⁶ This more immanent formulation has a greater affinity to the post-metaphysical nature of life as art.

²⁰⁷ Merleau-Ponty, PW, 151. Also see, for example, Heidegger, EHP, 78.

²⁰⁸ Which is the role of metaphysics in Adorno and Marcuse's thought.

Chapter 5: Creation

Camus and Foucault on the Life Artist

Thus we make these lives into works of art. In an elementary fashion we turn them into novels. In this sense, everyone tries to make his life into a work of art. We want love to last and we know that it does not last; even if, by some miracle, it were to last a whole lifetime, it would still be incomplete. Perhaps, in this insatiable need for perpetuation, we should better understand human suffering, if we knew that it was eternal.

– Albert Camus, *The Rebel*

From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art. . . . [W]e should not have to refer the creative activity of somebody to the kind of relation he has to himself, but should relate the kind of relation one has to oneself to a creative activity.

– Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics”

I: Introduction and Interlude

The preceding chapters have brought into greater focus the positive and negative dimensions of aesthetic judgment and their bearing on life as art. In Adorno and Marcuse there is the imperative to attend to particularity and negativity after the Holocaust, an attentiveness which is exemplified in the aesthetic emphasis on negativity, the philosophical yearning for particularity, the metaphysical hope for a just future, and the prospect of a society or individual that bears the marks of dissent by becoming a work of art. Phenomenology, instead of intensifying dialectical rationality, wishes to go beyond reason itself by affirming the Being—and its disclosure—which precedes rational determination and potentially grounds revelatory experience. This is founded in a set of coordinated embodied and aesthetic practices which open up sites of possible disclosure for Being through their stylization of the world. Metaphorically, critical theory signifies the resistive, individuating, and scientific (*Wissenschaft* in the Nietzschean sense)

dimension of life as art, while phenomenology marks the revelatory, abyssal, and illusory dimension of life as art.

Yet if we are to take Nietzsche's work on ideal types as a cue for life as art, then we cannot remain satisfied with a mere tension between science and art, resistance and revelation, the negativity and affirmation. In each of the above instances Nietzsche posits a critical third figure, whether it be the image of the "double brain" or the ideal type, which carefully and playfully blends both dimensions of aesthetic judgment into a total work, an artful life. This meaningful synthesis constitutes Nietzsche's conjunctive notion of the "gay science," his veneration for Zarathustra, and, ultimately, the *poesis* of life metaphorically represented in his ideal types and given expression in his later writings.

In this chapter I would like to further draw into focus this "third figure" and its relationship to life as art. Just as the examination of critical theory and phenomenology brought into greater relief the negative and affirmative dimensions within life as art, this chapter seeks to explore their constructive synthesis in concrete modes of living, thinking, and becoming. That is, inasmuch as the preceding chapters generally brought into focus the moments of *aesthetic judgment* within life as art, this chapter will examine the *ethical* element within in life as art. This will not abandon the methodological ground that has been established, however: if "ethics" are to be brought into further focus after Nietzsche, it must do so through a clarification of the relationship between art and thinking. Following the logic of the preceding chapters, this would indicate that an artful ethics constitutes its own art and mode of thinking, one which somehow takes into account the sophisticated analyses of critical theory and phenomenology.

This requires a preliminary articulation of the notion of ethics presupposed in this chapter. Instead of understanding ethics as the general prescription of rules of conduct or the formulation of normative standards given by God or reason, this chapter assumes the broader Foucauldian definition of ethics: how one problematizes one's relation to others and oneself and comes to constitute oneself as a subject. This working definition will be elucidated in what follows, but such a definition shifts the imperative of ethics from one of reasoning and rules for conduct to the problematization of various ways of acting and thinking in accord with criteria which need not be moral, rational, or otherwise. This leaves open the possibility for aesthetics to be deployed as a means of problematizing one's relationships to others and oneself while also giving general guidelines for how one creates oneself as subject.

This leaves undefined the relationship between the *ethics* established in this chapter and the dual forms of aesthetic judgment defined in the previous chapters.¹ For, if one posits, as does Nietzsche, a third figure (in this case, ethics) that stands in relation to the previous two moments (namely critical theory and phenomenology), it immediately raises questions about the nature of such a relation. Four ways of examining, and possibly resolving, this tension, present themselves: 1) the third figure can sublate (*Aufheben*) the previous two moments, taking them up into an objective synthesis (Hegel); 2) the third figure can stand in serial relation to the other two moments, i.e., it is merely an element in a succession of moments; 3) the third figure can remain in an undefined relationship to the two other moments, thus deferring the relationship to metaphors such as play, the "double brain," etc. (another reading of Nietzsche would proffer this account); 4) a combination which employs the chief insights of (1)–(3) above, in which the third figure

synthesizes the two previous moments, but, as in (2), preserves their individual integrity and, as in (3), sees this relationship of synthesis as polyvalent in expression (both concretely and philosophically).

While the fourth option above is considerably more imprecise, I would argue that this articulation is both closer to Nietzsche's original intention with respect to his ideal types and is also a means of accommodating the significant advances in critical theory and phenomenology without sacrificing their particularity. That is, *the third figure to be examined in this chapter would act as a conduit of concretion for the two previous moments examined in life as art, but would not sublate their distinctive contribution*. Thus, the third figure should be seen as a moment in a sequence containing negativity, particularity, and concretion, though such a sequence is neither serial (one does not necessarily follow the next) nor temporal (each can be simultaneous to one another). Rather, as was formulated above, the third figure elucidates the ways in which the artistic moments within life as art can be constituted as an ethics. The third figure presents a means by which aesthetic judgment can be strategically deployed in everyday practice while maintaining the integrity of aesthetic judgment and illuminating the various pathways for its deployment. Inasmuch as the previous chapters articulated forms of critical reflection (and indications of how one might live) based on aesthetics, this chapter brings into further relief the ethical moment in life as art.

As ethical, this third figure does not stand in a hierarchical relation to either critical theory or phenomenology. Rather, it distinguishes itself by a different problematization: instead of drawing attention to the relation between thinking and aesthetics, it problematizes and further refines the various modalities through which the

aesthetic life can be manifest. The indication for these various modalities, however, has been given in the preceding chapters, and the ethical dimension remains constrained by their logic. Thus, from critical theory the ethical dimension gains the demand for an attention to particularity, hope, dissent, and, in the case of Marcuse, the aestheticization and sensualization of the everyday life of the individual and society. And, from phenomenology one sees the imperative to remain open to the possibility of the appearance of a “world” and revelation through embodied poetic practices of vision and inhabitation.

Although critical theory and phenomenology remain distinctive approaches within life as art, then, they present a common set of foci upon which the ethical moment may draw. These common motifs are:

1. A commitment to the aesthetic body and its potential to create both patterns of resistance and affirmation through the modification of daily practices.
2. A consequent intensification of reflection on daily practices and their role in reinforcing the philosophical project of aestheticized thinking.
3. An undermining of objectivist thinking.
4. A critical role for fantasy, dissimulation, creation, and illusion in the production of both new ways of living and thinking.
5. A recognition of the bivalent nature of art: art bears within it both the universal and the particular.
6. A recognition of the autonomy of artistic production and reflection.
7. A modification of the philosophical project to include aestheticized thinking and new forms of living.

There are, to be sure, differences even within these commonalities which should not be obscured. However, the seven areas of complementarity above indicate not only points of agreement, but potential constraints for any ethical moment within life as art. Or, to be more precise: *the similarities marked out between critical theory and phenomenology thematize a shared domain of reflection to which the art of living must attend.* The body and its various practices, the role of creation and fantasy, the autonomy and nature of art, and a new role for philosophy all trace the contours that circumscribe an artful ethics.

If, as I have indicated, the ethics of life as art is to have a unifying function, then the above themes point to concrete practices of living, seeing, thinking, creating, and acting which open up the potentiality for a host of experiences which are bivalent in nature: practice can be both resistant and revelatory, affirmative and dissenting, creative and destructive. Yet all are forms of autonomous creation and are resistant to objectivist thinking. An artful ethics creates ways of living, seeing, and thinking which allow for a multivalent experience of the world.

To be sure, Nietzsche foresaw the contours of such an argument, and his ideal types are attempts to concretize a synthesis between art and science. The ideal type lives in multiple landscapes, “gives style to his life,” focuses his spirit through exercise and diet, is swept away by ecstasy and hardened through critique. Unfortunately, Nietzsche’s formulation of the ideal type never proceeds beyond the literary, and, though his work more adequately synthesizes the various dimensions of the artistic life than any other, the precise aesthetics and modalities for life as art remain unclear.

It is in this critical space that I wish to situate the present chapter. This chapter serves the function of more completely articulating an aesthetic ethics indicated, though

incompletely, by both Nietzsche and the common problematics of critical theory and phenomenology. I aim to do so by reflecting on the work of Albert Camus and Michel Foucault and their threefold relation to the problem of aesthetics, thinking, and their concretion in the motifs of the life artist and in an “aesthetics of existence,” respectively. In keeping with the above reflection, Camus and Foucault argue for concrete forms of living and thinking which are attentive to the problematization of the body, the role of creation and fantasy, and the bivalent nature of embodied experience, as well as the rejection of forms of thinking which objectify and constrain the individual.

Given their more practical concerns, both thinkers share a common commitment to a *strategic* conception of normative thinking. While more will be said on this in the coming pages, it is important to preliminarily register this conception at the outset and mark out its consequences. First, it reveals the more functional significance granted to thinking by Camus and Foucault: thinking is to be subsumed under the greater project of living artfully. Secondly, it is in marked contrast to the notion of thinking articulated by both critical theory and phenomenology, which argued for theories of thinking which are particularistic and pre-reflective in scope and *telos*, respectively. Camus and Foucault, though, are more concerned with the deployment of thinking as part of an overall ethical project, not as a complement to, or to be conjoined with, aesthetics and philosophy. Third, this strategic conception of thinking animates both a diagnostic and prescriptive move within their ethics. Diagnostically, one outlines points of resistance and potential affirmation; prescriptively, one deploys a strategy against and within these points of resistance and affirmation.

What follows, then, is an examination of the ways in which various points of resistance and affirmation are marked out and used as a foundation and an opening for embodied practices of self-formation. In Camus, this means becoming aware of an absurd universe which then forms a point of contact for character formation and a moderate and artistic life. In Foucault, this means elucidating the various ways in which power shapes and circumscribes the individual, and using that analysis as a starting point for self-creation and an aesthetics of existence. Both thinkers show how the artful life must be in persistent contact with a strategic vision and constantly oriented towards self-formation. As I hope to show in the coming pages and in the final, concluding chapter, life as art would therefore be the emergent realization of the positive, negative, and ethical moments outlined in this chapter and the two preceding chapters. The positive and negative dimensions of aesthetic judgment cast a vision which is put into practice through an aesthetic ethics, one which creates an artful self.

II: Camus

Albert Camus' work, fomented within the struggles against fascism, the Algerian independence movement, and the conflicts within post-war Europe, attempts to give expression to how one lives in a world of conflict, suffering, beauty, and fraternity. Camus, unlike his contemporaries Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, or many French Marxist intellectuals, did not seek to determine the conditions for the possibility of living and seeing, but rather sought to define an ethics based on the present conditions of humanity. As he stated, "What matters here is not to follow things back to their origins, but, the world being what it is, to know how to live in it."² And, in the twentieth century,

the question of how one lives—or how one practices a self-reflective ethics—is largely determined by the historical events that surrounded Camus: war, poverty, communism, and suffering. Thus the question of “how one lives” becomes transmuted into “how to live without grace and without justice?”³

If this chapter is to clarify the ethical problematics within life as art, then the question of ethics with respect to Camus must be channeled through his intuitions on how one lives in a world fraught with instability. And, arguably, these intuitions are to be found in his essays, plays, novels, and philosophical monographs.⁴ It is with this sense of thematic coherence in mind that the following section proceeds through an analysis of Camus’ philosophical work and his character studies in novels and plays. Specifically, by beginning with an analysis of absurdity and revolt in Camus’ early and later work, one sees the clear development of points of resistance and areas for strategic modification. This is followed by an analysis of the three normative features of Camus’ thought: his directive to “think at the meridian,” the role of art and the artist, and the unifying features of various characters in novels and plays (both as protagonists and foils), all of which collectively indicate an artistic ethics based on resistance, moderation, and solidarity. Through using Camus’ indications in novels, plays, and his philosophical work, one begins to see the emergence of an ideal ethical and artistic character that begins the clarification of the ethical moment in life as art.

A View of the whole: the absurd and revolt

The Absurd

As I indicated in the introduction to this chapter, the thought of Camus is founded upon a strategic notion of thinking which has both diagnostic and prescriptive components which outline, and prescribe action against, sites of suffering and oppression. And, in Camus' early work (work which appeared before the release of *The Plague* in 1947), the source of oppression, and therefore resistance, is the absurd.

To many, Camus' concept of absurdity is a superficial gloss on Sartre's concept of "nausea" or nothingness, an ontological separation between human consciousness and the objects towards which it intends. There is ample support for such a claim, as Camus, especially in his *The Myth of Sisyphus*, clearly proclaims a disjunction between humans and the objects of consciousness. He states, for example, "This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity."⁵ One could also cite Meursault's indifferent narrative which begins *The Stranger* as an example of the separation of humans from any meaningful narrative structure of existence.

Despite these examples, Camus arguably defines the absurd more broadly than the ontological difference between an actor and the flow of events in her life. Rather, such an ontological difference is merely symptomatic of a more general phenomenon—the irrational and indifferent nature of the universe. As Camus states plainly, "What I fail to understand is non-sense. The world is peopled with such irrationals. The world itself, whose single meaning I do not understand, is but a vast irrational."⁶ Camus does not specify the ontological status of such a claim: the irrationality of things may, or may not be, a characteristic feature of human consciousness and its encounter with the world. Instead, a more general and unspecified meaning is intended by Camus that points to a sense of biological indifference in the world.⁷

The claim of irrationality is not value neutral, either. Not only is an event such as the plague or a world war “surprising” by its very nature, but it signals an inherent volatility in the order of events, an indifference in the world to its suffering creatures. “The primitive hostility of the world rises up to face us across millennia. . . .that denseness and that strangeness of the world is the absurd.”⁸ The absurd is marked by both hostility and indifference: the world appears “strange,” irrational, or even cruel. The narrative of the plague here is telling, as Camus describes the brutal efficiency and indifference with which the plague afflicted the citizens of Oran: “The plague was no respecter of persons and under its despotic rule everyone, from the Governor down to the humblest delinquent, was under sentence and, perhaps for the first time, impartial justice reigned in the prison.”⁹

The moral designation of hostility within a more general phenomenon such as absurdity implies that absurdity is not just characteristic of biological reality, but, additionally, it is the failure of biological reality to meet the hopes and needs of those creatures it produces. Indeed, as Camus asserts, absurdity arises in the *confrontation* between one’s rational expectations and indifferent reality: “The absurd is born of this confrontation between human need and the unreasonable silence of the world.”¹⁰ The world meets our needs, and occasionally cries, with an abject silence. Humans and all creatures long for a unity between aspiration and response, for which there often is none, or, if there is a response, it is either by chance or is a break in the sequence of events.¹¹

The inevitable deflation of hope also signals an intrinsic relationship between humans and the absurd. Just as Sartre’s nihilation was the product of an In-Itself reflecting on a For-Itself, the absurd is the result of human rationality, desire, and

necessity meeting with the irrationality and finitude of the world. As Camus states, “the Absurd is not in man. . . nor in the world, but in their presence together. . . . There can be no absurd outside the human mind.”¹² Absurdity is not a category one can assign to the world: it is the product of the human confrontation with the world, a relational concept which signifies the separation that exists between human longing and the realities of existence.¹³ Thus the absurd, as a point of resistance, is not a feature of the universe: the world itself simply is what it is. Rather, the absurd is a relational category that signifies the gulf that exists between human longing and the environments in which we find ourselves. The absurd is irrational not because it despises rationality, but, being what it is, it simply stands outside of rational designation altogether. As such, the absurd provides a clear point of resistance against which humans may struggle in the midst of despair, suffering, and longing.

Rebellion and Revolt

Following the publication of *The Plague*, Camus embarked on a bold project of documenting rebellion and revolt in the West since the Renaissance. The contours of this project are well known: Camus attempted to reveal the historical and intellectual antecedents to the regicides of the 18th and 19th centuries as well as the atrocities of the 20th century. By exploring thinkers such as de Sade, Nietzsche, and Dostoyevsky, Camus traces the development of forms of rebellion which, in the absence of God, sought to re-create the world in their own image.

The first form of rebellion documented by Camus is “metaphysical rebellion,” the move—signaled primarily by Nietzsche—to recoil against the world in the name of a higher

humanity. Instead of rebelling against creation in the name of God, the rebel (in this case Nietzsche) rebels against the world, history, and God in the name of humanity.

“Metaphysical rebellion is the means by which a man protests against his condition and against the whole of creation. It is metaphysical because it disputes the ends of man of creation.”¹⁴ This protest against the world takes on the dimensions of Camus’ earlier refusal to submit to the absurd, and, though he clearly rejects particular dimensions of metaphysical rebellion (namely its refusal to obey the limits of moderation), Camus sees in metaphysical rebellion an ineluctable fate towards which the 20th century West has been driven. In this sense, “rebellion, in man, is the refusal to be treated as an object and to be reduced to simple historical terms. It is the affirmation of a nature common to all men, which eludes the world of power.”¹⁵

The metaphysical rebel, like the absurd figure, finds herself in a world in which history, finitude, and the loss of any overarching meaning have conspired to render the individual an object subject to the volatility of human will and biological suffering. The site of resistance for both the rebel and the absurd figure therefore remains the absurd, the irrational dictates of both finite existence and historical contingency. *The Rebel*’s analysis of the “absurd,” however, is distinct from Camus’ earlier work. Whereas in the early work the absurd was consistently given as the irrational and intrinsic relationship between humans and the world, in *The Rebel* the “absurd” is historically conditioned and is pliable: the features, if not the conditions themselves, for irrationality and suffering have been altered throughout the modern history of the West. Hence the rebel in her metaphysical rebellion does not resist creation *writ large* (as does Camus’ Sisyphus as

well as Diego in “The State of Siege”), but rebels strategically against historical structures of injustice which instantiate the irrationality which permeates existence.

This more nuanced approach to the conditions for rebellion and the ways in which the absurd comes to be grounded in concrete historical and political structures is carried through in Camus’ careful distinction between rebellion and revolution. Rebellion, as a general historical phenomenon, is the rejection of the objectivation and totalization of humans, and, while it resists the absurd, it does so through concrete social and political structures which serve as conduits for suffering and irrationality. Revolution, on the other hand, is a totalizing rejection of the historical order which does not obey any rational limitations as to how this rejection is achieved. In this sense, Dostoyevsky’s Ivan, who proclaims that “all is permitted,” becomes emblematic of a revolutionary *ethos* which does not obey rational limits.

[R]ebellion, in its primary aspect of authenticity, does not justify any purely historic concept. Rebellion’s claim is unity, historic revolution’s claim is totality. . . . The first [rebellion] is dedicated to creation so as to exist more and more completely, the second [revolution] is forced to produce results in order to negate more and more completely.¹⁶

With this distinction in hand, Camus can dismiss the immoderation and irrationality of fascism, the Soviet gulag system, and colonial repression, while still upholding the virtues of moderate and creative rebellion against structures of oppression. Rebellion upholds the value of resistance against certain manifest forms of absurdity, while revolution, as in many of the protagonists from Camus’ earlier work, rejects an entire created order which refuses the value of humanity. As Masters adds, “So [rebellion] does not only refuse the world, it proclaims the values in man which are lacking in the world.

It is thus creative, constructive, and affirmative. It affirms some intangible human ‘worth’ to which the Absurd is an insult.”¹⁷

This analysis crystallizes Camus’ consistent juxtaposition of ideal forms of rebellion with immoderate and destructive forms of revolution. Both share in the same essence, as they are a form of resistance against the absurd and wish to uphold the intrinsic value of humanity in a meaningless universe. Yet rebellion, as a strategic ethics, obeys clear limitations and resists the absurd as it is historically mediated in concrete and precise sites of resistance. Rebellion, in a theme to which Camus continually returns, is a form of resistance which is both resistant *and* creative, wishing to uphold a strategic vision of how the world should be.¹⁸ Camus states the contradictory nature of the rebel eloquently:

It is then possible to say that rebellion, when it emerges into destruction, is illogical. Claiming the unity of the human condition, it is a force of life and not of death. Its most profound logic is not the logic of destruction; it is the logic of creation. Its movement, in order to be authentic, must never abandon any of the terms of the contradiction which sustains it. It must be faithful to the *yes* that it contains as well as to the *no* which nihilistic interpretations isolate in rebellion. The logic of the rebel is to want to serve justice so as not to add to the injustice of the human condition, to insist on plain language so as not to increase the universal falsehood, and to wager, in spite of human misery, for happiness.¹⁹

The rebel, like Nietzsche’s free spirit, must suspend the persistent contradiction between refusal and creation. The rebel rejects the irrational suffering of humans only if it entails an increase in justice and a positive re-ordering of the world. At least implicitly, then, Camus argues that, though the absurd cannot be absolved, it can be ameliorated in the particular historical forms it takes.

Rebellion therefore forms part of a strategic conception in Camus' later thought which transforms the absurd into a phenomenon which finds itself instantiated in the political and sedimented within history. Rebellion, though, still owes its essence to the absurd, and, as such, realizes the ultimate deficiency of all forms of action in the face of the irrationality of the relationship between human need and the world.²⁰ Thus Camus' conception of the absurd not only serves the function of clarifying the relationship between humans and the world, but, more importantly, in Camus' later thought, it directs practical acts of resistance between humans and the historical and social structures in which they find themselves. While an embrace of the absurd entails affirming the ultimate failure of all actions, it also provides a means of envisioning concrete sites of resistance and the proper terms of rebellion. In short, the absurd, and Camus' later adaptation of the notion of its historical instantiations, lays the groundwork for a more strategic ethics which reconciles itself to both history and biological reality without submitting, or utterly revolting against, either.

Thought at the Meridian

If, as I have been arguing, Camus' "ethics" is based on a problematization of how one relates to an absurd or irrational world, and if the primary focus of ethical action in response to the absurd is resistance at specific social and political loci, then Camus' ethics necessitates a strategic conception of thinking. In order to resist absurdity in forms which do not evolve into totalizing revolt or nihilistic submission, one must be able to clarify the form which absurdity takes throughout history as well as prescribe concrete modes of action which are both resistant and creative. That is, Camus' ethics makes two

demands on thinking: 1) the clarification of the instantiations of the absurd; 2) the prescription of adequate modes of conduct. Ethical thinking, as stated earlier, is to be both diagnostic and prescriptive.

The first component of thinking for Camus is largely defined by his consistent emphasis on “lucidity” and the demand to suspend consciousness of the absurd. Found most frequently in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, lucidity is the imperative to continually rediscover the absurd by confronting the ways in which hope and human need are deferred by the world.

A stranger to myself and to the world, armed solely with a thought that negates itself as soon as it asserts, what is this condition in which I can have peace only by refusing to know and to live, in which the appetite for conquest bumps into walls that defy its assaults? . . . Hence the intelligence, too, tells me in its way that the world is absurd.²¹

Camus’ demand for “intelligence” essentially asks that one consistently repeat a phenomenological reconstruction of experience: one must, to be lucid, continually return to the ways in which human need is met with silence. This phenomenological conception of thinking is invoked in Camus’ conception of thinking as “learning all over again to see, to be attentive, to focus consciousness; it is turning every idea and every image, in the manner of Proust, into a privileged moment.”²² This does not simply imply vigilance or the meditation on a particular aspect of experience. Rather, it means *re-living* one’s lived experience, whether it be through memory, or, as the previous chapter has shown, by constructing a way of seeing and living which preserves the intensity and richness of experience as it arrives. As Camus states, “Living is keeping the absurd alive. Keeping it alive is, above all, contemplating it.”²³

Insomuch as Camus' concept of lucidity is a suspension and recognition of limitation, it also forms the foundation for the second aspect of thinking to which Camus attends, that of prescribing moderation in both thought and conduct. The linkage between the discovery of limits and the *prescription* of limits becomes clear in *The Rebel*, where the rebel's rebellion against oppression and suffering should be met with a moderation in action and response. This begins through an act of lucidity: "[T]he revolutionary mind, if it wants to remain alive, must therefore return again to the sources of rebellion and draw its inspiration from the only system of thought which is faithful to its origins; thought which recognizes its limits."²⁴ The thought which "recognizes its limits" is of course the lucid thought called for in Camus' earlier work. Yet, as was the case with absurdity, the recognition of limits is now observed within the structures of history and revolutionary politics. One's "limit" is no longer the abstract negation of human longing, but is the oppression of human dignity:

[The rebel] rebels because he categorically refuses to submit to conditions that he considers intolerable and also because he is confusedly convinced that his position is justified, or rather, because in his own mind he thinks that he "has the right to. . . ." Rebellion cannot exist without the feeling that somewhere, in some way, you are justified. It is in this way that the rebel slave says yes and no at the same time. He affirms that there are limits and also that he suspects—and wishes to preserve—the existence of certain things beyond those limits.²⁵

The limits to which Camus refers are undoubtedly the negative limitation of human suffering and the positive limit of human dignity. Thought, normatively practiced, is to recognize such limits and must persistently return to such limitation in order to renew the rebellious spirit.

The recognition of limitation, then, both in its abstract form and in its concrete particularity, remains the imperative behind Camus' notion of lucidity. As was suggested

previously, though, such a recognition is in itself prescriptive of other forms of thinking which are not merely diagnostic in nature. The consciousness of one's limits forms the basis for a moderate form of thinking that situates itself "between" nihilism and totality.²⁶ Hence one can understand Camus' common refrain to "remain in this middle path where the intelligence can remain clear."²⁷ The recognition of one's limits effectively circumscribes the options for thinking. One must obey one's limits not only through lucidity, but through how one structures thought itself.

It is clearly with this dual sense of moderation—both as revealed and as prescribed—in mind that Camus regularly speaks of the "tension" implied by proper thinking. Thinking, normatively practiced, is to hold in suspense the contradictions between creation and destruction, rebellion and revolt, coherent action and nihilism. For Camus, the thought which continually rediscovers its limits is a thought continually held in tension, as the disasters of the 20th century were caused by a form of thought which "tires of the tension caused by its positive and negative attitude, and finally abandons itself to complete negation or total submission."²⁸ The primary failure of revolt and other forms of nihilism is not a result of their intrinsic nature, but is rather a matter of immoderation, of failing to understand and follow the tension that thinking at the limits implies. Camus states: "There are thus gods of light and idols of mud. But it is essential to find the middle path leading to the faces of man."²⁹ The middle path, borne out of a lucid connection to one's limits in the face of the absurd, is the way towards understanding one's humanity and the ways in which it can be reconstituted without succumbing to dangerous modes of thought and action.

Camus' injunction to "think at the meridian" holds within it a diagnostic component (lucidity) and a prescriptive element which enjoins humans to act moderately. The rebel, following the dictates of moderate reason, does not deny everything, nor, like Dostoyevsky's Ivan, is "everything permitted." Rather, one must consistently problematize one's relationship to possible extremes of action and act in a way that preserves one's dignity and the dignity of others. Thinking, conceived as such, becomes strategic in nature, and, in turn, an ethics of the absurd becomes an ethics of clarifying and acting upon the options presented by an absurd world.

The Role of Art and the Artist

The above reflections on the role of thinking as a problematization of the relationship between a subject and the extremes imposed by the absurd signal Camus' intention to see thinking as a way of beginning an ethics of how one lives in a world of simultaneous limitation and excess. To this end, Camus states, "The realization that life is absurd cannot be an end, but only a beginning."³⁰ The absurd, as was seen above, is the content of a way of thinking which seeks to define both our relationship to the world and history as well as proper modes of action. This way of thinking, in turn, may help to define a just and dignified way of living which balances the positive and negative dimensions of lived and aesthetic experience.

Camus' work recognizes, though, that the analysis of the absurd and the prescription of a form of thinking are insufficient to his aim of exploring how one lives. The relationship between thinking and the world does not adequately thematize the ways in which one can act, much less the consequences of such action. Nor does it interrogate

the ways in which strategic or moderate thinking might be deployed: given only as “thought at the meridian,” Camus’ prescriptive for thinking remains vacuous.

It is for these precise reasons that Camus invokes the role of art and the artist as ways of more completely thematizing the relationship between thinking, the absurd, and concrete modes of action. To be sure, the work of art is spoken of as “an absurd phenomenon”³¹ in many of Camus’ works, but art’s primary function for Camus is not a demonstration or evocation of the absurd. Rather, both art and the artist, in their very natures, are to give fundamental clues as to how one lives given the problematic of thinking in relation to the world.

The following section will analyze the nature of the work of art, and, subsequently, the artist, and the clues they provide as to how one lives. As will be seen below, the nature of art becomes a means of envisioning a moderate life for Camus, one balanced between autonomy and commitment, creation and destruction. In this way, art becomes a completion of the ethical and epistemological project of living and thinking.

Autonomy

The most important characteristic afforded to art by Camus is the relatively high status it assumes in his thought. Art, from the discussion of “the artist” in both *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel*, to Camus’ multiple essays, including his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, is often upheld as a way of thinking and expression that upholds the capacity for change and justice in the world. Arguably, Camus upholds a high concept of art because he steadfastly maintains, like his contemporary Adorno, the autonomy of artistic production. For example, “. . . I have the highest possible idea of art. I place it too high

ever to agree to subject it to anything.”³² Art’s status as a possible remedy to the absurd and social ills is reciprocally dependent upon art’s autonomy from history, the market, or direct political concerns. As Camus states in *The Rebel*, art remains discordant because it remains outside of history: “by creating beauty outside the course of history, art impedes the only rational activity: the transformation of history itself into absolute beauty.”³³

Unfortunately, and unlike Adorno, Camus does not state precisely *how* art remains an autonomous work, nor does he specify the necessary conditions for artistic autonomy. Rather, like Adorno’s more programmatic statements, he asserts that art which submits to history becomes either propaganda or pure negation. Thus art, like thinking before it, must remain in a mediating position between pure negativity and pure positivity. “If it adapts itself to what the majority of our society wants, art will be a meaningless recreation. If it blindly rejects that society, if the artist makes up his mind to take refuge in his dream, art will express nothing but a negation.”³⁴ Art, like thinking, maintains itself by steadfastly refusing to submit to either ruling interest or its pure negation. It remains effectual in the world only by denying its tendency to become a part of the dialectic of history. As in critical theory, art remains autonomous not by denying or transcending history, but by remaining within it and transforming history from within.

This more dialectical interpretation is reinforced by Camus’ conceptual development of the work of art as a means of integrating and transforming reality through its very creation. That is, art which is self-consciously autonomous is in itself transformative; like Adorno’s concept of artistic production, the work of art transforms reality through mimesis and the imposition of form.

By the treatment that the artist imposes on reality, he declares the intensity of his rejection of it. But what he retains of reality, in the

universe that he creates, reveals the degree of consent that he gives to at least one part of reality—which he draws from the shadows of evolution to bring it to the light of creation.³⁵

Art, through its very nature as a selective creation, filters, distorts, and emphasizes particular aspects of lived experience; and, through their distortion in style, art effectively transforms an already re-formed reality. As Camus later states, art “simply adds something which transfigures reality.”³⁶ This “something,” as critical theory notes, is the imposition of form and the mimesis of content.

Art is therefore autonomous because, through its very nature, it is an assimilation and transformation of the world. It negates by creating. And, moreover, art’s autonomy clearly mimics the autonomy normatively assigned to thinking: by remaining between propaganda and pure negation or pure positivity and negativity, the work of art, like thought, is able to give a strategic vision of a world potentially transformed. The work of art can only maintain its privilege in Camus’ thought by remaining a dissonant and yet located voice within the historic struggles which have given rise to the need for moderate thinking.

Creation

A work of art remains autonomous through its incorporation and transformation of history and reality. Autonomy is the character of artistic production which takes seriously the need to depict reality without subsuming it to ideology. This definition of autonomy, of course, depends on the fact of artistic *production*, which forms the second critical aspect of Camus’ aesthetics.

In the account above, Camus invokes artistic creation as the means by which the world is depicted and stylized. Art is not simply reproduction,³⁷ but is the selective representation of the world through style. Production is often spoken of in terms of its ability to choose between competing options in the depiction of reality: “Realistic novels select their material, despite themselves, from reality, because the choice and the conquest of reality are absolute conditions of thought and expression. To write is already to choose.”³⁸ At other points, Camus places artistic production and stylization within the more general category of creation:

[O]ne principle remains common to all creators: stylization, which supposes the simultaneous existence of reality and of the mind which gives reality its form. Through style, the creative reconstructs the world and always with the same slight distortion which is the mark of both art and protest.³⁹

Just as *Geist* was the confrontation of material and mind in Adorno’s aesthetics, stylization is the way in which the artist incorporates and transforms a given material. Or, as was shown by Merleau-Ponty, “style” is a re-creation of the way in which our perception deforms the perceptual field.

Camus’ aesthetics do not depend on a more detailed analysis of style, though, as does the work of critical theory or phenomenology. Rather, Camus’ account of stylization is clearly in the service of his more general intuition that artistic production is inherently a *creative* process that introduces into the world an element, or thought, which was absent before. Camus frames the notion of creativity here in terms of rebellion and the creation of new “universes”:

In every rebellion is to be found the metaphysical demand for unity, the impossibility of capturing it and the construction of a substitute universe. Rebellion, from this point of view, is a fabricator of universes. This also

defines art. The demands of rebellion are really, in part, aesthetic demands.⁴⁰

Rebellion—and therefore the ethic of resistance to the absurd—is a mode of fabricating a universe, a characteristic which Camus believes is most clearly exemplified by the work of art. Thus artistic production is not only likened to the authentic act of rebellion which creates in-between nihilism and submission, but, most importantly, it is the envisionment of an alternate universe into which creative rebellion may move.⁴¹ In this way, the strategic demand to both clarify the absurd and to outline potential ways of acting is dependent on the same type of creativity from which artistic production is born. Thinking, like art, depends on the creation of alternate visions for reality.

Solidarity

That art is more generally inscribed in Camus' ethics is best shown by his frequent use of "solidarity" as a core characteristic of art and the artist. Just as he proclaimed art to be autonomous and creative by way of autonomous stylization, Camus simultaneously promulgates an ethic of solidarity at the heart of art and the life of the artist. In seeming contradiction to his earlier statements regarding autonomy, he states: "Contrary to the current presumption, if there is any man who has no right to solitude, it is the artist. Art cannot be a monologue."⁴² This contradiction belies a critical tension within art, however, one which was seen earlier in critical theory—the demand for art to be both negative and dissonant while at the same time autonomous and liberating.

Camus was clearly aware of such a movement in his own thought, as his work moved from the more solipsistic *The Stranger* to the individual in revolt in *The Myth of Sisyphus* to the demand for solidarity within rebellion in *The Rebel*.⁴³ It is in *The Rebel*,

of course, where Camus phenomenologically founds solidarity on the experience of rebellion. "Rebellion is the common ground on which every man bases his first values. I *rebel—therefore we exist.*"⁴⁴ This sense of identification is voiced powerfully in *The Plague*, where a band of men join together in sanitary squads to fight the plague. The theme of solidarity is also voiced in Camus' reflections on the work of art, where the work of art is part of the solidary effort to increase freedom and happiness in the world. "The aim of art, the aim of a life can only be to increase the sum of freedom and responsibility to be found in every man and in the world."⁴⁵

Camus therefore rejects a purely abstract conception of the work of art. Art, if it is to be honest to reality—and indeed it must do so in order to be a stylistic creation—must also interrogate the forms in which humans come together in resistance against the absurd. This amounts to a rejection of *l'art pour l'art*:

The lie of art for art's sake pretended to know nothing of evil and consequently assumed responsibility for it. But the realistic lie, even though managing to admit mankind's present unhappiness, betrays that unhappiness just as seriously by making use of it to glorify a future state of happiness, about which no one knows anything, so that the future authorizes every kind of humbug.⁴⁶

Camus characteristically juxtaposes art for art's sake with the "realistic lie," one that glorifies a "future state of happiness" and sanctions the atrocities of the present. As in Camus' account of thought, it is into this double bind that art is to be situated. Art must not completely abandon the struggles of humanity or remain blind to its evils, but it cannot also give in to utopian demands for a completely reconciled future which sanctions the ills of the present. Rather, art must denounce the present while simultaneously rejecting an escapist future and still remaining autonomous. Art is, again,

a *middle way* which joins in the suffering of the present without submitting to its conditions.

This image of autonomous production which simultaneously denounces the present reality is correlative to the image of the artist herself. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Camus frames the imperative for artists to denounce the present in terms of “speaking up”:

[W]e [artists] must know that we can never escape the common misery and that our only justification, if indeed there is a justification, is to speak up, insofar as we can, for those who cannot do so. But we must do so for all those who are suffering at this moment, whatever may be the glories, past or future, of the States and parties oppressing them: for the artist there are no privileged torturers.⁴⁷

In terms reminiscent of Brecht’s “we who hope for the sake of those who do not have hope,” (a quotation used in Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*) Camus calls upon artists to rebel in solidarity with others—even those who cannot rebel—by speaking truth to power. Camus’ role for the artist’s direct involvement in struggle is not elaborated further, and, given Camus’ own biography, one can assume that “speaking up” invariably involves efforts which are journalistic, artistic, and directly political. One would suspect, however, that the artist’s own efforts, even as they remain autonomous, can provide the critical forum demanded by Camus later in his career. In this sense, Camus’ note that “The world of the novel is only a rectification of the world we live in, in pursuance of man’s deepest wishes,”⁴⁸ is not only an imperative for artistic production, but is a way of envisioning the solidary work of the artist in conjunction with movements of resistance. The artist qua artist joins resistance efforts by steadfastly safeguarding the moderate and autonomous nature of the work of art. The work of art is to “speak up” by denouncing the present reality through its own mimesis of reality and is to be a part of solidary struggle

by depicting the conditions for the possibility of solidary rebellion. Art contributes to the liberation of suffering humanity by depicting suffering humanity and their possible solidarity: “there is not a single true work of art that has not in the end added to the inner freedom of each person who has known and loved it.”⁴⁹

This does not prevent the artist from directly contributing to struggle as a human, however. Thus, while the artist qua artist must remain autonomous, Camus sees it as imperative, if not inevitable, that the artist qua human being join in the struggles against forms of oppression and the absurd. “Today everything is changed and even silence has dangerous implications. The moment that abstaining from choice is itself looked upon as a choice and punished or praised as such, the artist is willy-nilly pressed into service.”⁵⁰ While the work of art must remain inviolate and only contribute to struggle indirectly through the envisionment of alternatives and the liberation of humanity, the artist herself can, and often must, become a part of the collective resistance.

Solidarity, then, while a consequence of rebellion and resistance, can become a part of the work of art and the life of the artist. In the work of art, solidarity is to be depicted or investigated as part of the very world which art is to interrogate and transform. In the artist herself, solidarity is to be the ground of the struggles the artist as a person assumes against the absurd. In both instances, however, a vital connection is established between acts of resistance and the nature of artistic production. If, as I have been arguing, art is to become a necessary component of Camus’ ethics, then it must do so by attending to the solidary forms of resistance, balanced between positivity and negativity, which the artist discovers.

Solitary vs. Solidary

The critical tension illustrated above between the work of art as autonomous and the artist as solidary forms a core motif throughout Camus' later work. By casting a distinction between the work of art and the artist, Camus has consequently created two "tensions" which are operative in his work: 1) the tension between the autonomous work of art and its committed author; 2) the tension between the committed artist and her need to create an autonomous work of art.

The former tension is most evident in Camus' examination of the work of art as a tension between universality and particularity, or, in terms of this analysis, between autonomy and commitment. Works of genius hold in suspense this tension and call into thought an alternate vision of the world:

The loftiest work will always be . . . the work that maintains an equilibrium between reality and man's rejection of that reality, each forcing the other upward in a ceaseless overflowing, characteristic of life itself at its most joyous and heart-rending extremes. Then, every once in a while, a new world appears, different from the everyday world and yet the same, particular but universal, full of innocent insecurity—called forth for a few hours by the power and longing of genius.⁵¹

As was the case with critical theoretical aesthetics, the authentic work of art is one which maintains an equilibrium between its elements and allows particularity to emerge out of universality. Or, as Camus states, an authentic work of art is one which holds in suspense reality and a rejection of that reality; only in doing so can a "different world" appear within the work of art. By maintaining this harmony between affirmation and negation, the work of art successfully holds in tension the demand for commitment and the imperative for autonomy. *Art, if it is to succeed as a mode of understanding and resisting the absurd, must do so by balancing its affirmative and negative elements.*⁵² "Art is an

activity which exalts and denies simultaneously. . . .Artistic creation is a demand for unity and a rejection of the world. But it rejects the world on account of what it lacks and in the name of what it sometimes is.”⁵³

As previous chapters have shown, it is this harmonization of positivity and negativity which marks successful works of art. Art holds in tension a series of opposing elements—Dionysian and Apollinian, illusion and reality, universality and particularity, world and earth—in order to perform the simultaneous functions of both assimilating reality and granting an alternate vision of the world transformed or revealed anew. Camus’ aesthetics align with this strain of thought, but, as should be evident, his emphasis is most frequently on the tension between solitary production and solitary commitment. As he states, “the greatness of art lies in the perpetual tension between beauty and pain, the love of men and the madness of creation, unbearable solitude and the exhausting crowd, rejection and consent.”⁵⁴ Whereas Nietzsche, the critical theorists, and the phenomenologists all advocated an aesthetics of *art*, Camus, by focusing on the themes of commitment and resistance, offers an *ethical aesthetics*.⁵⁵ Camus, by emphasizing the tension between autonomy and solidarity in the work of art, effectively problematizes the ethical dimension of aesthetic reception.

It is no coincidence, then, that the tension examined by Camus in the work of art is carried-over to his examination of the role of the artist. If aesthetics problematize ethics, then the demands of the aesthetic should be reflected in the life of the artist. This transition in logic is displayed by Camus in the following:

Art is neither complete rejection nor complete acceptance of what is. It is simultaneously rejection and acceptance, and this is why it must be a perpetually renewed wrenching apart. The artist continually lives in such

a state of ambiguity, incapable of negating the real and yet eternally bound to question it in its eternally unfinished aspects.⁵⁶

The artist transposes the ambiguity and tension of the work of art into her own life.

Inasmuch as Camus advocates an ethical aesthetics, his focus on the artist and her mimicry of the tensions within the work of art calls into order an *aesthetic ethics*, that is, a form of action and problematization of the self which inherits the problematics established in the work of art. This aestheticization of the ethical is even more evident in the following:

[I]t is not possible to be a militant in one's spare time. And so the artist of today becomes unreal if he remains in his ivory tower or sterilized if he spends his time galloping around the political arena. Yet between the two lies the arduous way of true art. It seems to me that the writer must be fully aware of the dramas of his time and that he must take sides every time he can or knows how to do so. But he must also maintain or resume from time to time a certain distance in relation to our history.⁵⁷

The artist is called upon to both join in the struggles for humanity *and* to reserve "a certain distance in relation to our history;" that is, like the work of art, the artist is to maintain an equilibrium between forms of commitment and the autonomy which is necessary to provide both a critical and liberating voice. As in the work of thought and the work of art, the artist is to maintain a mediating position between solidarity and autonomy, or, in the case of life as art, between the positive and negative dimensions of aesthetic judgment.

To be sure, the position outlined for the artist is not one which Camus intends for all. The artist is a specifically located individual whose work demands an equilibrium between commitment and autonomy. This specificity may also be attributed to the demands placed upon the artist herself: "This continual shuttling, this tension that gradually becomes increasingly dangerous, is the task of the artist today."⁵⁸ The work of

the artist becomes dangerous not only because of the nature of resistance, but because the artist refuses to reconcile herself to any movement. This steadfast denial constitutes the autonomy of the artist, but it also signals the artist's self-imposed exclusion from certain forms of resistance. Camus states, "The only really committed artist is he who, without refusing to take part in the combat, at least refuses to join the regular armies and remains a free-lance. The lesson he then finds in beauty, if he draws it fairly, is a lesson not of selfishness but rather of hard brotherhood."⁵⁹ Of course, as Camus adds, even as a "free-lance," one can experience the brotherhood found in the concrete struggle against oppression. Indeed, as Camus later admits, the autonomy demanded by the artist may be found in forms of direct intervention which lead to fraternity and brotherhood: "Let us not look for the door, and the way out, anywhere but in the wall against which we are living. Instead, let us seek the respite where it is—in the very thick of the battle."⁶⁰

This later statement, immediately preceding Camus' death, indicates that the autonomy necessary for the artist may be found in the concrete struggles against the absurd. Yet the problematic that remains consistent throughout Camus' writing, even in the above, is the imperative to hold in tension the precarious balance between autonomy and fraternity, critical distance and solidarity-in-resistance. This continual balancing act, given its transposition from the work of art, is seen as necessary in the life of the artist, such that autonomy and solidarity are mutually reinforcing.⁶¹ Camus leaves underdetermined precisely why such a relationship is mutually reinforcing. It is necessary, of course, because it reflects the nature of works of art as both autonomous and critical. And, in the life of the artist, such autonomy would provide the necessary critical distance for both artistic production and intervention. A second reason could be

proffered, however: the autonomous dimension of the life of the artist not only provides “critical distance,” but makes life pleasurable and beautiful. Ultimately, autonomy may make life worth valuing, and therefore defending, in the first place. Lazere summarizes this point well: “for Camus, in his wariness of any absolute value [of social commitment ala Sartre], such a commitment makes superhuman demands and must be moderated and energized by some degree of self-fulfilling appreciation of life.”⁶² The affirmation of life gained through autonomy and pleasure “energizes” the critical and partisan dimension of the artistic life; one engages in concrete struggle because one’s own life, and the world it sees and creates, is worth struggling for.

To be sure, this latter notion conceives of a largely aesthetic term—autonomy—in more sensual or ethical terms. But such a transition, I would argue, is wholly within the overall logic of Camus’ ethics and his aesthetics. Indeed, Camus’ aesthetics, through their transposition into the life of the artist and the consistent parallel development of themes of moderation, balancing between various tensions, and creativity in both the work of art and the artist herself, shows itself to be an aesthetics which are intended to function as an ethics. Camus, in advocating the life of the artist as one that directly reflects the tensions evident in art between revolution and creativity, estrangement and commitment, implicitly argues for an aesthetic ethics, a reevaluation of how one lives according to largely aesthetic criteria. The artist is to blend the ethical imperative to live both thoughtfully and in moderated resistance through the autonomy and creativity found in the work of art. Camus blends the fields of art and artist seamlessly in the following: “The artist, like everyone else, must bend to his oar, without dying if possible—in other words, go on living and creating.”⁶³

When thought through Camus' conception of the absurd and the ideal form of thinking, a picture begins to emerge of the ideal subject in Camus' work. By problematizing one's relationship to the world and concrete sites of possible resistance, advocating a strategic form of thinking based on moderation, and by positing a series of tensions within which the artist must live and create, Camus' ideal figure begins to emerge as one who uses thinking in order to conceptualize and apply a life based on resistance, solidarity, and autonomy. In the life of the artist, concrete modes of action are outlined and prescribed which can be either affirmative or resistive. The artist consistently problematizes her relationship to the world and the ways in which various actions may be devised to overcome, affirm, or re-create various dimensions of experience. In short, Camus' ethics becomes an ethics of the artist, an aesthetic ethics.

These ideal characteristics of moderation and holding-in-balance the autonomous, solitary, positive, and negative elements of art are carried over into Camus' literary character sketches. There, the ideal figure—the life artist—deploys an aesthetic ethics which allows her to blend the opposing poles of aesthetic reflection into a life oriented towards resistance, affirmation, and the creation of character.

The Characters

As has been seen above, Camus' ethics, grounded in his theory of the absurd, his normative appeal to moderate forms of thinking, and his aesthetics of autonomy, creativity, and solidarity, begins to coalesce around the figure of the artist. The artist is seen as a unifying figure who unites the various dimensions of experience through a form of strategic and lucid reasoning structured by aesthetic reflection and lived experience.

If this is the case, then Camus' literary work might be seen not only as a means by which he examines the well-developed themes of exile, suffering, the absurd, or judgment, but as an interrogation of the figure of the artist through the development of a series of characters or types who portray different dimensions of the artistic life. As in Nietzsche before, Camus might be said to develop a series of "ideal types" through which he funnels his more central intuitions on the aesthetic life and shows the various ways in which the artistic life might be manifest. Camus, to this end, sees his own characters as "sketches," who "merely represent a style of life. The lover, the actor, or the adventurer plays the absurd. But equally well, if he wishes, the chaste man, the civil servant, or the president of the Republic."⁶⁴

The following section employs Camus' own self-understanding of his characters as types as a cue to interrogating the "style of life" each may represent throughout his short stories, plays, and novels. As such, I proceed by treating Camus' characters as a series of *dramatis personae* who give an indication as to what may constitute the artful life. What emerges is a more complete picture of the life artist.

Rieux

The first character to be examined is Dr. Bernard Rieux, the chronicler of the plague and attendant upon the deathbeds of thousands of citizens of Oran. Rieux, one of the first to admit the onset of the plague,⁶⁵ becomes an absurd figure in Camus' tale, recognizing the bleak indifference of the reality to which he is subject and against which he must rebel. He is described thus: "Yes, plague, like abstraction, was monotonous; perhaps only one factor changed and that was Rieux himself. Standing at the foot of the statue of the

Republic that evening, he felt it; all he was conscious of was a bleak indifference steadily gaining on him.”⁶⁶ It is against this monotony and “abstraction” that Rieux rebels, though his rebellion is often indistinguishable from merely carrying out his duties as a doctor. There are glimmers of Rieux’s rejection of the state of things, though, and, as he reflects on himself in the third-person, his despise of the absurd injustice of the world becomes evident: “The language [Rieux] used was that of a man who was sick and tired of the world he lived in—though he had much liking for his fellow-men—and had resolved, for his part, to have no truck with injustice and compromises with the truth.”⁶⁷

Of all the characters in *The Plague*, Rieux is the most dedicated to the persistent task of fighting against an obstinate and indifferent foe. This sense of duty comes from a simple recognition that abstraction and the absurd are not be fought with half-measures: one must devote oneself entirely to its absolution—“when abstraction sets to killing you, you’ve got to get busy with it.”⁶⁸ Such labor is not done with full understanding or with a view to the finality of one’s action: one is never assured of one’s success, and, more often than not, such success is fleeting. And yet, as Rieux recognizes in conversation with his friend and fellow combatant Tarrou, it is incumbent upon humans to respond to the plague despite a lack of complete understanding: “What’s true of all the evils in the world is true of the plague as well. It helps men to rise above themselves. All the same, when you see the misery it brings, you’d need to be a madman, or a coward, or stone blind, to give in tamely to the plague.”⁶⁹ While Rieux admits that the plague “helps men to rise above themselves,” he also admits that the only way in which such self-transcendence is performed is by doing precisely as he does: continually resisting the plague, if not all the evils, which confront humanity.

Rieux's aside on rising above oneself tacitly admits, as does one of Camus' foils, Jean Baptiste Clamence,⁷⁰ that the aim of resistance is not salvation or eternal justification; the absurd, as an immanent phenomenon, has leveled out such options. Rather, the only reasonable form of action, as Rieux admits, is by "fighting against creation as he found it."⁷¹ Robbed of any metaphysical meaning for his actions, Rieux rebels against the absurdity of nature and its imposition of a fickle and arbitrary system. Rieux's dutiful and painstaking labor against the plague, then, is not one grounded in a transcendent meaning, but, as he reflects in a conversation with the Jesuit Priest Father Paneloux, is one aimed at a more modest and immanent purpose—human health:

"No, Father. I've a very different idea of love. And until my dying day I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture. . . . We're working side by side for something that unites us—beyond blasphemy and prayers. And it's the only thing that matters."

Paneloux sat down beside Rieux. It was obvious that he was deeply moved.

"Yes, yes," he said. "you, too, are working for man's salvation."

Rieux tried to smile.

"Salvation's much too big a word for me. I don't aim so high. I'm concerned with man's health; and for me his health comes first."⁷²

In Rieux's subtle defiance of the Father's implication that salvation is at stake, Rieux gives lie to the way in which a character can rebel against the absurd without invoking any transcendent or salvific meaning. In rebellion against the absurd, one can only hope for "health," and one can only achieve such health through the total labor exacted by figures such as Rieux or Sisyphus.

Nor can one, in the end, expect legitimation or justification for one's solemn resistance to the forces of nature and humanity. In the midst of an irrational foe, one cannot expect a rational justification for one's rebellion. And so Rieux continues to

struggle despite the lack of logic or even assurance in his victory. This is captured in another exchange with Tarrou:

[Rieux:] “since the order of the world is shaped by death, mightn’t it be better for God if we refuse to believe in Him, and struggle with all our might against death, without raising our eyes towards the heaven where he sits in silence?”

Tarrou nodded.

“Yes. But our victories will never be lasting; that’s all.”

Rieux’s face darkened.

“Yes, I know that. But it’s no reason for giving up the struggle.”

“No reason, I agree. . . . Only, I now can picture what this plague must mean for you.”

“Yes. A never-ending defeat.”⁷³

Rieux, much like Camus’ Sisyphus and his compatriot in *The Plague*, Rambert, recognizes the futility of his actions. And yet, despite this and the lack of any overarching meaning to such struggle, Rieux continues on in grave defiance of an order of existence which robs humans of their dignity and life.

If anything, it is this critical lack of justification or even purpose that makes the character of Rieux, much less most of Camus’ ideal types, quixotic. As Camus’ murderous emperor Caligula has shown,⁷⁴ logic lies on the side of the irrational and unjust. Rieux, however, works for justice knowing that the type of justice for which he labors will never be consummated. While Rieux and others are quick to point out that such action is grounded in the notion of rebellion, it remains unclear *why* Rieux acts as he does. He gives some hint that rebellion is intrinsic to the *character* of Rieux, a result of his “heart”:

In any case, [Rieux] had few illusions left, and fatigue was robbing him of even these remaining few. He knew that, over a period whose end he could not glimpse, his task was no longer to cure but to diagnose. To detect, to see, to describe, to register, and then condemn—that was his present function. . . . “You haven’t a heart!” a woman told him on one occasion. She was wrong; he had one. It saw him through his twenty-

hour day, when he hourly watched men dying who were meant to live. It enabled him to start anew each morning. He had just enough heart for that, as things were now. How could that heart have sufficed for saving life?⁷⁵

Rieux's "heart" comes to symbolize the concrete dedication to the task at hand, the stubborn resistance continually mounted by Rieux in the midst of an overwhelming foe. Such an account does not explain the reasons for Rieux's work—in the end, as Camus wishes to show, there are no "reasons."⁷⁶ There is only the formation of a character who resists the absurd in all its forms and fights alongside others to gain a fleeting foothold in the struggle. What is important in Rieux is not a rational account for his actions, but the constitution of a self which resists inhumanity without the need for metaphysical order. As Rieux states, "What interests me is—being a man."⁷⁷

In the doctor's quiet and steadfast resistance, one sees an ethics of rebellion which grounds itself not in logic or rationality, but in the aesthetic ideal of character formation and the attendant concepts of solidarity, duty, and persistence. Rieux's response to the absurd onset of the plague is neither religious, logical, or justified; it is, instead, an outgrowth of a constitution which naturally responds to injustice by solemn and moderate struggle.

Tarrou/Diego/Cherea/Scipio

What the figure of Rieux gains for rebellion is heightened in those figures which appear throughout Camus' writings who act in open and steadfast defiance of all forms of absurdity or inhumanity. In *The Plague's* Tarrou, "Caligula's" Cherea and Scipio, and "State of Siege's" Diego, Camus creates a series of characters who violently oppose the

absurd often at the expense of their life or the life of others who represent the absurd. The earnest rebellion thus totters precariously close to the absurd tyrant or martyr.⁷⁸

This affinity to figures such as Caligula or the conqueror is often admitted by the characters themselves. Scipio, for example, openly admits his personal and philosophical closeness to Caligula,⁷⁹ and Tarrou, the mysterious organizer of the sanitary squads in *The Plague* and friend of Rieux, admits to the doctor that his long journey to Oran has brought him to realize that he has already been inoculated with the plague:

And thus I came to understand that I, anyhow, had had plague through all those long years in which, paradoxically enough, I'd believed with all my soul that I was fighting it. I learned that I had had an indirect hand in the deaths of thousands of people; that I'd even brought about their deaths by approving of acts and principles which could only end that way.⁸⁰

Like other ideal types in Camus' work, Tarrou recognizes the absurdity into which he is thrown. Moreover, Tarrou and other figures like him can react violently and defiantly against the absurd because they recognize its logic; in a sense, it is their own logic. More so than Rieux and more in line with a figure such as Jean Baptiste Clamence,⁸¹ Tarrou, Scipio, and others are willing to take the absurd onto themselves in order to combat it.

Given this inoculation with the absurd, it is unsurprising that the resistance put up by Tarrou and others is more virulent and self-sacrificing than even that seen in Rieux. Tarrou's "path of sympathy"⁸² leads him to form a series of sanitation squads that puts them in direct contact with the plague and therefore places their lives in perpetual danger. Yet Tarrou, understanding the nature of the absurd and, specifically, the plague, avers, "Death means nothing to men like me."⁸³ Or, as Cherea, one of the future assassins of Caligula, remarks: "To lose one's life is no great matter; when the time comes I'll have

the courage to lose mine. But what's intolerable is to see one's life being drained of meaning, to be told there's no reason for existing. A man can't live without some reason for living."⁸⁴ Not only do Tarrou, Cherea, Diego, and Scipio join in the fight against the absurd and the plague, but, in doing so, they continually risk their own lives. This arises, as they all admit, out of an understanding of the nature of the absurd and therefore the realization that their action—and possible sacrifice—is a necessary consequence of the absurd world in which they live and the only possible palliative for the suffering of others.

This sense of substitutionary suffering does not stop them, however, from meeting the absurd with continued resistance and even scorn. Diego, for example, confronts The Plague and his assistant The Secretary in "State of Siege" not with the usual pleas, but with rebellion and the promise to organize the town against their own annihilation. As opposed to other figures in the play who silently reconcile themselves to The Plague or beg for lenience from the indifferent and calculating Secretary, Diego confronts them both and offers his own call to resistance:

I'd have you know that you are nothing, and that this vast authority of yours, darkening the sky, is no more than a passing shadow cast upon the earth, a shadow that will vanish in a twinkling before a great storm wind of revolt. . . .when you were compiling your precious registers, you quite forgot the wild roses in the hedges, the signs in the sky, the smiles of summer, the great voice of the sea, the moments when man rises in his wrath and scatters all before him. . . .For there is in man—look at me, and learn—an innate power that you will never vanquish, a gay madness born of mingled fear and courage, unreasoning yet victorious through all time. One day this power will surge up and you will learn that all your glory is but dust before the wind.⁸⁵

Diego's resistance, like Camus' version of Sisyphus, is built on an aesthetic vision of the world and the innate defiance within humanity. Diego decries The Plague not in the name

of a transcendent order, but in the name of the created order itself: his rebellion is animated by an act of affirmation. This overt form of rebellion is met with a surprising reply by the Secretary: she allows Diego to escape judgment. As she later admits, “Then I can’t do anything to harm you. That, too, is down in the regulations.”⁸⁶ The plague, and the absurd more generally, often admits of surprises when resisted.

Such resistance, however, is not done in the hopes that the absurd relents or that one can triumph over the natural order. Rather, the sacrifice, labor, and often violent resistance put up by Tarrou, Scipio, Cherea, and Diego represents, like Rieux, an aspect of character formation wherein resistance is an outgrowth of one’s own self-becoming. In another exchange with Rieux, Tarrou gives the following:

“It comes to this,” Tarrou said almost casually, “what interests me is learning how to become a saint.”
“But you don’t believe in God.”
“Exactly! Can one be a saint without God?—that’s the problem, in fact the only problem, I’m up against today.”⁸⁷

Tarrou’s admission becomes the desideratum for all of Camus’ ideal types, especially those who sacrifice themselves in rebellion against absurd–sainthood without God. That is, sainthood without the possibility of salvation or justification. This form of sainthood, as Tarrou notes in both action and his journal, is one which must grow comfortable with the possibility of violence and “benevolent diabolism”: “Perhaps. . . we can only reach approximations of sainthood. In which case we must make shift with a mild, benevolent diabolism.”⁸⁸

Insomuch as their sacrifice and duty is a component of character formation, it seems fitting, then, that the characters of Diego, Cherea, Scipio, and Tarrou are collectively concerned with their own happiness and the happiness of others. As

idealizations, each is depicted as balancing stubborn rebellion and moderation with pleasure and autonomy, though the balance, as in the life of Rieux, is always swung towards rebellion and struggle. Cherea, for example, admits, “what I want is to live, and to be happy. Neither, to my mind, is possible if one pushes the absurd to its logical conclusions.”⁸⁹ Not only is happiness seen as essential and struggle as the necessary means by which a creative space for its emergence liberated, but it, too, is seen as a form of resistance to the absurd.⁹⁰ If one thinks the absurd faithfully, happiness is not allowed. Thus the greatest act of rebellion in *The Plague* is not the formation of the sanitary squads or the futile efforts by Rambert at escape, but the pleasurable and leisurely swim taken by Tarrou and Rieux in the midst of their struggle. The swim, for both, is given not as a means of escape, but of renewal before once again immersing themselves in the fight against the plague. Rieux states before their swim, “Really it’s too damn silly living only in and for the plague. Of course a man should fight for the victims, but if he ceases caring for anything outside that, what’s the use of fighting?”⁹¹ Such happiness is lucid and aware of the limits imposed even on pleasure. As they swam, Rieux “caught a glimpse on his friend’s face of the same happiness, a happiness that forgot nothing, not even murder.”⁹² Even in the furor of the plague, Camus’ elegant narration of a casual swim between friends allows one to realize that happiness, however temporary, and embodied openness to pleasure or the abyss of the sea, is even possible during struggle. The swim between Rieux and Tarrou becomes a model for a form of pleasurable resistance, happiness, and, most of all, friendship, in the midst of the absurd.

For some minutes they swam side by side, with the same zest, in the same rhythm, isolated from the world, at last free of the town and of the plague. . . . They dressed and started back. Neither had said a word, but

they were conscious of being perfectly at one, and that the memory of this night would be cherished by them both.⁹³

With this elegy to friendship and happiness and its recognition as temporary, it is unsurprising that Tarrou, like Diego, dies only a few short days later from the plague. Yet, even during his struggle against death, Tarrou smiles as he combats the same plague which he had persistently fought in the bodies of others.⁹⁴ In doing so, Camus gives a lucid description of an ideal resistance which is at times scornful, fraternal, self-sacrificing, and happy. The collective image given by figures like Tarrou, Scipio, Cherea, and Diego is one in which character becomes defined by the ability to act moderately, autonomously, and in brotherhood even with a deep recognition of the absurd. While self-sacrifice ultimately becomes a defining dimension of all four figures, they are equally defined by their allegiance to humanity and the way in which they cling to life.

So all a man could win in the conflict between plague and life was knowledge and memories. But Tarrou, perhaps, would have called that winning the match. . . . But if that was what it meant, winning the match—how hard it must be to live only with what one knows and what one remembers, cut off from what one hopes for! It was thus, most probably, that Tarrou had lived, and he realized the bleak sterility of a life without illusions. There can be no peace without hope, and Tarrou. . . had lived a life riddled with contradictions, and had never known hope's solace.⁹⁵

Grand/Gilbert Jonas

Given Camus' own biography, one would think that he holds figures such as Tarrou, Diego, Cherea, and Scipio in the highest regard. Each blends fraternity, deep-seeded resistance, autonomy, and a loyalty to existence into a noble character that lives—and dies—fully. It is ironic, then, that Camus reserves his highest praise for two of the more quixotic and idiosyncratic stylizations in his work, Joseph Grand from *The Plague* and Gilbert Jonas from “The Artist at Work.”

What emerges as praiseworthy in both characters is their complete and faithful blending of autonomy, creativity, solidarity, and moderation into the orbit of simple and honest lives. After interrupting the attempted suicide of his neighbor Cottard, for example, Grand promises Rieux to watch over the man for the night, stating, “one’s got to help a neighbor, hasn’t one?”⁹⁶ Grand’s allegiance to his fellow man is simple and unflinching, a silent resolve which is witnessed again in his self-sacrificial decision to work with the sanitary squads. As Rieux narrates:

. . . more than Rieux or Tarrou, Grand was the true embodiment of the quiet courage that inspired the sanitary groups. He had said “Yes” without a moment’s hesitation and with the large-heartedness that was a second nature with him. . . . When Rieux thanked him with some warmth he seemed surprised. “Why, *that’s* not difficult! Plague is here and we’ve got to make a stand, that’s obvious.”⁹⁷

Interestingly, Grand’s commitment to the squads does not involve the same degree of danger as does the work of Rieux or Tarrou: Grand works as an accountant, bookkeeper, and general assistant, not as a sanitation worker or doctor on the “front lines.” Grand, owing to his sense of silent autonomy and solidarity, gives what he can.

This sense of autonomy is most earnestly reflected in Grand’s persistent, if not completely absurd, literary undertaking. Grand is continually attempting to find the perfect words to express himself, whether it be in letters, speech, or his most absurd work, a novel of which he continually re-writes the first sentence, which, in various phases, reads as follows: “One fine morning in the month of May an elegant young horsewoman might have been seen riding a handsome sorrel mare along the flowery avenues of the Bois de Boulogne.”⁹⁸ Throughout *The Plague*, the sentence is re-written and re-worked, adjectives, conjunctions, and verbs subtly changed to deliver a unique

literary effect which would cause a publisher to deem the novel worthy of publication based on one sentence alone. Grand summarizes his absurd quest:

“What I really want, doctor, is this. On the day when the manuscript reaches the publisher, I want him to stand up—after he’s read it through, of course—and say to his staff, ‘Gentlemen, hats off!’” . . . “So you see,” Grand added, “its got to be. . . flawless.” . . . “Evenings, whole weeks, spent on one word, just think! Sometimes on a mere conjunction!”⁹⁹

Grand’s pursuit of the perfect words for a woman riding horseback in France is absurd, of course, the fact of which has not escaped Grand himself. Yet it is the constant pursuit of an unattainable aesthetic perfection that drives Grand towards absurd creation.

This perfectionist motif is belied by the fact that Grand’s creation is symptomatic of a larger personality trait, namely his inability to perfectly express himself. As he states to the doctor, “Oh Doctor. . . how I’d like to learn to express myself!”¹⁰⁰ Grand’s repetitive formulation of a woman riding horseback along the Bois de Boulogne is an extension of his desire to achieve a perfection of expression, one which must be wrought through the type of labor and dedication which typifies the dutiful work of Rieux and the self-sacrifice of Tarrou and others. As Rieux states, “In any case, the austere, not to say ascetic life of Joseph Grand was, in the last analysis, a guarantee against any anxiety in this respect. . . .He went on looking for his words.”¹⁰¹ Grand’s work is tantamount to an *askesis* of expression: his work on expression amounts to a constant work on himself. It demands a constant attention to speech, writing, and the various tasks to which he does—and does not—commit himself. Grand’s seemingly inane pursuit of perfection, then, is part of the formation of his own character, one which uses a notably aesthetic pursuit—the writing of the opening sentence to a novel—to problematize his relationship with others,

words, and himself. Thus, one can conclude, as does Rieux, that “Grand’s work was connected with ‘the growth of a personality.’”¹⁰²

As Grand’s work on the opening sentence implies, however, his development of personality through a largely aesthetic medium is an open-ended and never-ending process. When Rieux discovers a late draft of Grand’s sentence near the end of the plague, Grand’s command is to “Burn it!”¹⁰³ Grand’s creation is not intended to be final, and, as part of the work on himself, never can be. What is important in Grand’s character is the system of effects produced by the aesthetic task of perfecting self-expression and attending to one’s relationships with others: the balance between autonomy, creativity, and solidarity. Though Grand’s character is not as self-sacrificing or noble as that of Rieux, Tarrou, or others, his character is oddly venerable for its subtle balance between autonomy and solidarity.¹⁰⁴

Similar to Grand’s suspension of the tension between solidarity and autonomy is the life of artist Gilbert Jonas, whose innocent but brilliant artistic expression eventually draws the love of friends and fans who fill his small Parisian apartment to watch him work. Eventually, Jonas’ “star” fades and the genius which once drew crowds with it. Having lost faith in himself and in his own art, Jonas begins the search to regain his “star” and the artistic expression that came with it. Like Grand before him, this amounts to an absurd quest for the perfect work of art, one which could summarize both Jonas’ life and the work of art itself. As he recognizes, “He had to grasp at last the secret which was not merely the secret of art, as he could now see.”¹⁰⁵ This quest sends Jonas into the lonely corners of his small apartment, in isolation from those who once surrounded him. In the dark corner of a small terrace he built in his sitting room, Jonas eventually finds his

star. He also rediscovers the demand for others in his life and in the work of art. Camus gives a picture of an artist thrown into the tension between solidarity and autonomous artistic creation: “Deprived of [his friends and admirers], he would have merely an empty solitude. He loved them as much as his painting because they were the only things in the world alive as it was.”¹⁰⁶

Jonas, on the verge of madness and after collapsing, has to be removed from his cave in the middle of the living room. His wife, who solemnly protected Jonas’ work, eventually discovers a stark white canvas in which the words, “*solitary* or *solidary*,”¹⁰⁷ were indistinguishable from another. In Jonas’ small painting is encapsulated the critical tension in which Jonas, and above all Camus’ ideal types, lives. Jonas, whose art was forged in a constant tension between friendship and isolation, naivete and self-conscious expression, summarizes the contradictory relationship the artist has with both herself and the world in which she lives. This sense of contradiction, as Jonas shows, can be stylized, but never fully resolved.

What is vital in Grand and Jonas alike is the way in which they use artistic production and creation as a means of problematizing their relationships with others, resistance, the work of art itself, and, most especially, themselves. The absurd work of art and the perfection it demands calls upon an *askesis* of self-sacrifice, quiet dedication, and loyalty to the absurd ideal of open-ended production. Interestingly, such an ideal is typified more in the quixotic behaviors of Grand and Jonas than in Tarrou, Diego, or Sisyphus. As Rieux recommends in his narrative of the plague:

[I]f it is a fact that people like to have examples given them, men of the type they call heroic, and if it is absolutely necessary that this narrative should include a “hero,” the narrator commends to his readers, with, to his thinking, perfect justice, this insignificant and obscure hero [Grand]

who had to his credit only a little goodness of heart and a seemingly absurd ideal.¹⁰⁸

Camus' demand, funneled through the narrative of Rieux and the characters of Grand and Jonas, is not perfection or even the noble self-sacrifice better exemplified by others. It is the ability to give what one can while balancing such an effort with the absurd project of character formation and artistic creation. Jonas and Grand's singular achievement is not a number of works, but a unitary life which gives artistic expression to the paradox between solidarity and autonomy, the committed and affirmative dimensions of experience.

The Life Artist

What emerges from Camus' various character sketches is a collective picture of the work of the life-artist and his/her development of character through a suite of ascetic and aesthetic practices. The life-artist undertakes practices which are creative, solitary, solitary, and resistive and unites them in a self which recognizes the limits of rebellion and the risks associated with her *askesis*. This work is often clarified through the project of artistic production or the intensification of pleasure. In short, the life-artist practices an aesthetic ethics where the qualities that signify an authentic work of art are applied to one's daily life. For Camus, this can be distilled into the "art of living": "Perhaps we shall be able to overtake that elusive feeling of absurdity in the different but closely related worlds of intelligence, of the art of living, or of art itself."¹⁰⁹ Or, as he reflects on the work of Baudelaire, the task of the artist is one of transposing the critical motifs of art into an ethics. "From romanticism onward, the artist's task will not only be to create a

world, or to exalt beauty for its own sake, but also to define an attitude. Thus the artist becomes a model and offers himself as an example: art is his ethic.”¹¹⁰

If art is to be melded with the more general ethical project of constituting oneself and one’s relation to others, then it becomes critical to define precisely what art is. The previous chapters and the introduction to this chapter have gone to some length to detail the various dimensions of aesthetic experience which are applicable to ethical formation. What is important to establish for Camus, then, is the way in which art is deployed in one’s life and how it is used to problematize one’s relation to socio-political structures of oppression and creativity. In the figures of Rieux, Tarrou, Diego, Cherea, Scipio, Grand, and Jonas, a series of examples are given as to how aesthetic criteria can be applied to one’s life; namely, how one deploys the artistic qualities of creativity, autonomy, and solidarity in situations of distress and suffering. The key terms which come to denote this creative and strategic deployment is the development of personality, heart, sainthood, or character.

Thus the problem of how one employs the various aesthetic modalities in one’s life is both a creative and a strategic task which requires a diagnosis of the present and a prescription for future creative activity. To this end, Camus speaks of the artist as the “creator and the thinker,”¹¹¹ and, in a bow to Nietzsche’s earlier recognition that *Wissenschaft* must be thought of as the “regulator” for the artistic quest of creation, Camus gives the following:

For an absurd work of art to be possible, thought in its most lucid form must be involved in it. But at the same time thought must not be apparent except as the regulating intelligence. . . . The absurd work requires an artist conscious of these limitations and an art in which the concrete signifies nothing more than itself.¹¹²

Thought, as in Nietzsche before, is to be the force which constrains the creative impulse to exceed its limits.¹¹³ Immersed in the absurd and understanding of the present instantiations of hostility and indifference, thinking can strategically apply the intuitions of the creative impulse towards the formation of character and the illustration and formation of sites of resistance and pleasure. The art of living, like the balance between science and art in Nietzsche, becomes the moderating art of strategically applying the insights of art without falling prey to its inevitable excesses.

This strategic deployment of the creative practices of resistance, solidarity, and autonomous creation, however, is not done for the sake of creation itself. Rather, each is projected towards the creation of an individualized self which overcomes the absurd through a suite of daily practices. As Camus recognizes, “the absurd man discovers a discipline that will make up the greatest of his strengths. . . . To create is likewise to give a shape to one’s fate.”¹¹⁴ Hence characters shape their fate through the lives that they create, whether it be through the free decision to form sanitary squads, perfect an absurd sentence, or perform one’s duties as a doctor. And yet, as each recognizes, the task of character formation and individualization receives no final sanction or justification; it does not free one from sin, hell, suffering, or injustice. It is, rather, an absurd task taken on in full recognition of its absurdity.¹¹⁵

It is for this reason that figures such as Caligula, Meursault, and Clamence appear as attractive options within the absurd.¹¹⁶ They counter its logic with redoubled intensity, matching absurdity with absurdity. Their logic is, as Cherea recognizes, fully coherent. This more rational -- and yet depraved--logic is countered by the life-artist, who sees the absurd as both a limit and an opening, a cue to resistance and an appeal to moderation.

Self-creation, then, must also fully grasp the historic struggle into which it enters and the action which it undertakes. “[R]ebellion at grips with history adds that instead of killing and dying in order to produce the being that we are not, we have to live and let live in order to create what we are.”¹¹⁷ Creating what we are, or, more aptly, what we are *becoming*, entails the persistent diagnosis of the present and practices in which one does not exceed the limits of the present. As such, figures like Tarrou, Diego, or Cherea and Scipio do not go beyond the limits of reason; they merely condone what is necessary for the present. This is the “superhuman task”¹¹⁸ which we are given: to overcome the present in the name of an indefinable and indeterminate future. Living within the limits of the absurd means transcending oneself for the sake of becoming. Camus summarizes this dynamic relation to history and the future: “History may perhaps have an end; but our task is not to terminate it but to create it, in the image of what we henceforth know to be true. . . .One can reject all history and yet accept the world of the sea and the stars.”¹¹⁹

Camus’ coda that one “can reject all history and yet accept the world of the sea and the stars” reveals the implicit links with Nietzsche’s ideal types. Just as Nietzsche’s free spirits and philosophers of the future must be both *of* the future and “think” the future as a critical affirmation of the present, Camus’ life-artist and literary characters must give all to the present in order to affirm the possibility of the future. “Real generosity to the future lies in giving all to the present.”¹²⁰ Creation entails committing oneself fully to the present while realizing that such creation opens up a critical space for becoming in the future. Acts of creative resistance, solidarity, and autonomous production sanctify and affirm the present while contributing to the ongoing process of character formation and the art of living.¹²¹

As the lives of Camus' characters show, then, resistance, solidarity, and autonomous creation are undertaken as a dual movement which affirms the present and reveals possibilities for the future. Such action is not heroic in the literary sense, however: the acts of self-sacrifice made by Rieux, Tarrou, Grand, Cherea, and Scipio are strategic decisions which befit their role in the world and are in full accord with "what they can give." Their creativity and allegiance to the present and future are embedded in daily acts of sacrifice, solidarity, and resistance. Or, as Camus states, they practice an "*ascesis*," a disciplined and strategic effort to see in daily practice the resonance of an aesthetic aim:

Of all the schools of patience and lucidity, creation is the most effective. It is also the staggering evidence of man's sole dignity: the dogged revolt against his condition, perseverance in an effort considered sterile. It calls for a daily effort, self-mastery, a precise estimate of the limits of truth, measure, and strength. It constitutes an *ascesis*. . . . But perhaps the great work of art has less importance in itself than in the ordeal it demands of a man and the opportunity it provides him of overcoming his phantoms and approaching a little closer to his naked reality.¹²²

If one is to take his cue from art on how to live, then it is not art itself which is vital, but rather the way in which art problematizes one's relations to others and the moderation, creation, and self-transcendence it demands. The artful life uses the insights of art as a means of examining and re-creating daily practices anew. Sagi reflects on this motif in the work of Camus: "We do not find a given, comprehensive meaning, but we can make our lives meaningful through our struggle and our lucid consciousness and, above all, through the concrete modalities of our lives."¹²³ Thus the artistic life problematizes one's relationship to historical sites of oppression, forms of solidary resistance, and the creative work one undertakes as a source of renewal. But it also, in the spirit of Marcuse and Merleau-Ponty, emphasizes the more banal practices of seeing and living: one's diet,

sexuality, exercise, and how one lives. Indeed, if the “art of living” is to be resistant and creative, it must do so, like the work of Joseph Grand, through both the large and the small.

In Camus, then, one has the beginnings of an aesthetic ethics which brings to bear a recognition of the absurd realities of history on a form of living which is moderate and directed towards the production of an aesthetic life. This move from an aesthetics to an ethics is symbolized by the shift in Camus’ own aesthetics from an emphasis on art to an emphasis on the artist, a figure he characterizes both directly as a free-lance rebel and autonomous creator, and indirectly as a figure who simultaneously rebels against suffering and creates himself as a saint devoted to self-perfection. This occurs, in both instances, through an attention to the various loci of oppression and the ways in which they may be strategically modified to create a life of liberation and, perhaps, authentic pleasure and affirmation.

But he who dedicates himself to the duration of his life, to the house he builds, to the dignity of mankind, dedicates himself to the earth and reaps from it the harvest which sows its seed and sustains the world again and again.¹²⁴

III: Foucault

Through Camus’ philosophical monographs, essays, plays, and novels, we begin to see a sketch of the work of the life artist and how she brings the essence of art to bear on daily practices both extraordinary and banal. In fusing together the seemingly contradictory elements of autonomy and solidarity, creativity and rebellion, the life artist suggests a way in which we may begin to unite the seemingly contradictory threads of reflection attained through critical theory and phenomenology in previous chapters. This

blending occurs primarily through using the work of art as a means of problematizing one's relation to the world and, through an art of both moderate thinking and strategic deployment, finding concrete sites for the materialization of an artistic *ethos*.

The middle and later thought of Michel Foucault¹²⁵ represents an intensification of the problematics inherited by Camus. Foucault's thought traces the thematics established in Camus and more generally in life as art, namely, how one can apply the insights of art to the processes of thinking and acting after Nietzsche. Foucault does so, however, not through an intensification of dialectical reasoning, nor a return to the things themselves, but, rather, as my analysis of Camus suggests, through an *ethics* and the means by which art and aesthetics may be used as a means of problematizing one's relation to others, oneself, and the world.

As in Camus, Foucault's insights on the concept of an aesthetic ethics are neither linear nor systematic, as his untimely death cut short any final programmatic statement on the nature of an aesthetics of existence or the ways in which his later writings on the Greeks related to his work on power and subjectivity. Hence, as in Camus before, this section reconstructs Foucault's thought in a "Foucauldian" fashion; that is, by marking out the areas which are problematized and traced in Foucault's own thought and showing the ways in which they relate to his self-described "aesthetics of existence." Practically, this means exploring, as with Camus' notion of absurdity, Foucault's concept(s) of power, his strategic conception of thinking, and his analysis of Greco-Roman forms of self-creation.

What emerges from this analysis is a more concrete conception of an artistic ethics and how the separate fields of analysis and various constraints¹²⁶ marked out by

critical theory and phenomenology might come to be united in life as art. While Foucault's work, like that of Camus, leaves wanting a more coherent conception of art or aesthetics, his ethics clearly shows the ways in which a particular aesthetics, especially one with elements both affirmative and negative, might be deployed in the various modalities of daily life. It does so, akin to Camus, by problematizing our relationship to structures of oppression and illuminating the potential resources that such a relationship produces or leaves open. These resources, as I show below, represent an intensification of the attention paid to the body, one's relation to truth and pleasure, and illuminate, in ways critically anticipated by previous chapters, the path toward a more coherent concept of life as art.

Power and the Constitution of the Self

Power and the Surveillance of Bodies

An analysis of Foucault's normative conception of ethics must be formulated, as in Camus above, with respect to the ways in which humans are limited in the contemporary era and what possibilities, if any, exist for resistance and affirmation. Ethics, if they are to have meaning for Camus or Foucault, must be formulated as a creative response to dominant modes of thought, action, and oppression. In Camus the source of creative resistance arises generally through the absurd and in its more recent historical instantiations as revolt; in Foucault, the strategic setting for the devising of ethics is an analysis of power relations.

“Power relations” for Foucault does not indicate a traditional substance-oriented conception of power in which one person “has” power and another does not. Nor is it a

quality one may attribute to a person such as a sovereign, psychiatrist, or professor. This more traditional notion of power is summarized by Foucault as such:

[T]his power is poor in resources, sparing of its methods, monotonous in the tactics it utilizes, incapable of invention, and seemingly doomed always to repeat itself. Further, it is a power that only has the force of the negative on its side, a power to say no; in no condition to produce, capable only of posting limits, it is basically anti-energy.¹²⁷

The traditional conception of power is one in which power is fundamentally repressive: it condemns certain acts while only liminally permitting others. It is generally uniform in its implementation, “top down” in its origin, and is bent on maintaining its own exercise.

This more monarchial and localized notion of power largely forms a foil for Foucault’s more positive intuitions on the nature of power relations. As he states, “By power, I do not mean ‘Power’ as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state.”¹²⁸ Power is not to be conceived as a property which one person, agent, or institution may possess and wield in only a negative or repressive fashion. Rather, if only formulated negatively, power relations would be a non-localized, non-sovereign form of agency which does not act solely through forms of repression. Power relations operate not by controlling, but by manipulating and disciplining.¹²⁹

If this negative working definition of power is to be coherent, then it must alter a number of aspects of the traditional conception of power against which forms of ethics and subjectivity were formulated. Thus, as a first step, Foucault alters the site of application of power: instead of negatively repressing *only* the body by exacting taxes, torture, or tribute, Foucault’s concept of power relations operates more dynamically on both body *and* soul, acting on one’s materiality as well as her thoughts.¹³⁰ As both an

embodied and an epistemological phenomenon, power relations are concerned with how an individual acts and thinks, how the body is related to the inner workings of the mind and how the mind produces effects in the body. In short, power relations are given as the means by which a totality of effects are relayed to, and implanted within, a person through either signs, movements, or rituals. “But the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs.”¹³¹ Owing to his affinity for the thought of Merleau-Ponty, Foucault sees power relations as the means by which the body and mind are placed at the center of interpersonal and political relations.

This concept is critically amended by an adjoining notion, namely that power, like the absurd, is consistently given as a *relation* between two agents, whether they be personal, institutional, or political. Power is conceived as relationships of forces, in contrast to the monarchical model which posits power as a duality between possession and non-possession. Instead, “power must be understood as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them. . . .”¹³² To be sure, this means that power relations are not only directive or repressive (i.e., the sovereign limits certain actions), but are primarily strategic, subtle, or manipulative. Power operates under the range of options given by relationships themselves.¹³³ By making power relational, Foucault has shifted the range of operations for power from one of unidirectional oppression to a multi-scalar and multi-dimensional strategic topography where actors are in constant struggle with

one another. Just as there is no longer a monarch who possesses power, there “is no point where you are free from all power relations;”¹³⁴ power is omnipresent as long as relationships and the forces within them, obtain.

This move on Foucault’s part to see power as relational, omnipresent, strategic, and derivative means that power has effectively been decentralized. Power relations are distributed across a landscape of possible relationships and their configurations. This undermines the conception of power as “top-down,” and allows Foucault to grant that power is “capillary,”¹³⁵ “cellular,”¹³⁶ and “exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations.”¹³⁷ Power relations operate through a distributed agency, one which operates on both micro- and macro- scales of analysis. In this regard, Foucault’s repeated biological imagery is apt: power relations, like the workings of a cell, operate by means of a suite of various networks which are only loosely coordinated and are relatively autonomous in their derivation and deployment. The operations of power relations are best described, then, as a “multiple network of diverse elements” which operate based on “a strategic distribution of elements of natures and levels.”¹³⁸ Just as Merleau-Ponty adduces a more network-based understanding of ontology, Foucault registers a notion of power relations based on complex and non-dualistic interactions between multiple actors and the various strategies and techniques they employ.

Foucault’s reappraisal of power is not limited to the general nature of power relations, however. If power is to work, then it must also do so not by acting solely through a suite of interactions, but must also alter the activity of the body and soul through a host of effects. Hence power works not only *through* the family, sex, etc., but

on the body and its potential movements.¹³⁹ If power is to be effective at the minute level, it does so by manipulating the expenditure of time, the rituals of everyday life, and the ways in which such activities are represented. Power no longer works on the body through direct intervention, but by “working it ‘retail,’ individually; of exercising upon it a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself—movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body.”¹⁴⁰ The body is the locus for the manifold operations of power opened up through the family, one’s workday, one’s distractions, etc. Power works through a subtle coercion of one’s habits, gestures, and speech. Indeed, power admits of “indefinite lines of penetration”¹⁴¹ through the various possible means that we come to live, move, and have our being.¹⁴² If power is disseminated across multiple domains and through manifold strategies, then its techniques and sites of application are just as varied: the body and its ways of acting, seeing, ingesting, and excreting; the mind and its ways of representing, signifying, and expressing.

It is within this problematic that the concept of Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon arises as a model of institutional penalty. By making the body of a prisoner visible at all times, the panopticon effectively makes the body and its habits, along with the mind and its representations, the subject of constant vigilance and oversight. Power is expressed in the panopticon through pure visibility and the impossibility of concealment. The panopticon therefore permits “an internal, articulated and detailed control—to render visible those who are inside it; . . . to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them.”¹⁴³ If power is to operate on the body and the mind in ways other than overt repression and material

deprivation, then the panopticon becomes an exemplar of a means by which one's actions, thoughts, and expressions are manipulated through non-coercive methods. The panopticon works precisely because it implants in the subject a "state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power."¹⁴⁴ The panopticon works to discipline individuals because of its invisibility,¹⁴⁵ the implantation of "being watched" in a subject without the subject being able to return the gaze.

Of course, what remains significant with respect to the panopticon and Foucault's ethics is the way in which it is a reflection of the contemporary ways in which power relations have been extended indefinitely into the functionings of the mind and body.¹⁴⁶ The panopticon, in admitting perpetual vigilance over one's activities, habits, and expressions, represents the ways in which one's own fields of movement and expression have become increasingly the subject of disciplinary action.¹⁴⁷ One's activities and self-representations are monitored and made the subject of a series of discourses on what is normal, desirable, etc. Thus the panoptical society and its manifold dimensions of force operate by constantly monitoring, and thereby altering, the various dimensions of the body and soul. And, indeed, this model works not only because it practices a form of constant vigilance, but because we are complicit in its operation: we implant the attuned gaze within ourselves and allow it to function as a disciplinary field of force.

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.¹⁴⁸

If power relations act on and through the body by altering one's movements, habits, and ways of being, then the aim of such relations is not only disciplinary, as

Foucault suggests, but also, more subtly, the normalization of the subject in thought and action. “The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*.”¹⁴⁹ By attuning the panoptical gaze on one’s body and thoughts, contemporary forms of power have created an effective means whereby a normal subject is produced that lives and thinks in accord with certain institutional and cultural directives. The normalizing operations of power on the body serve the general strategy of constructing subjects capable of serving the general functions of advanced industrial society. Contrary to the work of Adorno and Marcuse, however, the normalizing society does not operate merely through repression and institutional interest: instead, normality is a task undertaken by all components of society, which serve as its “anchor points” and relays. The production of a normal subject is the work of all upon all, not, as in dialectical theory, of the universal upon the particular.

Thus, while a subject may be complicit in his own subjection, as was suggested by Marcuse’s notion of “introjection,” the source of such subjection has been significantly altered in Foucault’s thought to accommodate contemporary forms of manipulation and normalization. Now, a subject is normalized by means of the capillary action of multiple discourses, fields of force, and relationships. And, most importantly, power relations do not act purely as negative or repressive: power relations are *productive* and generate forms of normality by inciting one to act or behave in certain ways. The primary means by which they do so is by being coupled to forms of gratification and pleasure: power normalizes because the forms of normality it produces are pleasurable or interesting. Hence, contrary to the critical theoretical disposition to

speak of power in only negative and repressive terms, power relations are seen as acting through “*perpetual spirals of power and pleasure*”¹⁵⁰ or through the enfolding of “gratification-punishment.”¹⁵¹ Power relations can normalize subjects because the forms of normality and subjectivity they produce give us pleasure.

With the introduction of power-pleasure as a guiding concept for the production of normality, Foucault has significantly advanced the critical theoretical understanding of the ways in which society and politics operate to produce and administer needs. Society produces normal subjects through a diffuse deployment of strategies and techniques designed to both repress certain instincts and behaviors and refine and produce others. In this sense, power is ultimately productive: it creates normality through a variety of complex effects. “Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement.”¹⁵² Rather than seeing power and pleasure as antagonistic (ala Marcuse’s work in *Eros and Civilization*), Foucault sees pleasure as a means by which the aims of complex power relations are achieved. One’s sexuality is not simply repressed or narrowed; it is *constructed* and normalized through the intertwining of power and pleasure. This account does not discount the role of repression, however. It simply expands the domain of techniques through which power operates to achieve normality in contemporary society. “What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse.”¹⁵³

If power is productive, and if the aim of power is the normalization of individuals, then, as a consequence, the individual is itself a production of power relations. Foucault grants this as a logical consequence of his theory of power: “power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.”¹⁵⁴ The panoptical structure of society operates to create individuals who are productive and fully integrated. However, the possessors of the dominant interest are no longer the “culture industry,” but, rather, distributed networks of interest in whom power may, or may not, crystallize momentarily. The normal individual, who is “carefully fabricated”¹⁵⁵ from this milieu of interests and strategies, is to be seen as a relay point and producer of normality just as much as he/she is its product.¹⁵⁶ In both living through pleasurable forms of being and disseminating them, the individual becomes a node within a wide complex of normalizing techniques.

Thus, contrary to Camus and critical theory, who saw forms of the absurd and administered reality, respectively, as a negative imposition on human needs, wants and desires, Foucault gives a more detailed account of power in which the individual is not simply a victim or agent of repression, but is itself a production within a vast array of normalizing techniques. If Camus’ account of the absurd can be said to have problematized one’s relationship to biological and historical reality, Foucault’s theory of power has radicalized such a critique, as one’s relationship to all forms of pleasure, one’s family, and even one’s sense of “self” have been shown to be apparatuses of manipulation and the strategic production of a normal individual. Power relations not only limit certain forms of self-constitution (and they do), they serve primarily as a

means of cajoling individuals into normalized forms of living, seeing, and thinking.

Ultimately, Foucault's analysis of power relations problematizes the complex interface between the body and society and the ways in which the body is brought into alignment with forms of constraint and production.

The Constitution of the Subject Through True Discourses

Foucault's account of power and its analysis of the production of normal individuals is still in the service of the greater ethical concern of how a subject comes to constitute herself, though, and for this reason it is necessary to look at another dimension within his theory of power, namely the techniques used to produce normal individuals. Only by considering the techniques inherent to the creation of selves can one begin to see more clearly how a strategic conception of thinking might reverse the constitution of the self through power relations.

To this end, the primary means by which individuals are created in contemporary society is through the production and implementation of forms of "knowledge" and "truth" which have relevance to the production of self. Foucault's analysis begins with the general assertion that if power is productive, then it produces not only pleasures and normality, but knowledge as well. He states, "power produces knowledge. . . power and knowledge directly imply one another. . . there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge. . ."¹⁵⁷ Owing to his work in *Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Order of Things*, Foucault recognizes the interrelationship between domains of truth and the functionings of power. Discourse serves as a means of opening up a domain of knowledge within which there are certain ways of looking at objects,

privileged ways of analysis, or communities within which such analysis is practiced.

There is a reciprocal relationship between knowledge and the structures of power in which it is produced, altered, and conveyed. “‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A ‘regime’ of truth.”¹⁵⁸ Power produces truth just as truth effects relations of power. Power operates by creating true discourses and implanting them within the social body, where they are taken up, expressed, and made the subject of other true discourses.¹⁵⁹

Power operates through the production of true discourses, thereby creating forms of knowledge through which normality can be both envisioned and constructed. Indeed, the production of knowledge is always strategic and purposive: knowledge creates normal individuals through its circulation and effects. Foucault relates the concept of normalization here to the body: “In becoming the target for new mechanisms of power, the body is offered up to new forms of knowledge. It is the body of exercise, rather than of speculative physics; a body manipulated by authority, rather than imbued with animal spirits. . . .”¹⁶⁰

By seeing the body as an object, “true discourses” have effectively circumscribed and produced the range of movements and modes of expression which the body may undertake. The same logic would apply to the production of subjectivity.¹⁶¹ True discourses are both the constraints and productive effects for creating individuals that exist within certain discursive boundaries.

It is likely for this reason that Foucault undertakes an analysis of sexuality in the latter part of his career. For sexuality, by its very nature as the confluence of one’s

instincts, one's familial life, one's reproductive desires, and one's status in society, provides a unique window into the operations of a power which produces true discourses about the body and soul. Power creates sexuality by creating types around which knowledge is constructed.¹⁶² Through the medicalization, politicization, and psychologization of sexuality, a number of truths surrounding sexuality have been constructed which seek to analyze, constrain, and produce certain forms of sexual expression.

The most significant and widespread form of such normalization is the production of discourses in which sexuality is seen as a secret of the self to be revealed through psychoanalysis, confession, or public truth-telling. One's sex is seen as part of the essence of the self, even if such a sexuality is produced and simultaneously interpreted by dominant forms of knowledge.¹⁶³ To tell the truth about one's sex is to tell the truth about oneself. Sexuality is given as constitutive of our inner nature by virtue of its relationship to our drives, our madnnesses, and, as Merleau-Ponty showed, our perception. Thus to tell the truth about one's sexuality is to tell the truth about one's very nature as a subject. "[W]e demand that [sexuality] tell us our truth, or rather, the deeply buried truth of that truth about ourselves which we think we possess in our immediate consciousness."¹⁶⁴ In effect, the "truth" of our sexuality is that our sexuality is part of a series of discourses which seek to implant, and then define, the very nature which we are supposed to be.

As in the panopticon, Foucault's account of sexuality and the functioning of true discourses serves an exemplary function. The account of sexuality shows the ways in which true discourses are constructed, deployed, and relayed through various social, political, and familial networks. Individuals are constructed within a host of domains

which produce individual identities as simultaneously scientific, natural, beautiful, religious, free, virtuous, etc. As Foucault states, “In the end, we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power.”¹⁶⁵ Individuals are judged, both by themselves and others, by the degree to which they bear the traces of specific true discourses about themselves.

This contention, when coupled with Foucault’s analysis of normalization, comes to form a coherent view of the contemporary subject: *the contemporary subject is created by a series of techniques, the most prominent being the production of truths about oneself, in which the aim is to illicit patterns of normality and productivity.* The body and mind are the loci for a multitude of devices which seek to produce an individual that is autonomously normalizing; the individual, through the play of forces within which she exists, participates in and creates discourses, pleasures, and forms of normality about herself which provide a fixed point in power relations. Power works best inasmuch as it works least, by creating individuals that construct themselves according to fixed patterns and fields of knowledge whose effects are both known and desirable.

Resistance

There is a Janus face to Foucault’s analysis of power, though. Inasmuch as power constructs subjectivity through discourse, pleasure, and other techniques, it also admits to being a play of forces which only obtain if they are anchored within various individuals. Power is, above all, a series of strategic interactions between subjects. For the most part,

this interaction creates discourses, pleasures, institutional structures, and individualities. Yet, as a strategic interaction, it also produces nodes of resistance.

Just as Foucault effectively “decapitated” the monarchial model of power, thereby making power diffuse, local, and bottom-up, he also showed that power relations operate on a microscopic level and are dependent on an infinite number of finite relays. Instead of being implacable and stable, then, “these power relations are mobile, they can be modified, they are not fixed once and for all.”¹⁶⁶ Power relations are always moving, shifting, and producing; and, in doing so, they are also revealing weaknesses and points where knowledges and pleasures can be undermined or revealed for what they are—contingent. Part of Foucault’s work with power, then, is one of demythologization and demystification: power relations cannot be fixed and immovable if they are seen as distributed and operating through concrete strategic relations between individuals. “A certain fragility has been discovered in the very bedrock of existence—even, and perhaps above all, in those aspects of it that are most familiar, most solid and most intimately related to our bodies and to our everyday behavior.”¹⁶⁷

Foucault’s analysis of power, then, similar to Camus’ concept of thinking, is a diagnostic procedure designed to illustrate both the ways in which individuals are created and how such situations may be undermined or transformed. Actually, Foucault’s analysis goes further than that of Camus: not only does Foucault attempt to show the cracks immanent to power relations, he can also show that resistance is *inherent* to power relations themselves. Because power relations are based on ongoing strategic interactions, then one always has the ability to resist or modify a given strategic situation. Foucault states, “if there was no resistance, there would be no power relations. Because it would

simply be a matter of obedience. You have to use power relations to refer to the situation where you're not doing what you want."¹⁶⁸ In order for power to be panoptical, disseminated, and continual, it must rely on the operation of a multitude of individuals as its anchor points. Just as these individuals anchor power, they are also sites of modification and relay: they are not simply obedient to its operation. Resistance is therefore inherent to the operation of power, though such resistance is usually meager or provisional. Even so, Foucault, by virtue of his analysis, must admit that

there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations.¹⁶⁹

Since power operates through a multitude of techniques, so too does resistance. Resistance can be weak, submissive, or self-interested;¹⁷⁰ it may also be solidary, autonomous, or creative, as Camus has shown. What is unique to Foucault's analysis is the fact that resistance and productivity within power relations are in dynamic, antagonistic, and synergistic tension with one another at all times.¹⁷¹ Resistance serves to both create and undermine power. As Joseph Rouse states, "Resistance cannot be external to power, because power is not a system of domination with an inside or an outside."¹⁷² Rather, power circulates and relies on the continual operation of forms of resistance which modify and produce its effects.

There is, to be sure, also a normative underpinning to Foucault's analysis of power. Resistance is given not only as an immanent possibility within power relations, but should also be creatively deployed in order to undermine the various ways in which individuals are constituted by power relations. If resistance is an intrinsic possibility

within power relations, then the subjectivities which are created are not inevitable or fixed; they are, rather, contingent constructions which can and should be altered.¹⁷³

While Foucault's analysis of power and its underlying ubiquity calls into question the possibility for resistance, it also reveals the potential for, and indeed the reality of, widespread resistance to patterned relationships which normalize and constitute individual subjectivities. Resistance is always constitutive of power relations, though its form of expression usually does not deviate from dominant forms of discourse. Equally important, though, is an often missed component of resistance which links Foucault's conception of resistance to that of Camus before him. In an interview on power, a questioner asks, "to resist is not simply a negation but a creative process; to create and recreate, to change the situation, actually to be an active member of that process." To which Foucault replies, "Yes, that is the way I would put it."¹⁷⁴ Resistance is creative. Of course, all power relations rely on creation and re-creation, the active participation within a particular process. This does not undermine resistance, however; it merely means that resistance is *necessarily* creative, inasmuch as it relies on altering, if only slightly, a form of discourse or a strategic situation.

The question for Foucault, and life as art, therefore turns to the ways in which resistance is created within power relations. If one presupposes creative resistance as a fact, then the question becomes, "how does one creatively resist the grips of power on the normalized self?" Foucault's analysis of power has adequately problematized the means by which individuals are constituted through power relations and the dynamics inherent to both the production of individuals and resistance. It remains to be seen how this problematization can be constructively deployed in an ethics which seeks to undermine

the normalized self fabricated through the overlapping networks of power, pleasure, truth, and resistance.

Thinking Through Power

The Genealogical Project

As in Camus before, we can begin to see the contours of Foucault's normative project for an "aesthetics of existence" by outlining his account of the use of strategic thinking as a means of undermining and creating a way of life based on resistance and self-creation. Just as Camus based much of his conception of the work of the life artist on a tactical response to both general and historical forms of the absurd, Foucault's later project should be seen as a form of creative resistance to the suite of strategies which normalize and produce individual subjectivities. And, as in Camus, the form of strategic thinking proposed by Foucault has both diagnostic and prescriptive functions.

Diagnostically, Foucault's normative conception of thinking relies on the advocacy of forms of thinking which re-create the genealogical trajectory of power traced in the preceding pages. Whereas Camus argued for re-living the phenomenological experience of the absurd, Foucault calls for a mode of thought which interrogates the movements of power and the ways it normalizes individuals. In essence, one must be brought to the recognition that power creates contingent individualities which can be reversed through tactical resistance. Foucault states this practical desideratum:

In what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique. . .

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The theoretical project of outlining points of strain, historical contingencies, and the moral indignation at being a constructed subject, are all in the service of a “practical critique” which transforms itself into forms of creative resistance. Critique is a general diagnostic procedure where the theoretical understanding of structures of contingency and constraint gives way to the practical concern for action and self-conscious resistance.¹⁷⁶

To be more precise, however, Foucault’s concept of critique is not simply intended to be a general procedure where one detects instances of historical contingency or inadequacy. Rather, the critical project advocated by Foucault is to be understood as *genealogical* in the Nietzschean sense: the outlining of the historical formation of certain discourses and the dynamics of power that brought them into play.¹⁷⁷ Genealogical analysis is an analysis of power relations and the various techniques employed in order to construct individualities and forms of discourse. For Foucault, the construction of the individual is paramount in the genealogical project, as it is the substratum upon which contemporary forms of power operate. “[W]e should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc.”¹⁷⁸ Insomuch as genealogy is an examination of power, it is also an examination of the construction and normalization of subjectivity over time. The more general imperative for critique therefore turns to a specific analysis of the various means by which subjectivity is achieved in contemporary society.

If this is the case, then Foucault’s conception of diagnostic thinking can be thought of as a genealogical procedure in which one traces the various strategies and

motifs that have constructed individuality as a concept in contemporary society as well as the specific forces that have come to constitute one's own individuality. Genealogy is thus an attempt to "dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that's to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework."¹⁷⁹ Yet "dispensing with the subject" is an empty notion if it only serves the diagnostic and deconstructive project of realizing that subjectivity is an historical construction. The genealogical project must also free the self from the specific forms of subjectivity that have been constructed and implanted within the self that "made us what we are," with an eye to "the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think."¹⁸⁰ That is, genealogy must serve the therapeutic purpose of freeing ourselves from who we are; it illuminates the construction of the self in order to reveal the potentiality for refusing what one has become.

Through diagnosis, then, the genealogical project becomes prescriptive; as a form of discourse which produces its own "truth" about a subject and as a therapeutic means of dissolving the notions of individuality and normality, genealogy becomes operative as a form of resistance within power relations. Moreover, genealogy is assigned the task of *creative* resistance, not only diagnosing a situation, but providing alternative interpretations for future realizations.¹⁸¹ For Foucault, the formulation of this task falls chiefly to the idealized intellectual, who embodies not only Foucault's own genealogical aspiration but the ability to creatively transform history through discourse. Owing to the strategic function of thought, the intellectual is to map the landscape of possible alternative forms of self-constitution and truth:

To say to oneself at the outset: what reform will I be able to carry out?
That is not, I believe, an aim for the intellectual to pursue. His role, since

he works specifically in the realm of thought, is to see how far the liberation of thought can make those transformations urgent enough for people to want to carry them out and difficult enough to carry out for them to be profoundly rooted in reality. . . ¹⁸²

Akin to Camus' concept of the ideal artist, Foucault's intellectual operates as a "free-lance," prescribing the forms of transformation necessary to undermine present power relations. The intellectual outlines the possibilities and probabilities for programmatic change through critique, but does not herself participate in such struggles, given her autonomy. In this famous quotation, Foucault continues to envision the role of the intellectual as a genealogist who nonetheless remains in an autonomous prescriptive role.

I dream of the intellectual destroyer of evidence and universalities, the one who, in the inertias and constraints of the present, locates and marks the weak points, the openings, the lines of power, who incessantly displaces himself, doesn't know exactly where he is heading nor what he'll think tomorrow because he is too attentive to the present; who, in passing, contributes the raising of the question of knowing whether the revolution is worth it, and what kind. . . , it being understood that they alone who are willing to risk their lives to bring it about can never ask the question. ¹⁸³

Foucault's depiction here of the intellectual as both prescriptive and removed is somewhat suspect, as the intellectual remains diagnostic but uncommitted. Indeed, much of Foucault's later work on the aesthetics of existence may be seen as a remedy for this more abstract conceptualization of the process of thinking. What is of remaining relevance, though, with respect to Foucault's account of the intellectual is twofold: 1) like Camus, Foucault shifts the conceptualization of the work of thinking to an ideal type who blends creative resistance and autonomy; 2) the ideal intellectual reveals the linkage between critique and resistance. By shifting the normative project of thinking to the "intellectual," Foucault has shown that genealogical thinking must be in the service of more practical concerns and has formally problematized the relationship between

thinking and resistance. If one is to resist forms of normalization, then such resistance must be tied to a practice of thinking which is both critical and creative.¹⁸⁴

Truth as in the Future

If the above assessment is true, then Foucault's description of the genealogical project gives a sufficient description of the *critical* aspect of thinking in his ethics. Thinking is a diagnostic process whereby sites of normalization, and therefore of possible resistance, are mapped out and readied for practical application. What is left to describe, then, is the *creative* dimension of Foucault's normative account of thinking, which seeks to create true discourses about the self.

As before, Foucault's concept of creativity can be gleaned from his analysis of power. For, if knowledge is both reciprocally intertwined in, and a product of, power relations, then knowledge occupies a role similar to the production of the individual. Thus, part of the genealogical project is to illuminate not only the ways in which subjectivity is carefully fabricated, but also the discursive formation of truth over time. Foucault describes the procedure interrogatively:

Why the truth rather than myth? Why the truth rather than illusion? And I think that, instead of trying to find out what truth, as opposed to error, is, it might be more interesting to take up the problem posed by Nietzsche: how is it that, in our societies, "the truth" has been given this value, thus placing us absolutely under its thrall?¹⁸⁵

Foucault's questions here are partially rhetorical. If indeed "truth" is just as contingent as the subject, then truth holds a position tantamount to illusion. Thus the epistemological question behind Foucault's conception of genealogy is not "is this true?" but, rather, "what effects has this truth had?" or "what types of subjectivities does this discourse

produce?” This form of questioning has a more practical, as opposed to epistemic, aim: by questioning the productions of truth, one shifts the analytical imperative to social, political, and cultural concerns.¹⁸⁶

The genealogical critique of truth is therefore aimed at revealing the socio-political consequences of the formation of certain truths and their instantiation in particular ways of living and thinking. This analysis serves a second and more important function, however, one which is partially given in the indented quotation above. Namely, if truth has a function, it occupies one alongside, or rather identical with, illusion. And, equally, if truth is fabricated,¹⁸⁷ then illusion can be a fabrication which serves the same function as truth.

It seems to me the possibility exists to make fiction work in truth, to induce effects of truth with a discourse of fiction, and to make it so that the discourse of truth creates, “fabricates” something does not yet exist, there “fictionalizes.” One “fictionalizes” history starting from a political reality that makes it true, one “fictionalizes” a political outlook that does not yet exist starting from an historical truth.¹⁸⁸

By altering the landscape of how we examine truth from one of deriving the conditions necessary for truth to delineating the effects of truth, Foucault has made his account of truth neutral as to whether or not a proposition is “true.” Rather, one can fabricate a fiction which plays the same role as truth, that is, by creating a field of discourse which engenders forms of normality, states of affairs, etc.

This account underpins Foucault’s advocacy for the creative deployment of forms of fiction as a means of resistance. One can resist certain normalizing discourses by creating a fiction whose effects one sees in the future. One creates truth as a possibility in the future, not as a reality in the present. Foucault frames this notion of truth in terms of his self-conception as a writer:

In reality, what I want to do. . . [is to] work out an interpretation, a reading of a certain reality, which might be such that, on one hand, this interpretation could produce some of the effects of truth; and on the other hand, these effects of truth could become implements within possible struggles. Telling the truth so that it might be acceptable. Deciphering a layer of reality in such a way that the lines of force and the lines of fragility come forth; the points of resistance and the possible points of attack; the paths marked out and the shortcuts. It is the reality of possible struggles that I wish to bring to light.¹⁸⁹

In “telling the truth,” one is actually creating a fiction that serves as both a diagnosis of the present situation and as a prescription for future forms of action and resistance. The analogies with Nietzsche’s concept of “honest illusion” in the work of art, the critical theoretical concepts of metaphysics and fantasy, and the phenomenological concept of “expression” here are straightforward: one uses fiction and illusion as a means to achieve a different way of seeing or structuring one’s world.¹⁹⁰ Truth-telling becomes a productive enterprise whereby one tells a truth about the world in which one would like to live.

The use of truth-as-illusion in the formation of critical discourses that generate new realities in the future also implicitly asserts the notion that thinking is subsumed to the broader task of reconfiguring one’s subjectivity or one’s socio-political situation. As in Camus before, thinking has a strategic function that serves to illuminate and create practices enmeshed in power relations; thinking, as such, is assigned a functional significance relative to its role in strategically altering power relations. Foucault speaks of this dimension of his thought in terms of using theory “as a toolkit,” where “[t]he theory to be constructed is not a system but an instrument, a *logic* of the specificity of power relations and the struggles around them. . . .”¹⁹¹ Thus the use of fiction and illusion is not done for its own sake: the creative deployment of fiction in order to realize an

aspect of struggle or illuminate a particular dynamic is part of a *greater* concern regarding the alteration of power relations. Similar to critical theory and phenomenology, which regarded thinking as part of the greater concerns of social liberation and the experience of Being, respectively, Foucault constructs a form of thinking that is used as part of the greater ethical concern of resisting forms of normality. Truth, in this instance, need not reflect an actual state of affairs. One produces truths about oneself and one's struggles such that they may be realized *in the future* within the context of certain practices.

What I am trying to do is provoke an interference between our reality and the knowledge of our past history. If I succeed, this will have real effects in our present history. My hope is my books become true *after* they have been written—not before. . . . I hope that the truth of my books is in the future.¹⁹²

This concept of thinking and the futural role afforded to truth therefore stands closer to Nietzsche's invocation of the future as a means of affirming one's struggles in the present. Moreover, it inscribes the epistemic task of thinking within the greater ethical project of resisting normalizing discourses. The way in which we confront normality and strategically alter power relations is through the creation of potentially true discourses about ourselves and our world which create a critical space for alteration and practical action. The ethical dimension of life as art "uses" thinking in the service of the greater task of strategically assessing, and then creatively deploying, modes of thought which are part of the struggles for, and against, the constitution of oneself as an ethical subject.

To become an ethical subject therefore implies a dual movement between problematizing one's relationship to certain power relations and simultaneously creating fictions or illusions which may serve in altering the functioning of power-knowledge.

Truth is part of a greater experimental process involved in the formation of practices that may transform one's relationship to one's "self" and the power relations in which one finds oneself.¹⁹³ In accord with Nietzsche's concept of "living dangerously," thought is an adventure underwritten with risk and the acknowledgement that many of the fictions or "truths" through which one lives may in fact never be realized. Foucault's ethics persistently courts the possibility of falsity.

By using both the diagnostic and prescriptive functions of thinking within his sophisticated analysis of power relations, Foucault has effectively clarified the *general* form which an ethics would take. Ethics would be a critical genealogical assessment of the various techniques and strategies employed in the construction of one's identity and the socio-political struggles in which one is engaged. It would also employ new modes of discourse and practice which critically undermine certain power relations. As I have been suggesting, this movement should be seen as a clarification of the aesthetic ethics of both Nietzsche and Camus, as Foucault's conception of thinking successfully elucidates how one problematizes one's relationship to the world, and, at the same time, more fully elaborates what "creativity" might mean in the context of ethical deliberation. It will remain the task of the following sections to elaborate the *specific* form which a Foucauldian ethics, constrained by the work of critical theory and phenomenology, might take.

[T]his work done at the limits of ourselves must, on the one hand, open up a realm of historical inquiry and, on the other, put itself to the test of reality, of contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take.¹⁹⁴

Becoming a Subject

The preceding sections have elaborated the various ways in which we might understand Foucault's ethics given his analysis of power and his twofold conceptualization of thinking. As in Camus before, however, an analysis of the starting point for ethical reflection (the absurd or power) and the use of thinking as a strategic apparatus is insufficient for envisioning how one comes to practice an aesthetic ethics. In the case of Camus, this required an elaboration of his aesthetic theory as well as an investigation into his use of characters as idealizations of the ethical life. For Foucault, on the other hand, an aesthetic ethics turns on the construction of novel forms of subjectivity which are creative and resistant. And, in the final analysis, the creation of subjectivity calls upon certain practices and exercises upon the self which resist strategies of normalization and domination.

The constructive dimension of Foucault's ethics therefore begins with his invocation to create true discourses about the self and the world which reciprocally modify both. This normative injunction for truth creation relies on another post-metaphysical dimension of Foucault's thought: his absolution of the modernist subject. In opposition to Cartesian or even Husserlian subjectivity, Foucault sees the subject as a construction—either by oneself or by others—resulting from various discourses, practices, and relations of power. Foucault's analysis aims to show “how the subject constituted itself, in one specific form or another. . . through certain practices that were also games of truth, practices of power, and so on.”¹⁹⁵ In order to create true discourses about oneself, one must also presuppose a “self” which is fluid and subject to creative formation through networks of power or certain discourses. The point of resistance is not to shield the subject from such formation; rather, Foucault's call for creating true discourses about

oneself is to wrest the locus of agency away from normalizing discourses and place it within one's own control.

The use of fiction and "true" discourses, then, is a means by which we begin the work of creating ourselves. Fictions not only serve the function of being "that which enables one to get free of oneself,"¹⁹⁶ but are part of a practice in which we start to become a new subject. Bernauer and Mahon summarize: "If one side of this resistance is to 'refuse what we are,' the other side is to invent, not discover, who we are by promoting 'new forms of subjectivity.'"¹⁹⁷ This means that we not only resist forms of normalization through the process of thinking, but we are to actively modify the ways in which power, truth, and pleasure normalize our "self," and are to become active agents in our own self-constitution.^{198,199}

In acknowledging the constructed nature of subjectivity and in invoking us to create true discourses about ourselves, Foucault has turned the question of ethics to one of ethical self-constitution. Not only are we to become conscious and creative subjects who modify relations of power, but, more importantly, *the work of self-constitution is seen as essential to modifying relations of power*. As in Camus before, creation is its own form of resistance. Foucault's ethics hinge on practices of self-creation.

Arguably, much of Foucault's work from the *History of Sexuality, Volume 1* onward can be seen as an attempt at thematizing and examining the way in which one might practice self-creation while still attending to the need for resistance. In the first volume, for example, pleasure receives privilege of place in framing acts of resistance and creativity:

It is the agency of sex that we must break away from, if we aim—through a tactical reversal of the various mechanisms of sexuality—to counter the

grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance. The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures.²⁰⁰

Because power acts on and through the body, and because it creates forms of normality and subjectivity through pleasure and gratification, one must begin the process of self-formation, or a new “deployment of sexuality” by problematizing one’s relationship to pleasure and one’s own body. Foucault, following the work of Marcuse and his focus on the extension of libidinality into all domains of life in *Eros and Civilization*, sees self-formation concretely in terms of the affirmation of multiple forms of pleasure which extend beyond current discursive limits. “What we must work on, it seems to me, is not so much to liberate our desires but to make ourselves infinitely more susceptible to pleasure. We must escape and help others to escape the two readymade formulas of the pure sexual encounter and the lovers’ fusion of identities.”²⁰¹ The act of self-formation entails the expansion of pleasure beyond those pleasures used to incite one to forms of normality; one must begin to experience pleasure in forms which are forbidden, forgotten, or unexamined. Pleasure should no longer be seen as part of certain acts such as sex, but should be seen as polymorphous in origin and distribution. Foucault’s injunction clearly bears the traces of Marcuse: “one should aim instead at a desexualization, at a general economy of pleasure not based on sexual norms.”²⁰²

In interviews immediately following volume one of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault sees the use of pleasure-as-resistance extending beyond the domain of “sexuality” and entering into other domains which have become normalized, such as eating and drinking. Reversing the grip of power on these activities is also seen as a practice of tactical reversal:

The possibility of using our bodies as a possible source of very numerous pleasures is something that is very important. For instance, if you look at the traditional construction of pleasure, you see that bodily pleasure, or pleasures of the flesh, are always eating, drinking, and fucking.²⁰³

By modifying the ways in which one eats, drinks, and has sex, and by simultaneously altering the discourses, rituals, and limitations one places on such activities, one can begin to re-form the ways in which one experiences pleasure and, therefore, the ways in which one forms oneself as a subject. This process relies, as Foucault states, on a process of invention and not just “rediscovery.”²⁰⁴ Correlative to the notion of truth-telling, one must also create new discourses around the relationships one forms with others, food, sex, one’s body, and one’s community. In the writings surrounding the first volume on sexuality, these discursive formations are largely seen as problematizing and creating new forms of pleasure that reverse fields of normalization and begin the task of creating new subjectivities that appreciate pleasure in forms as varied as sado-masochism, drugs, or something as banal as coke and a sandwich.²⁰⁵ In short, pleasure is given as a technique through which one may begin the problematization of the body’s relationship to certain discourses and begin to oppose certain power relations.

In the period between the publication of the *History of Sexuality, Volume 1* and the second volume, however, Foucault’s emphasis on the nature of ethical reflection shifts. Whereas the writings and interviews surrounding volume one were attentive to the use of pleasure as a means of resistance and a tactic within the larger struggle for de-sexualization and de-normalization, the writings in volumes two and three are more focused on the fabrication of alternate forms of subjectivity which are themselves forms of resistance. This does not dispense with the imperative for pleasure, however: if one is

to create oneself as an ethical subject, the expansion and use of pleasure remains a means by which one creates alternate discourses and new affirmative forms of self identity. It also attends to the ways in which the body is used as a critical site for the relay of power relations, and, like Marcuse and Merleau-Ponty, sees the use of the body as a means of re-envisioning new modes of living and being. Yet the thematics of a pleasurable body are to be seen in Foucault's "later" ethics as part of a more general programmatic attempt to re-assess how one creates novel and resistive subjectivities. The later writings thus bear out a more concerted effort to coherently develop the parallel concepts of resistance, pleasure, subjectivity, and the creation of true discourses about oneself.

Greco-Roman Care of the Self

If, broadly speaking, the later work of Foucault can be seen as a concerted attempt to problematize the work of de-normalization and resistance, then the last two volumes of the *History of Sexuality* series, *The Care of the Self* and *The Use of Pleasure*, can be said to be Foucault's attempt to frame de-normalization and resistance in terms of self-constitution and the rigorous attention to one's processive subjectivity. As stated above, this represents a shift in focus from the *Will to Knowledge*, where pleasure was seen as a tactical means by which we free ourselves from normalizing discourse. It is through Foucault's analysis of Greco-Roman sexual ethics, then, that self-constitution becomes a method through which we create true discourses about ourselves that are resistive, self-directed, and affirmative.

As he begins his inquiry into Greco-Roman ethics, Foucault outlines four dimensions of ethical reflection which bear directly on his call for self-constitution and

de-normalization. They are: 1) the outlining of the “ethical substance” that is to be problematized (what are the specific acts which demand attention?); 2) how one deals with the ethical substance (how should I as an ethical subject react? who am I to become through this action?); 3) the work required to carry out a particular act, or set of acts; 4) the teleology of all ethical action.²⁰⁶ Defined as such, “ethics” in the Greco-Roman period is formulated as a deliberate means of continuously creating oneself as a conscious subject through modes of problematization, subjection, and ritualization. This definition of ethics helpfully assimilates Foucault’s earlier notions of de-normalization and genealogy (as parts of 1 and 2 above, respectively) and shows the general rubric under which one can begin to see ethics as a united field of action with a coherent strategy.

With this methodological framework in hand, the following pages examine a few dimensions of Greco-Roman ethical stylization and the techniques it uses to achieve an ethically self-constituted subject. As in Camus before, this analysis will culminate in a synthetic vision of an ethical life which employs artistic production as the dominant metaphor in explaining the work of the self on the self.

The Greeks

1. The Care of the Self

Foucault’s investigation into early Greek ethics (primarily from the Socratic and Classical periods) begins with an acknowledgement of the “ethical substance” of action as “*aphrodisia*,” the “acts, desire, and pleasure”²⁰⁷ which constitute not only sex, but all actions which call into play a specific set of pleasures and demands upon the subject. Greek ethics brought into focus a play of forces which surrounded the pleasures and

made them the subject of an elaborate thematics which included rationalizations, ritualizations, and forms of proper conduct. Through this complex problematization, actions, desires, and pleasures were linked in a “circular fashion” such that the linkage of all three culminated in an “ontology of force”²⁰⁸ which demanded rigorous attention to all forms of living and acting.

Foucault is consistently distinguishes the Greek attention to *aphrodisia* from Christian conceptions of sin and the depravity of the body. For, in *aphrodisia*, one does not have either a metaphysical or substance-oriented account of natural evil or its consequences, but, rather, an acknowledgment of the potency of pleasurable acts and the ethical and social demands they place upon a subject. One is thus not to approach such acts with either fear or condemnation, but with a careful attention to the play of effects they produce and the ways in which they can be adequately attuned to specific situations and circumstances. It is this sense of vigilance, rationalization, and recognition that Foucault translates as “care of the self.” If the ethical substance of Greek ethics are the *aphrodisia*, then the acts to which they attend are to be dealt with through constant care and attention. As Foucault states: “Attending to oneself is therefore not just a momentary preparation for living; it is a form of living.”²⁰⁹

If the care of the self was to adequately deal with the various pleasures and demands created by and through the *aphrodisia*, then it would not be through cultural normalization, medicalization, or confession, but through persistent attention to oneself as a subject which calls into play a suite of pleasures and desires. As a consequence, the care of the self is constantly referred to as *techne tou biou*, the craft of “how to live.”²¹⁰ Like Marcuse and Heidegger before him, Foucault sees an understanding of *techne* as

critical to his project. And, like Marcuse and Heidegger, *techne* is not to be seen on purely instrumental grounds, but as an aesthetic concept designating the work of an artist on a particular material. For Marcuse the material of production become an artful individual or society; in Foucault, this aestheticization of *techne* is intensified: *techne* is now seen as the work of the ethical subject on his²¹¹ desires, pleasures, and modes of conduct. The care of the self is therefore a craft-work, a notion which calls upon metaphors of whittling, refining, and sculpting, the proper conduct of which is to bring about a “natural economy that would produce a life of real satisfactions.”²¹²

Such a craft invariably calls upon a host of techniques, forms of knowledge, and thought processes which coherently direct how one problematizes and refines the work of desire and pleasure.²¹³ The subject can only perform a *techne* of the self by becoming more attentive to, for example, “relations to the body” or “the relation to the truth,” where questions are raised as to the pleasurable, spiritual, or embodied dimensions of experience.²¹⁴ Thus Foucault’s initial directive to examine Greco-Roman sexual practices is referred to a whole complex of practices, self-examinations, and modes of attention of which sexuality is only a part. This more general attention to one’s body, thoughts, and actions is reflected in the attention given to food, drink, and sex in Greek ethics:

Foods, wines, and relationships with women and boys constituted analogous ethical material; they brought forces into play that were natural, but that always tended to be excessive; and they all raised the same question: how could one, how must one “make use” of this dynamics of pleasures, desires, and acts? A question of right use.²¹⁵

Just as sexuality is considered a locus of pleasures, desires, and thoughts in the contemporary period, the acts associated with eating, drinking, and exercise constitute loci of potential pleasure which demand attention and forms of action which attend to

their moderation, balance, and harmony. One is not to condemn or fully liberate such modes of action; rather, they are to be structured in terms of “right use” and an attention to the ways in which they effect the subject and his own self-constitution. Foucault’s recognition of the care of the self, then, refers to “a whole domain of complex and regulated activities”²¹⁶ such as diet, exercise, sex, and action which raise issues of “rightness,” specificity, and fine-tuning.

This meant that experiences ranging from the banal to the sublime became the focus of an entire apparatus directed towards self-craft and the production of a self capable of extending and controlling pleasure. Food, for example, received the most attention,²¹⁷ as it gave rise to both intense pleasure and extreme excess (e.g., gluttony, sickness, or purging). Part of the *techne* of the body was directed towards understanding the pleasures wrought by food and the various ways in which they aid in creating a pleasurable existence. For this reason, Greek ethics focused on the timing, delivery, and quality of food, especially its relation to the self, the seasons, and other pleasures.²¹⁸ Attention was paid to diet as a means of regulating and liberating certain pleasures; one saw one’s diet as a means of refining the pleasures to which the body is subject.

The attention to diet, as with sexuality, was performed in the service of a larger concern, that of the behavior of the individual in relation to both himself and the world around him. One refined one’s diet as part of a more general effort to problematize the body and its relation to the *aphrodisia*. This more general problematics comes to be seen as “regimen” by Foucault:

[I]t is clear that “diet” itself—regimen—was a fundamental category through which human behavior could be conceptualized. It characterized the way in which one managed one’s existence, and it enabled a set of rules to be affixed to conduct; it was a mode of problematization of

behavior that was indexed to a nature which had to be preserved and to which it was right to conform. Regimen was a whole art of living.²¹⁹

The notion of *techne* turns on the formulation of a regimen, an “art of living” which attends to the body and its various ways of experiencing and controlling pleasure. One’s diet was therefore understood as “an art of the everyday relationship of the individual with his body,”²²⁰ while economics was seen as an art of relating to one’s family and erotics as an art of relating to young boys. Foucault’s use of “regimen” effectively re-defines “art” as *techne*: art is not a work or an artifact, but is rather a *process*, a set of practices designed to create a particular effect.²²¹ Owing more to Marcuse and Heidegger’s conceptions of *techne*, the “art of living” is given as the process whereby one creates oneself through persistent attention, ritualization, and thinking. This transition to art-as-craft is seen in Foucault’s frequent employment of “regimen” as a means of defining Greek ethics:

[R]egimen had to take account of numerous elements in the physical life of a man, or at least that of a free man, and this meant day by day, all day long, from getting up in the morning to going to bed at night. . . . [R]egimen problematized the relation to the body and developed a way of living whose forms, options, and variables were determined by a concern with the body.²²²

This means that the art of living in Greek ethics is to be seen as a constant effort of vigilance, refinement, and production directed towards the self and its relationships to its body, soul, and environment.²²³ “Art” is here defined as the creative practice of self-production and regimen, the control, distribution, and direction of the pleasures towards a certain end. This system of reflection and regimen is referred to by Foucault as an “aesthetics of existence”: “Putting it schematically, we could say that classical antiquity’s moral reflection concerning the pleasures was not directed toward a codification of acts,

nor toward a hermeneutics of the subject, but toward a stylization of attitudes and an aesthetics of existence.”²²⁴ To live an “aesthetics of existence” indicates a reliance on the notion of “aesthetics” as creative and stylistic: one is to create a self and a set of regimens which are simultaneously individualized and specific. The aesthetic self is a production wrought through persistent effort.

2. Self-government and Moderation

This injunction to an aesthetics of the self should be seen, then, as a way of dealing with the various appetites and pleasures through the numerous modalities of lived existence. And, owing to its demand for problematization, adaptation, and “right use,” the care of the self is a suite of practices directed towards *moderation* in thought and action.²²⁵ Of crucial value was the rational process of discovering the harmonious balance between excesses in any action. Hence,

moderation could not take the form of an obedience to a system of laws or a codification of behaviors; nor could it serve as a principle for nullifying pleasures; it was an art, a practice of pleasures that was capable of self-limitation through the “use” of those pleasures that were based on need. . . .²²⁶

The *techné* of the self is directed towards the moderation of the subject’s actions through the art of situational reasoning and the recognition of the excesses to which *aphrodisia* are apt to fall into. One is to identify the actions and pleasures which demand both attention and moderation in oneself. This form of self-limitation, regulation, and heautocracy is consistently seen as a form of self-government, a refrain which McGushin summarizes well: “To take care of oneself is to occupy oneself with the proper

government of one's soul—to establish the right and just relationship of oneself to oneself.”²²⁷

Yet establishing “the right and just relationship of oneself to oneself” should not be seen as merely a form of moderate self-rule. The harmonization of the appetites, the attention to the body, the restraint in the presence of potential over-whelming pleasure: each situation calls forth a moment in which one must be prepared “to cross swords with oneself.”²²⁸ Indeed, self-government and moderation is seen as an agonal affair in which the self battles the self in order to craft a moderate and pleasurable existence without succumbing to the excesses of pleasure and desire. Part of the art of living, then, is “characterized more by an active form of self-mastery, which enables one to resist or struggle, and to achieve domination in the area of desire and pleasures.”²²⁹ If one is to craft the self, then such a craft invariably involves self-combat where one directs one's regimen towards the elimination of certain desires and the pursuit of other pleasures. One must see *oneself* strategically. And, to be sure, this indicates a hierarchy of the faculties in which reason—and therefore thinking—plays a critical role in restraining and heightening the pleasures: “moderation implied that *logos* be placed in a position of supremacy in the human being and that it be able to subdue the desires and regulate behavior.”²³⁰

The agonal dimension of care of the self and the more governmental metaphors it employs also point to a critical aspect of the Greek “aesthetics of existence,” namely their pre-occupation with creating subjects capable of involvement in the *polis*. In the case of Alcibiades, for example, the “intersection of political ambition and philosophical love is ‘the care of the self.’”²³¹ Socrates' dialogue with Alcibiades shows that care of the self is a necessary pre-requisite to ruling Athens. Self-government and moderation go hand-in-

hand with external governance: “The most kingly man was king of himself.”²³² More generally, however, self-government was seen as the pre-requisite to being a good citizen. For, in order to carry out the duties of Athenian citizenship—maintenance of land and a household, speaking in the *polis*, and simple virtue—one had to be in control of oneself, one’s relationships, and one’s speech. Hence it was vitally important for Grecian citizens to be masters of themselves, and, specifically, masters of their own appetites and conscious of the positions of power which they enjoyed. As Foucault states, “a person who took proper care of himself would. . . be able to conduct himself properly in relation to others and for others. A city in which everybody took proper care of himself would be a city that functioned well and found in this the ethical principle of its permanence.”²³³ The care of the self is seen as a preparatory act for proper citizenship and the conduct of the affairs of the democratic state.

This core notion of self-government undergirds a concept of democratic citizenship and consequently undermines a more narcissistic interpretation of Foucault’s aesthetics of existence.²³⁴ While the Grecian aristocrats to whom such discourses were directed were inevitably privileged, one of the aims of the art of living was the proper conduct of citizens within the *polis* and the restraint of any potential excess, either political or bodily, to which a citizen might be inclined. Practicing the art of living meant acknowledging one’s position in society and regimenting forms of conduct and thinking which were attentive to moderation and one’s desires. Far from being a solipsistic enterprise, then, self-government was seen as the necessary means by which one became capable of right action and political conduct.

3. *Parrhesia*

The consideration of self-government from Foucault is coincident with his preoccupation in his unpublished 1984 College de France lectures with the notion of Greek *parrhesia*, or “truth-telling.”²³⁵ There, the notion of *parrhesia* is explored under the general notion of care of the self, in particular, the recognition that, “the rule of having to know oneself was regularly associated with the theme care of the self.”²³⁶ And, in the case of *parrhesia*, one must be able to tell the truth to oneself in order to know oneself. Self-constitution is founded on self-honesty. If one takes seriously the task of crafting oneself within and against the pleasures, and if such a task is seen as combative and calling upon self-government, then the acknowledgement of pleasure, desire, and excess is critical to practicing an aesthetics of existence.

It is likely for this reason that Foucault devoted his final lecture to the concept of *parrhesia*, as it stood at the intersection of self-government, practices of the self, and the various desires and pleasures through which one must do the work of self-fashioning.

Foucault summarizes this juncture nicely:

I believe that with that notion of *parrhesia*—with [its] political roots and moral derivation there is a possibility to pose the question of the subject and of the truth from the point of view of a practice that we could call the rule of oneself and of others. . . . It seems to me that by examining a bit the notion of *parrhesia* we can see connecting together the analysis of modes of truth-telling, the study of the techniques of governmentality, and the localisation of the forms of practices of the self.²³⁷

If, as does Foucault here, *parrhesia* is translated as “truth-telling,” then Foucault’s later lectures on *parrhesia* come full-circle with his earlier work on creating true discourses about oneself. One is not only to tell the truth about oneself in the sense of “being honest,” “admitting one’s desires,” but one is *creating* true discourses about oneself.

Parrhesia, under this reading, would have a double-meaning: in a more literal sense, it would indicate knowing oneself; in another, more systematic reading against the rest of Foucault's work, it would indicate that one would have and create "knowledges" about oneself. One would come to see oneself as an object of knowledge who can modify discourses about she is. Foucault potentially foresees such a reading in this quotation: "Taking care of oneself requires knowing oneself. Care of the self is, of course, knowledge of the self. . . .To take care of the self is to equip oneself with these truths: this is where ethics is linked to the game of truth."²³⁸ To have knowledge of oneself is to participate in the "game of truth," to formulate true discourses about oneself not only as forms of correspondence between the subject and a state of affairs, but between the subject and the forms of knowledge she creates and lives through.

This reading is arguable, and Foucault never makes clear the role of *parrhesia* in relation to the rest of his work. However, if one is to see *parrhesia* as "truth-telling," then, read against Foucault's analysis of power, *parrhesia* might be seen as the acknowledgment of one's status as an object of knowledge and the conscious directive to formulate true discourses about oneself. This brings the creative and especially *stylistic* element of an aesthetics of existence into focus. One can stylize oneself through the production of both certain practices *and* certain discourses about who one is to become. *Parrhesia* therefore clarifies part of the aesthetic dimension of the art of living. Jakub Franek puts the point well:

Parrhesia rather keeps asking the question "who am I?" or, better, "who should I be? who should I become?" over and over. Giving account of oneself consists in taking care of oneself, in taking care of one's existence; and to take care of one's existence one must keep asking the question 'who should I become?' 'what should I do?' face to face

situations that come to him. Socratic *parrhesia* hence refers to becoming rather than being oneself.²³⁹

Of course, *parrhesia* should be considered alongside or within the more overarching concept of care of the self, and therefore as a technique tantamount to exercise and the economics of the household. As a general prescription in Greek ethics, *parrhesia* places the pre-occupation with oneself as an object of knowledge at the fore of forms of action and more clearly problematizes the relationship to oneself as well as the stylistic dimension in ethics.

Late Antiquity

1. A Continuation of the Greeks and Self-Writing

Foucault's *Use of Pleasure* was released contemporaneously with his *Care of the Self*, an examination of Greco-Roman ethics and self-stylization in late Antiquity. While the periodization of the works suggests a discontinuity between the two inquiries, Foucault's analysis suggests that the two studies are both hermeneutically and substantively similar to one another. Hermeneutically, they are both part of a general effort to understand forms of self-constitution which are not modeled on the inculcation of normalizing discourses. Substantively, the Greco-Roman ethics of late Antiquity are seen as philosophically continuous with the ethics of the Socratic and Classical periods in Greece.

The notion of the care of the self, for example, is described by Foucault in *Care of the Self* in terms identical to those given in the *Use of Pleasure*. The "cultivation of the self" is given as such: "in this case the art of existence—the *techne tou biou* in its different forms—is dominated by the principle that says one must 'take care of oneself.'"²⁴⁰ This

formulation of care of the self is not in contrast to the Greeks, but is actually an intensification of their problematics. One's actions, diet, relations with the family, and political behavior are still to be rigorously attended to using a set of formulations, knowledges, and ritualizations. In fact, Greco-Roman ethics reflected a *greater* attention to such themes: the *aphrodisia* were to be attended to with even more care, vigilance, and practice. In terms of one's diet, for example, "It is clear that the general principles stayed the same; at most, they were developed, given more detail, and refined. They suggested a tighter structuring of life, and they solicited a more constantly vigilant attention to the body."²⁴¹ Instead of modifying early Greek ethics, the Greco-Roman period marked an intensification of the themes of moderation, attention, and the problematization of the various excesses of the body. Whether it be attending to one's household, one's relationships with boys, or the excesses and pleasures of the diet, Greco-Roman ethics reflected common preoccupations with their Greek forebears.²⁴²

One such area of intensified attention was that of self-examination.²⁴³ While early Greek ethics employed *parrhesia* and honest discourse as a means of care of the self, the Greco-Roman period witnesses an explosion of discourses related to how one examines the self and modifies the self through practice, vigilance, and attention. With this intensification and quantitative expansion of discourse related to self-knowledge came new methods of self-examination. To the early Greek techniques of "testing oneself," dialogue, and friendship were added the practices of "self-writing," meditation, and conscious introspection. Foucault, noting this expansion of techniques, reflects specifically on Marcus Aurelius' concept of self-reflection: "to come back inside oneself and examine the 'riches' that one has deposited there; one must have within oneself a

kind of book that one rereads from time to time.”²⁴⁴ What changes from the early Greek period to late Antiquity is the attention given to the various practices and dimensions of the self. One now no longer merely thinks situationally, one records situational thinking and reflects on its significance. One no longer merely “crosses swords with oneself” through struggle and exercise, but, additionally, one explores the various dimensions of the self through meditation.²⁴⁵ Meditation, along with other practices of self-examination, is seen as a means by which we come to see our own histories and practices within the greater context of self-constitution and the art of living. One can only begin the craft of becoming oneself if one marks out the critical spaces for alteration and modification; this task begins in meditation and practices of self-examination.

This is not a confessional practice, however, and Foucault is clear to demarcate Greco-Roman practices of self-examination from later practices which attempt to discover a “self. . . beneath visible representation.” Rather, the practices of meditation and writing are in order to “assess the relationship between oneself and that which is represented, so as to accept in the relation to the self only that which can depend on the subject’s free and rational choice.”²⁴⁶ We are to examine our thoughts and actions in order to determine which thoughts and actions need to be kept, modified, or discarded according to the criteria of “free and rational choice.” The imperative is not one of “discovering one’s self,” it is rather one of defining the practices and processes which help one *become* a self. This process is likened to the work of metallurgy: “We have to be moneychangers of our own representations, of our thoughts, vigilantly testing them, verifying them, their metal, weight, effigy.”²⁴⁷ Self-examination is directed towards the production of a self through acts of self-disclosure and honesty. We can only become a

self, or practice the art of living, by examining the various constituent practices that make up our daily lives and contribute to the production of our subjectivity.

In addition to the more internal process of meditation, these practices also demanded forms of externality, of which “self-writing” was a core theme. In self-writing, one records one’s thoughts, desires, and regimen in an attempt to trace the contours of self-becoming. By mapping one’s subtle transformations, one’s stagnations, and one’s accepted truths, one becomes aware of—and subsequently the agent in—one’s own self-becoming. As Foucault states, “[W]riting constitutes an essential stage in the process to which the whole *askesis* leads: namely, the fashioning of accepted discourses, recognized as true, into rational principles of action. . . it is an agent of the transformation of truth into *ethos*.”²⁴⁸ By recording, weighing, and verifying one’s thoughts and actions, one can begin the craft of transforming them into legitimate and transformational modes of action. Self-writing is intrinsic to the process of self-becoming, if only because it represents an intensification of the care for oneself and the directedness towards all modes of thought and action. It directs the subject, according to Foucault, to “the anxiety concerning all the disturbances of the body and mind, which must be prevented by means of an austere regimen.”²⁴⁹

Greco-Roman ethics, then, with their extended emphasis on rationality, one’s health, and practices of self-veridiction and meditation, intensified the processes of self-care and self-craft formulated in the early Greek period. Self-writing and meditation, in particular, became critical components of an ethics which took even more seriously the act of self-fashioning and production. As McGushin notes, the Greco-Roman period is also “etho-poetic” in orientation: “These practices were essentially etho-poetic. They did

not interpret the self, they fashioned the self; they did not approach the self as a text to be read but as a material to be formed.”²⁵⁰ Of course, the self may *translate* her own thoughts into text through self-writing. But the self is essentially still a malleable structure which is to be continually modified through a suite of practices, of which meditation and self-writing are only a part. The self is seen, then, as the subject of practice, not as the core of textuality or confessional discourse discovered through self-analysis; the aim of self-discourse is not self-discovery, but, rather, the tactical mapping of new arenas for self-becoming.

2. More Practices of the Self

This intensification of the early Greek practices is also decisively extended into the life of the family and social relations in the Greco-Roman period examined by Foucault.

Whereas early Greek ethics subsumed household relations under economics and paid extensive attention to one’s relations with boys, Greco-Roman ethics further problematized the relations of the household as well as relationships which were not determined by structures of kinship or obligation. “[The care of the self] found a ready support in the whole bundle of customary relations of kinship, friendship, and obligation.

... The care of the self—or the attention one devotes to the care that others should take care of themselves—appears then as an intensification of social relations.”²⁵¹ Indeed, Greco-Roman care of the self more fully analyzed the various dimensions of human sociality and the ways in which one might act more honorably, artfully, or just. This notably extended the discourses on citizenship from the early Greek period: now, care of

the self was seen not only as the necessary preliminary to becoming a better citizen, but was part of the process of becoming a better human being.

Of significant note here is the newfound attention paid to marriage and the conjugal relationship. For the early Greeks, the man-boy relationship received significant attention, insomuch as it problematized the mentor-mentee relationship and further clarified the dynamics of the philosophical life; in the Greco-Roman period, this focus was shifted to the marital relationship, in which the life with another was the site for self-transformation and the formulation of more just and equitable modes of conduct. As Foucault states:

The art of marriage is not simply a rational way for the spouses to act, each on his or her own account, in view of a purpose both partners recognize and in which they are united. It is a way of living together and of being as one person. Marriage calls for a certain style of conduct in which each of the two partners leads his or her life with the other, and in which, together, they form a common existence.²⁵²

The stylistics which were demanded in the man-boy relationship have been effectively annexed by the marital relationship: one is now to act conscientiously within marriage in a way which creates a strong household and a firmly committed relationship with a woman. General codes for the division of labor, courtship, lovemaking, and cooking formed part of a general discourse in which marriage was seen as one of the preeminent sites of self-formation.

This intensified and relatively new attention to the marital relationship is exemplary of a more general trend in Greco-Roman ethics—a more profound recognition of the other. “The intensification of the concern for the self goes hand in hand with a valorization of the other.”²⁵³ Whereas early Greek ethics focused on the *polis* as the site of one’s relations with others (aside from the man-boy relation), Greco-Roman ethics

sought to further problematize one's relationships with others through marriage, friendship, and kinship. One must come to see one's relations with others as bearing on the self and therefore the site for potential modification and self-stylization. Foucault describes this "new stylistics of existence":

These developments may very well have occasioned, not a withdrawal into the self, but a new way of conceiving oneself in one's relation to one's wife, to others, to events, and to civic and political activities—and a different way of considering oneself as the subject of one's pleasures.²⁵⁴

While early Greek ethics may not have occasioned a "withdrawal into the self," it is clear with the Stoics, Epicureans, and Neoplatonists that one's relations to others, including God, becomes more deeply problematic and in need of further reflection and action. One is to care for oneself only by expanding the domain of what is attended to and the techniques which are to be employed: meditation, self-writing, a stylized marriage, just actions with others, and a renewed attention to the *logos* are all constitutive of a greater effort to become a crafted and honorable self.

The greater attention paid to others and to oneself also indicates a heightening of the amount of time one must dedicate to becoming an artful subject. Becoming a self was a craft that required a total labor—the art of living effectively became one's "life." As Foucault states, "With regard to oneself as well, *epimeleia* implies a labor. It takes time. And it is one of the big problems of this cultivation of the self to determine the portion of one's day or one's life that should be devoted to it."²⁵⁵ With Greco-Roman ethics one begins to see the way in which self-craft becomes integrated into every aspect of one's life: food, diet, exercise, labor, sex, and one's relationships are all part of a greater effort at self-constitution and virtue. Inasmuch as the Greco-Roman period intensifies the care of the self indicative of the early Greeks, it also reveals an increased integration of the

possible sites for the art of living into the numerous modalities of existence. If one is to become an artful subject, one who practices the *techne* of the self, then one must now do so through a conscientious and vigilant attention to all aspects of one's life.

3. A *telos* for the Aesthetic Life?

The final element to consider in Foucault's examination of early and late Antiquity is the aim of an aesthetics of existence. The foregoing discussion has sketched the "substance" of a Greco-Roman ethics, namely the *aphrodisia* and their derivatives, pleasure and desire; it has also assessed the means of action, namely care of the self and its attendant techniques. What remains to be considered, then, is the teleology of the care of the self, which has a direct bearing on life as art.

It may be somewhat unsatisfying to note, then, that Foucault is notably ambiguous on the aim of an aesthetics of existence. In one sense, the teleology is self-constitution and the creation of a self: "the *teleologie* was the mastery of oneself."²⁵⁶ This merely defines a general prescription which underwrites both the strategic orientation to care of the self as well as its essential project. To "master oneself" leaves undefined what the aesthetic subject *might look like* as a result of self-craft. The question is not *whether* one becomes a subject, but *what* one becomes as an aesthetic subject, that is, what is the "form" of an aesthetics of existence.

On this matter, unfortunately, Foucault does not give a clear answer. In the *Use of Pleasure*, for example, he states that one aim for an aesthetic subject would be to "make his life into an *oeuvre* that would endure beyond his own ephemeral existence."²⁵⁷ This is paralleled, however, by Foucault's admission that many practices of the self were

designed to “give their existence the most graceful and accomplished form possible”²⁵⁸ or “to live a beautiful life.”²⁵⁹ To this is added O’Leary’s contention that the aim of Hellenistic ethics is to “establish a certain relation with the self which would have as its result a pure enjoyment.”²⁶⁰ Foucault does not clarify, however, what the terms “graceful” or “beautiful” might mean in the Greco-Roman period, much less what a beautiful or pleasurable life might look like. This, coupled with the indefinite nature of the self that “would endure” beyond this life, leaves the question of teleology unanswered.

This is owing, as I have been arguing, to Foucault’s attempt to see “aesthetics” largely in terms of *techne* and *poesis* and not in terms of the work of art or a static production. If “art” and “aesthetics” are collectively seen as creative and stylistic enterprises—and not, contra the positive and negative dimensions of aesthetic judgment, as bearing epistemic or ontological content—then the “aim” of an aesthetics of existence would effectively be collapsed into the *nature* of care of the self. That is, *self-formation would become the aim, as well as the content, of care of the self*. If true, this would effectively close off an aesthetics of existence from a more “aesthetic” interpretation, such as the one offered by Camus. One is to become an aesthetic subject through the act of self-formation, not by modeling oneself on the work of art. This transition is seen by Foucault in the following:

It was a question of making one’s life into an object for a sort of knowledge, for a *techne*—for an art. We have hardly any remnant of the idea in our society that the principal work of art which one must take care of, the main area to which one must apply aesthetic values, is oneself, one’s life, one’s existence.²⁶¹

Art is here given as *techne*, as a work to be undertaken through a set of techniques and self-modifications. One has an aesthetic existence by giving one's life form. That form, however, is never prescribed or "aesthetic" on its own right. One's life may be beautiful in an aesthetics of existence, but the principal aim is neither beauty nor harmony: it is the engagement in an open-ended process of self-formation and perfection.

An Aesthetics of Existence: Summary and Conclusion

Foucault passed away shortly after publication of his analyses of Greco-Roman ethics, leaving their summation and placement within his overall corpus to scholars. On a general level, Foucault's work with Hellenistic ethics can be formulated as a response to the problematics laid out in his earlier analyses of power and the constitution of the subject through normalizing discourse. That is, Foucault's reconstruction of Greek ethics is an attempt to not only reconstruct contemporary formations of power (and therefore reveal their contingency), but, more importantly, it reveals a way in which one might come to constitute oneself as a subject without inculcating normalizing discourses about oneself. The investigation into a Greco-Roman aesthetics of existence is important to Foucault inasmuch as it elaborates a suite of techniques and modes of thought which might be used to subvert contemporary discourses on the subject.

This does not answer the question, however, of Foucault's relevance to life as art, nor does his analysis fully elucidate what it might mean to "live aesthetically" in the contemporary age. Foucault's genealogical examination of the Greeks is a necessary, but insufficient, interrogation of the core themes that might be found in an aesthetic ethics. It is for this reason that this final section poses itself as an attempt to reconstruct the

potential dimensions of a Foucauldian aesthetic ethics and how it might be situated within life as art. This is to be done, first, by reconstructing what it might mean to live aesthetically, and, second, how such a reconstruction fits into life as art.

At the outset it is important to note the fact that Foucault stridently rejected the straightforward application of Greco-Roman ethics to our contemporary situation. He states: “you can’t find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by another people.”²⁶² Greco-Roman ethics, particularly their repulsive emphasis on relations with boys, cannot be the measure for a contemporary form of non-normalized ethics. Rather, as Franek points out, what is critical in Greco-Roman ethics is its approach to “thinking about, or ‘problematizing’”²⁶³ the ethical substance and its relations to certain forms of practice and thinking. Foucault’s analyses of the Greeks and Romans can only illuminate the various ways in which we might come to think about the body and its relations to others, the soul, and the world without falling into patterns of normality or identity.

With this limitation in place, what remains is the acknowledgement that living artfully includes a set of practices designed to, at minimum, aid one in the construction of a self which is resistant to structures of normalization, attentive to relations with others, and is continually involved in the craft of refining and re-working oneself. This “art of the self” is “the development of an art of existence that revolves around the question of the self, . . . of its universal form and of the connection it can and should establish with others, of the procedures by which it exerts its control over itself, and of the way in which it can establish a complete supremacy over itself.”²⁶⁴ If there is such a thing as a Foucauldian aesthetic ethics, it must be one which acts through a set of problematizations

and strategic interactions: one must problematize one's relations to one's body, one's mind, one's family, the *polis*, and, in the case of the Stoics and Neoplatonists, the cosmos. These are all sites of potential modification, resistance, and struggle.

Moreover, the problematization of sites of application and resistance is only successful if situated within a greater strategic conception of the self which includes persistent work on the self through exercises, thought, meditation, writing, acts of kindness, attention to cooking, etc. The whole of one's life is to be the subject of *both* intense awareness and modification. Foucault refers to this work on the self through exercise as "etho-poetic,"²⁶⁵ or, more frequently, as an *askesis*. *Askesis* for Foucault indicates "the work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself or make the self appear which, happily, one never attains."²⁶⁶ By reclaiming the notion of *askesis* from its more monastic orientation, Foucault interprets the term as the general form undertaken in Greco-Roman ethics to progressively refine and perfect the self through mastery, struggle, and vigilance. *Askesis*, in short, can be defined in terms akin to Foucault's formulation of "regimen," as it encapsulates a set of practices whereby the subject seeks to constitute herself. Moreover, as part of a struggle defined through thinking, *askesis* "is a set of practices by which one can acquire, assimilate, and transform truth into a permanent principle of action. *Aletheia* becomes *ethos*."²⁶⁷

The "truth" of which Foucault speaks should be seen as operative in a dual sense, both as the truth about one's own actions and history, *and* as the fictions one tells about oneself in order to become oneself.²⁶⁸ *Parrhesia* becomes critical in a Foucauldian aesthetic ethics because it places truth within the context of a life based on the strategic conception of power relations and the deployment of forms of living and acting which are

resistant and self-crafting. *Parrhesia*'s relation to *askesis* is also important in one other respect: it highlights the role of telling the truth to oneself about oneself. One can only practice the *askesis* of self-formation if one is honest about the practices and relations which constrain, normalize, and please oneself. Foucault recognizes that the "art of living" cannot "be learned without an *askesis* that should be understood as a training of the self by oneself."²⁶⁹ Forming the self is, above all, a work of the self on its self, a form of self-education in the service of self-transformation.

Given this individualistic orientation to the aesthetic life, it is unsurprising that Foucault admits in *Care of the Self* that there are multiple "stylistics" to living.²⁷⁰ Yet it is also likely for this reason that Foucault, as noted before, fails to deliver a coherent statement as to what might be the *telos* of a Greco-Roman aesthetics of existence, much less a contemporary one. When pressed on the issue of a *telos* or the contemporary form for an aesthetics of existence, Foucault, as he does in the interview, "A Genealogy of Ethics," often defers questions regarding form and aim to ones regarding style.²⁷¹ In an interview, for example, he gives the following:

At every instant, therefore, it's trying to give a coloration, a form and intensity to something that never says what it is. That's the art of living. The art of living is to eliminate psychology, to create, with oneself and others, individualities, beings, relations, unnameable qualities. . . .An existence can be a perfect and sublime work. That's something the Greeks understood, whereas we have forgotten it, above all since the Renaissance.²⁷²

Here, the "art of living" is directly connected to a broad conception of style, wherein giving one's life "coloration," "form," and "intensity" lead to an existence that "can be a perfect and sublime work." Foucault gives some clue as to how an existence might be more pleasurable, intense, or perfect in his analyses of Greco-Roman ethics, but the

quotation above hints at a more “aesthetic” preoccupation at the core of a *techne* of the self. Foucault seems to hint at the possibility that an *askesis* of the self will produce not just an aesthetic life where “aesthetic” is interpreted as creative and form-giving, but, also, a life that positively simulates the work of art. He re-states this tension in the following:

What strikes me is the fact that, in our society, art has become something that is related only to objects and not to individuals or to life. That art is something which is specialized or done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object but not our life?²⁷³

And:

What I mean by the phrase are those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria.²⁷⁴

Unfortunately, Foucault never makes clear what these “aesthetic values” and “stylistic criteria are.” His work on Greco-Roman ethics, as I have shown, along with his earlier work, does not examine what is constitutive of a work of art, much less an aesthetic life.

This forms the crux of contemporizing Foucault's aesthetic ethics. While the techniques requisite to his ethics, as well as the general prescription for self-formation are incontestable, Foucault does not outline the aim or content of such an ethics. That is, read against Foucault's own introduction to Greco-Roman ethics, he properly identifies the “substance” and “methods” of an aesthetic ethics, but he does not properly articulate the aim of an aesthetic ethics or the form which a subject is to take. His remarks on “style” do little to clarify this matter, as he either 1) collapses “style” to *techne* and therefore re-emphasizes the creative and self-formative aspect of an aesthetics of existence,²⁷⁵ or 2)

sees style as an independent category aside from *techne* and *askesis* (as in the two above quotations). This vacillation in between two modes of articulating style reveals a critical dimension of Foucault's aesthetic ethics: they are not based on the work of art, but, rather, are based on the work of an *artist*. The "aesthetic" dimension of an aesthetics of existence is primarily to be gleaned from the creative aspect of artistic production, and only secondarily from the work of art.

David Boothroyd, seeing this lacuna in Foucault's thought, argues persuasively that, if one's life is to be seen as an artistic object, then the artful life, read against Foucault's few writings on art, would necessarily be "transgressive."²⁷⁶ He states: "The work of art in Foucault is always presented as exhibiting a certain kind of resistance to the system. It alone is able to work at the borders of systems of thought without being drawn back into them along the lines of 'discursive formations' which constitute the whole."²⁷⁷ This interpretation would be in keeping with Foucault's own work on power, and, from a systematic perspective, would rightly see the work of self-constitution as a form of resistance to normalizing discourses. Moreover, it would place Foucault's aesthetic ethics in conversation with critical theoretical discourse on the aestheticization of life.

Despite the persuasiveness of such an argument, I would only consider it as secondary to Foucault's more systemic attempt to see an aesthetics of existence primarily in terms of *techne*, *poeisis*, *askesis*, and self-formation. Timothy O'Leary agrees with such an assessment:

[C]ontrary to some of the more unguarded statement he makes in interviews, we would have to say that a close reading of volumes II and III of *The History of Sexuality* shows that according to Foucault's own research the "aesthetics of existence" is *aesthetic* by virtue of its mode

(which is “ascetic/poetic/technical”) rather than by its aim (which is certainly not a cultivation of beauty).²⁷⁸

One could argue, of course, that the “aim” of Foucault’s ethics is, broadly speaking, resistance. However, resistance is itself embedded in acts of self-formation, so one does not act “in order to resist.” Rather, a more thoroughgoing account of Foucault’s work shows that the *sine qua non* of an aesthetic ethics is self-constitution through practices of problematization, strategizing, and the deployment of forms of action and new discourses. One may work to create a self which models itself on a work of art, but this is an option left decidedly open by Foucault, as he never articulates either what constitutes a work of art or how such an assimilation would occur.

If the preceding argument is correct, then the importance of Foucault’s analysis falls to his attempt to see an aesthetic ethics in terms of self-formation, not the way in which it models itself upon a work of art. As an *ethics*, one is to deploy certain discourses, modes of action, even fictions, in order to create a self which is resistant (by virtue of its self-creation) and liberated. One must conceivably look to other aesthetic discourses—such as those found in critical theory and phenomenology—if one chooses to additionally constitute oneself along artistic lines or delineate a coherent *telos* to such an ethics beyond self-formation.²⁷⁹

It is likely with this dilemma in mind that many, including Foucault himself, have looked to other discourses beyond the Greeks and aesthetics as potential exemplars of an aesthetic life. The most formidable example of such a move is Foucault’s citation of Baudelaire and dandyism in his re-appraisal of Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”²⁸⁰ Like Camus before him, Foucault attempts to envision the aesthetic subject through a concrete figure, the life artist, depicted most formidably in Baudelaire’s character sketches of the

artist Constantin Guys.²⁸¹ As a possible ideal type for the contemporization of an aesthetic ethics, the dandy crafts himself within and against dominant modes of discourse and beauty. For Foucault, the dandy is “the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not ‘liberate man in his own being;’ it compels him to face the task of producing himself.”²⁸² Moreover, the dandy is seen as following the strategic form of thinking Foucault advocates for his own aesthetic ethics. The dandy is thus “one that simultaneously problematizes man’s relation to the present, man’s historical mode of being, and the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject. . . .”²⁸³

Foucault clearly folds the dandy into his own project: the dandy practices the art of self-formation and the problematization of the present, but his work is neither attentive to the play of power nor built on the austerity themes Foucault develops in his analysis of Greco-Roman ethics. Nonetheless, many critics see Foucault’s use of dandyism as appealing to a “Baudelairean fantasy of ‘unrestricted’, open-ended self-invention”²⁸⁴ in which one is open to produce a self which is as effete, naïve, and aristocratic as the dandies of Baudelaire and thereafter. Such a reading, however, is mistaken. For, just as Foucault used the Greeks as a means of showing the substance and techniques one might use to form the self in a non-normalizing manner, Foucault’s use of dandyism is to reveal the possibility for resisting modernity through an act which is aesthetic in nature. To be sure, the “aesthetic” appealed to by dandyists is superficial and narcissistic. Yet Foucault would reject these elements and would instead, like his work with the Greeks, see dandyism as a means of problematizing the present and reacting through the employment of certain techniques aimed at unique forms of self-constitution. Dandies are not notable

in the substance of their self-transformation; they are notable in that they see the present and respond through an aesthetic self-transformation.

As Nietzsche and Camus recognize, then, there are likely no historical precedents for the form of aesthetic ethics which Foucault advocates. For Nietzsche this means the concretion of an aesthetic ethics in ideal types, whose realization of an artful life is temporally deferred; for Camus, this means envisioning their possibility in character sketches. For Foucault, this might mean thinking together his various genealogies—of the Greeks, Romans, and dandies—into a synthetic whole, though such a synthesis could only be conceptual and not, as with Nietzsche and Camus, a philosophical persona.

This conceptual synthesis, I would argue, occurs in outline form in Foucault's use of the concept of a "technology of the self," a subject on which he wrote infrequently in the last years of his life. A technology of the self provides Foucault's most synthetic insights on the appearance of a contemporary aesthetic ethics. He describes a *techne* of the self as such: "reflection on modes of living, on choices of existence, on the way to regulate one's behavior, to attach oneself to ends and means"²⁸⁵ In another instance, he focuses on the *techniques* involved in a technology of the self:

techniques that permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power.²⁸⁶

Both of the above quotations illustrate the strategic and technical dimensions of a technology of the self: one is to both map out possibilities for modification and then, through certain techniques, to manipulate the mind, body, and one's actions with the aim of self-transformation. More importantly, however, Foucault outlines a potential aim of a

technology of the self—the attainment of happiness, perfection, virtue, or “supernatural power,” the latter of which remains ambiguous.

A technology of the self would be incomplete, however, if it merely equated the aesthetic life with an increase of pleasure, happiness, or virtue. Indeed, given Foucault’s reading of power and resistance, a technology of the self must also be seen as resistant to normalizing discourse as well as forms of knowledge and power which constrain other individuals. Kevin Thompson comments that a technology of the self must be a form of resistance to “contemporary fascistic life,” doing so by reclaiming “the task of caring for ourselves, for forging our own destinies, for governing our own lives.”²⁸⁷ That is, resistance to structures and operations of power is to occur through the task of self-formation and de-normalization. By “unlearning” what one has learned, or “unbecoming” what one has become,²⁸⁸ one forms a hardened point of resistance within various networks of power which seek to normalize the self and other individuals. An increase in pleasure, the formation of the self, the manipulation of the store of available cultural techniques: each becomes constitutive of an effort which is inherently resistant to forms of domination, suffering, and oppression. One resists by becoming; the creative life *is* the resistive life. Boothroyd summarizes:

The care of the self is the “silent” way of resistance to exterior force; its very existence thus signifies resistance to the system. It represents the fundamental possibility of the oneself to contest continually its determination by the system: We can “refuse what we are.”²⁸⁹

A contemporary aesthetic ethics adds an extra dimension to resistance, however, which cannot be forgotten, and which remains prescient in the work of Adorno, Marcuse, Camus, and even Heidegger: the minimization of domination. Especially in the Greeks and dandyism, an aesthetic ethics is an aristocratic ethics, one practiced by an elite in

dispose of extra resources and the means to live, as Marcuse would add, amidst surplus production. Thus the ethical desideratum is not only negative—the resistance to forms of normality—but also positive: the formulation of forms of living which minimize the suffering of others. A technology of the self is the strategic orientation to “play these games of power with as little domination as possible.” Foucault continues, “I believe that this is, in fact, the hinge point of ethical concerns and the political struggle for rights, of critical thought against abusive techniques of government. . . .”²⁹⁰ Part of strategic thinking, then, is not only the delineation of points of resistance and outlining the contingencies which make up various matrices of power, but also to determine which dynamic of power is the “main danger.”²⁹¹ A technology of the self is therefore only truly *ethical* (and not simply an ethics) if it attends to the possibilities for domination which are constantly embedded in the very relations of power it seeks to undermine through self-formation.²⁹²

A Foucauldian aesthetic ethics, though, like that of Camus, can only remain resistant so long as it also pleasurable and liberating. One can therefore map Foucault’s construction of the categories of pleasure and minimization of domination onto the Camusian concepts of autonomy and solidarity, respectively. To be sure, Foucault’s analyses of power, normality, and the options for resistance are more sophisticated and fine-grained, but their proposals remain quite similar. In the end, to practice an aesthetic ethics, as Camus shows in his character sketches and Foucault through his genealogies, one must strategically integrate a series of creative practices into the various modalities of one’s life with an eye towards the creation of a self which is de-normalized (and

therefore resistant), “ethical,” and attentive to the need for an indefinite process of self-production.

Though only sketched in the latter part of his career, Foucault’s concept of a “technology of the self,” when read against his analyses of the Greeks, dandyism, and his work on power, provides the synthesizing function necessary (though not sufficient) to contemporize his work into an aesthetic ethics. Through using a store of cultural and historical techniques, one is to form the self through a suite of methods which are directed towards autonomy and the limitation of suffering. This requires an *askesis* and *techne* which involve, as in the Romans, all modalities of one’s life: diet, exercise, marriage, the *polis*, friendship, and labor. The art of living, when seen through the lens of a technology of the self, becomes a process of mining, selecting, and refining the techniques and pleasures one might employ to become what one becomes.

IV: Conclusions

The reconstructions of Camus and Foucault have seen the ways in which one might come to formulate an aesthetic ethics which is compatible with the constraints laid down in both the positive and negative dimensions of aesthetic judgment. With both thinkers one sees the development of themes of resistance, perfectionism, strategic thinking, techniques of self-modification, and self-formation. One also sees the use of aesthetics-as-creativity as a means of clarifying the ethical task: one creates oneself, or one’s life, as participation in the primary occupation of art as creative. Similarly, one lives a pleasurable and/or autonomous existence which is also a product of the aesthetic process. Cumulatively, one begins to see an aesthetic ethics as one which is attuned to structures

of normality/oppression and seeks to resist such structures through a tactical engagement with the various dimensions of lived experience. An aesthetic ethics is not a limited enterprise based on decision-making, but is one which involves the formation of character through persistence and time.

There are also clear differences between both thinkers. Foucault's analysis of power, for example, is more post-metaphysical and lends itself better to strategic thinking than do Camus' concepts of the absurd and revolt. Moreover, Foucault's genealogical reconstruction of Greco-Roman ethics reveals the more common techniques one may employ in the formation of a self and the ways in which one can come to problematize the various dimensions of lived experience. On the other hand, Camus' aesthetic ethics are more clearly "aesthetic" in their formation, as they are gleaned directly from his analysis of the work of art and the artist. And, likewise, Camus' character sketches more adequately concretize the notion of the life-artist than do Foucault's genealogies, though Foucault's concept of a technology of the self remains viable for an aesthetic ethics.

As in previous chapters, then, one must think together Camus and Foucault in order to delineate an aesthetic ethics. By combining Foucault's sophisticated analysis of power and resistance, along with his reconstruction of Greco-Roman ethics, with Camus' character studies and his more direct aesthetic ethics, one begins to see a clearer picture of an aesthetic ethics. Under these terms, an aesthetic ethics would be one which uses strategic thinking as a means of problematizing the various networks of power in which one finds oneself as well as the dimensions of experience which can be altered. These sites would then be available for creative modification along aesthetic lines, wherein one focuses the general aesthetic categories of creativity, autonomy, and solidarity on specific

practices which are pleasurable and minimize domination. The aesthetic life is one which concretizes the dual axes of autonomy/creativity and resistance/solidarity in everyday practice, giving, as does Joseph Grand, what one can to those practices which are deemed critical to self-formation and resistance.

By constantly straddling the divide between autonomy and solidarity, along with resistance and pleasure, the aesthetic ethics developed here can be formulated as a re-examination of the themes developed in Nietzsche's ideal types. The artful self, like the ideal type, playfully blends science and art, negativity and positivity, into a life modeled on stylistic or aesthetic criteria. The aesthetic ethics outlined by Camus and Foucault deepens these motifs, as it shows more clearly the means by which an aesthetic vision can be deployed into everyday living through strategic thinking and the formulation of techniques for self-constitution. Whereas Nietzsche formulated a vision for the life artist, Camus and Foucault, when thought together, help to give a clear direction to the ethical dimension of life as art.

While the aesthetic ethics developed by Camus and Foucault clearly articulates the *ethical* moment in life as art, it does not offer a sufficient vision of the aesthetics which are to ground the ethics they formulate. This is shown most clearly in Foucault's ambiguity on the notion of "aesthetics" and both Camus and Foucault's collective definition of the work of art in terms almost wholly related to artistic production. For Camus, this results in a somewhat narrow and general definition of the life-artist as one who holds in tension a core set of aesthetic themes; for Foucault, this means that he is unable to adequately define the aim of an aesthetics of existence, as he continually defines "aesthetics" in terms of *techne*, *poesis*, and *askesis*. It is for this reason that the

work of Camus and Foucault remains a necessary, but insufficient, moment within life as art.

The examination of Camus and Foucault therefore shows the ethical moment in life as art to be one in which the formation of character becomes a primary pre-occupation that consumes one's way of thinking and living. The life artist creates her own existence by linking together the various bodily modalities and walking the tightrope between commitment and autonomy. The life artist is able to translate both a micro- and macroscopic vision of the world (or the various landscapes for strategic action) into concrete ways of seeing, living, and thinking that allow for a greater sense of justice, pleasure, and liberation. At the same time, however, the examination of Camus and Foucault reveals the necessity for a more thorough vision of aesthetics which is to guide the production of self and the formation of daily practices and techniques which have a definite aesthetic aim. It is only by thinking together the ethical moment in life as art alongside the positive and negative moments of aesthetic judgment that one begins to see life as art as a whole. Aesthetic judgment grants the *form* of an artful life, while an aesthetic ethics resolves that form into concrete modes of action and character creation. Through the negative moment in life as art one sees the necessity for particularity, metaphysics, and an artful self/society; through the positive moment in life as art one sees the necessity for the integration of the experience of Being into the various modalities of one's life; and through an aesthetic ethics one sees how an aesthetic vision is manifest in daily life. Only an aesthetic ethics founded on the tensions evident in the work of art can come to manifest the positive and negative moments in aesthetic judgment essential to life as art.

The aesthetic ethics formulated by Camus and Foucault shows how one can create an artful life through the various dimensions of lived experience by creating a self that is both resistant and affirmative. The artful self is to attend to the various dimensions of lived experience while constantly seeking out forms of self-constitution that are both negative and positive. In doing so, an aesthetic ethics becomes a necessary moment in creating a life which opens a creative space for liberation and pleasure, and gives meaning to this effort through the reception and expression of the immanent world.

Endnotes

¹ Though they, too, were ethically loaded.

² Albert Camus, *The Rebel* [R], trans., Anthony Bower (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), 12. Also see Avi Sagi, *Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd*, trans., Batya Stein (New York: Rodopi Press, 2002), 29: “the leit-motif of [Camus]’ entire work is still his contest with the question: How should we live in this world? What is a worthy human existence?”

³ Camus, R, 192.

⁴ As Donald Lazere states, in his *The Unique Creation of Albert Camus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), ix: “I see as the most distinctive quality of his art the dialectical interrelations between all his individual novels, stories, plays, and philosophical, lyrical, and journalistic essays that unite them thematically and stylistically into what is in effect a single, dynamic creation.”

⁵ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* [MS], trans., Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 6.

⁶ Camus, MS, 27.

⁷ *The Plague*’s narrator, Dr. Rieux, for instance, cites the seemingly “surprising” explosion of the plague in the town of Oran. Echoing the statement of a night porter that the plague “came out of the blue,” (Albert Camus, “The Plague [P],” trans., Stuart Gilbert, in *The Plague, the Fall, Exile and the Kingdom, and Selected Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 27), Dr. Rieux states: “Everybody knows that pestilences have a way of recurring in the world; yet somehow we find it hard to believe in ones that crash down on our heads from a blue sky. There have been as many plagues as wars in history; yet always plagues and wars take people equally by surprise.” (Camus, P, 35)

⁸ Camus, MS, 14. Also see Alba Amoia, *Albert Camus* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1989), 82: “Absurd is the revolt against bodily death; the denseness and strangeness of life; malaise and nausea in the face of man’s inhumanity to man; the inevitable and immeasurable fall that follows a glimpse of the familiar stranger one sees in the mirror. The absurd is also the confrontation between an irrational world and the frantic desire for clarity that stirs in the deepest part of man—the confrontation between the human cry and the unreasonable silence with which it is met.”

⁹ Camus, P, 151.

¹⁰ Camus, MS, 28. Also see Camus, MS, 21, as well as Brian Masters, *Camus: A Study* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1974), 39: “It is this eternal disparity between man’s need for coherence and order, and the world’s stubborn disorder and incoherence, which constitutes the absurd.”

¹¹ See Camus, MS, 50: “[The Absurd] is that divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints, my nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that binds them together.”

¹² Camus, MS, 30.

¹³ Masters, 40, summarizes this dimension of the absurd: “What is absurd is the *relationship* between man and the objects of his understanding, the link which ties man to the world. The world is not absurd, it is irrational, incongruous.”

¹⁴ Camus, R, 29.

¹⁵ Camus, R, 216.

¹⁶ Camus, R, 217.

¹⁷ Masters, 101.

¹⁸ As we will see below, this dimension of Camus’ thought opens itself to the work of critical theory, particularly its more utopian and metaphysical aspects.

¹⁹ Camus, R, 249.

²⁰ Masters, 47, gives an excellent summary: “[Rebellion] is the only *honest* attitude, the only response to life which faces the hard facts squarely and refuses all concealment. We are not speaking of a [revolt] which seeks to render the world rational, since it will always be irrational; nor can it offer a meaning to life, which will always be meaningless. We are speaking of a [rebellion] which accepts its limitations, knows that the absurd makes everything pointless, but keeps alive at least the one human quality about which there is no doubt—awareness without illusion. . . .”

²¹ Camus, MS, 20.

²² Camus, MS, 26.

²³ Camus, MS, 54. Also see Lazere, 9.

²⁴ Camus, R, 258.

²⁵ Camus, R, 19.

²⁶ See Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* [RRD], trans., Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 247: “We stifle and yet survive, we think we are dying of grief and yet life wins out. The men of our time, whom we encounter in the streets, show in their faces that they know. The only difference is that some of them show more courage. Besides, we have no choice. It is either that or nihilism.”

²⁷ Camus, MS, 40.

²⁸ Camus, R, 31. Also see 72, where Camus speaks again of rebellion and the “tension that it implies.” There are clear resonances here with the positive and negative dimensions of aesthetic judgment.

²⁹ Camus, MS, 103.

³⁰ Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays* [LCE], trans., Ellen Conroy Kennedy, ed., Philip Thody (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 201. Also see 346: “Accepting the absurdity of everything around us is one step, a necessary experience: it should not become a dead end. It arouses a revolt that can become fruitful. An analysis of the idea of revolt could help us to discover ideas capable of restoring a relative meaning to existence, although a meaning that would always be in danger.”

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- ³¹ Camus, MS, 95.
- ³² Camus, LCE, 353.
- ³³ Camus, R, 220.
- ³⁴ Camus, RRD, 253.
- ³⁵ Camus, R, 233.
- ³⁶ Camus, R, 234.
- ³⁷ See, for example, Camus, R, 65.
- ³⁸ Camus, R, 235.
- ³⁹ Camus, R, 236.
- ⁴⁰ Camus, R, 221. Also see RRD, 264: "Art, in a sense, is a revolt against everything fleeting and unfinished in the world. Consequently, its only aim is to give another form to a reality that it is nevertheless forced to preserve as the source of its emotion."
- ⁴¹ Note here the resonance with the critical theoretical concepts of metaphysics and fantasy.
- ⁴² Camus, RRD, 257.
- ⁴³ See Camus, LCE, 339: "If there is an evolution from *The Stranger* to *The Plague*, it is in the direction of solidarity and participation." Also see Sagi, 40.
- ⁴⁴ Camus, R, 28. Also see 27: "Man's solidarity is founded upon rebellion, and rebellion can only be justified by this solidarity."
- ⁴⁵ Camus, RRD, 240.
- ⁴⁶ Camus, RRD, 263.
- ⁴⁷ Camus, RRD, 267.
- ⁴⁸ Camus, R, 228. Note here the clear affinities to Adorno's concept of metaphysics.
- ⁴⁹ Camus, RRD, 241.
- ⁵⁰ Camus, RRD, 249.
- ⁵¹ Camus, RRD, 265.
- ⁵² As we will see below, this has tremendous consequences for an aesthetic ethics in life as art.
- ⁵³ Camus, R, 219.
- ⁵⁴ Camus, RRD, 268.
- ⁵⁵ "Ethical" is here employed in the sense above, that is, as a means of problematizing the relations between oneself and others.
- ⁵⁶ Camus, RRD, 264.

⁵⁷ Camus, RRD, 238.

⁵⁸ Camus, RRD, 238.

⁵⁹ Camus, RRD, 267. Also see Lazere, 19

⁶⁰ Camus, RRD, 272.

⁶¹ See Lazere, xi: "Camus advocated and practiced the militant engagement of the artist's sensibility in the spiritual and social problems of his historical moment. In his view, partisan commitment and autonomous, complex literary creation reinforce one another rather than being mutually exclusive. . . ."

⁶² Lazere, 190.

⁶³ Camus, RRD, 250.

⁶⁴ Camus, MS, 90-1.

⁶⁵ An explicit admission of absurdity.

⁶⁶ Camus, P, 81.

⁶⁷ Camus, P, 13.

⁶⁸ Camus, P, 79. Also see Lazere, 180: "Rieux recognizes that one must act decisively out of instinctive compassion for men's suffering and only afterward seek full understanding, as he does in compiling his chronicle."

⁶⁹ Camus, P, 113.

⁷⁰ See Camus, "The Fall," trans., Justin O'Brien, in *The Plague, the Fall, Exile and the Kingdom, and Selected Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), especially 339, where Clamence, set against the flattened backdrop of Amsterdam, gives the following: "For it cannot be said there is no more pity; no, by heaven, we never stop talking of it. It's just that no one is ever acquitted any more. Over the dead body of innocence the judges swarm, the judges of all species, those of Christ and those of the Anti-Christ, who are the same anyway, reconciled in the little-ease. . . . Wherefore, since we are all judges, we are all guilty before one another, all Christs in our cheap way, one by one crucified, always without knowing. We should be at least, if I, Clamence, had not found a way out; the only solution, truth at last. . . ."

⁷¹ Camus, P, 114.

⁷² Camus, P, 192-3. The parallels to Foucault's concept of "care of the self" (see following section) are striking.

⁷³ Camus, P, 115.

⁷⁴ See Camus, "Caligula [C]," in *Caligula and Three Other Plays*, trans., Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage Books, 1958).

⁷⁵ Camus, P, 169.

⁷⁶ See here Sagi, 49: "Rieux finds his actions meaningful without anchoring them in any metaphysical order. No knowledge of an overall 'larger plan' is necessary for

human beings to find significance in their actions, and the immediate meaning provided by concrete human reality will suffice.”

⁷⁷ Camus, P, 226.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Camus, C, 43, where Caligula recognizes that the logic of rebellion tends towards the immoderate: “I’ve merely realized that there’s only one way of getting even with the gods. All that’s needed is to be as cruel as they.” Or, equally important, is Caligula’s assertion that “One is always free at someone else’s expense.” (Camus, C, 28) The brutal figure of Caligula—and his eventual assassination by Cherea and Scipio—shows the affinity between resistance and outright violence.

⁷⁹ Camus, C, 67.

⁸⁰ Camus, P, 222.

⁸¹ See, for example, the “confession” of Clamence, the judge-penitent, in F, 335, where he effectively takes the guilt of all onto himself: “Moreover, we cannot assert the innocence of anyone, whereas we can state with certainty the guilt of all. Every man testifies to the crime of all the others—that is my faith and my hope. . . .God is not needed to create guilt or to punish. Our fellow-men suffice, aided by ourselves.”

⁸² Camus, P, 225.

⁸³ Camus, P, 109.

⁸⁴ Camus, C, 21.

⁸⁵ Camus, “State of Siege [SS],” in *Caligula and Three Other Plays*, 206.

⁸⁶ Camus, SS, 207.

⁸⁷ Camus, P, 225.

⁸⁸ Camus, P, 242.

⁸⁹ Camus, C, 51. Also see Diego’s castigation of the Plague and his Secretary, SS, 143: “That’s why I don’t believe in your gloomy prophecies; I’m too busy being happy. And that’s a full-time occupation, which calls for peace and good will everywhere.”

⁹⁰ Note here the connection with Marcuse, whose pleasurable “society/individual as a work of art” is seen as a form of resistance in itself.

⁹¹ Camus, P, 226.

⁹² Camus, P, 227.

⁹³ Camus, P, 228.

⁹⁴ See Camus, P, 250.

⁹⁵ Camus, P, 256.

⁹⁶ Camus, P, 20.

⁹⁷ Camus, P, 120.

⁹⁸ Camus, P, 94.

⁹⁹ Camus, P, 92.

¹⁰⁰ Camus, P, 44.

¹⁰¹ Camus, 44.

¹⁰² Camus, 41.

¹⁰³ Camus, P, 233. Also see David Carroll, "Rethinking the Absurd: *Le Mythe De Sisyphe*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Camus*, ed., Edward J. Hughes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 61: "Absurd 'man' is above all an artist—but an artist who never fulfils the ultimate project of art: to produce a finished work."

¹⁰⁴ As Lazere, 39, summarizes, "Despite the satirical picture that Camus paints of his artistic activities, Grand embodies Camus' ideal of the artist whose life fluctuates between social solidarity in helping to alleviate the human condition and solitude in expressing it through his art."

¹⁰⁵ Camus, "Exile and the Kingdom [EK]," in *The Plague, the Fall, Exile and the Kingdom, and Selected Essays*, 453.

¹⁰⁶ Camus, EK, 447.

¹⁰⁷ Camus, EK, 455.

¹⁰⁸ Camus, P, 123.

¹⁰⁹ Camus, MS, 12.

¹¹⁰ Camus, R, 49.

¹¹¹ Camus, MS, 96. Also see Carroll, 60: "If the awareness of the limitations of the human condition is characteristic of those who 'think clearly,' the creator (the artist-writer) is presented as the figure who 'thinks' most clearly of all. But to think clearly in Camus' sense is to know that thought itself is limited and therefore to think in part against thought."

¹¹² Camus, MS, 97.

¹¹³ An element critically lacking in the character of Caligula, for example.

¹¹⁴ Camus, MS, 117.

¹¹⁵ See Camus, MS, 114: "To work and create 'for nothing,' to sculpture in clay, to know that one's creation has no future, to see one's work destroyed in a day while being aware that fundamentally this has no more importance than building for centuries—this is the difficult wisdom that absurd thought sanctions."

¹¹⁶ Arguably, the figures of Caligula, Meursault, the Conqueror, and Clamence are also ideal constructions on the part of Camus, though they are envisioned as foils for the ideal life led by figures such as Cherea, Grand, Rieux, and Tarrou. They share many of the same characteristics with such figures, namely inasmuch as they are aware of the absurdity of existence and seek to combat it in acts of revolt or delusion.

¹¹⁷ Camus, P, 218.

¹¹⁸ See Camus, LCE, 135: “Our task as men is to find the few principles that will calm the infinite anguish of free souls. We must mend what has been torn apart, make justice imaginable again in a world so obviously unjust, give happiness a meaning once more to peoples poisoned by the misery of the century. Naturally, it is a superhuman task. But superhuman is the term for tasks men take a long time to accomplish, that’s all.”

¹¹⁹ Camus, R, 241.

¹²⁰ Camus, R, 268.

¹²¹ See Sagi, 126, where he states that “rebellion relies on a double act of affirmation and negation.” This adequately captures the resistant and affirmative moments in life as art.

¹²² Camus, MS, 115.

¹²³ Sagi, 176.

¹²⁴ Camus, R, 266.

¹²⁵ Ostensibly from the publication of *Discipline and Punish* in 1972 to his death in 1984.

¹²⁶ See the introduction to this chapter.

¹²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* [WK], trans., Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 85.

¹²⁸ Foucault, WK, 92.

¹²⁹ See, Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* [PK], ed., Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 105.

¹³⁰ See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [DP], trans., Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 16, where he states: “since it is no longer the body, it must be the soul. The expiation that once rained down upon the body must be replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations.”

¹³¹ Foucault, DP, 25.

¹³² Foucault, WK, 92.

¹³³ This means that power relations may also be seen as ubiquitous as Foucault states in WK, 93: “The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.”

¹³⁴ Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* [E], trans., Robert Hurley and others. *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed., Paul Rabinow, Vol. 1 (New York: The New Press, 1997), 167. Also see Foucault, PK, 89.

¹³⁵ Foucault, PK, 96.

¹³⁶ Foucault, DP, 149.

¹³⁷ Foucault, WK, 94. Also see Pirkko Markula and Richard Pringle, *Foucault, Sport, and Exercise* (London: Routledge, 2006), 37: “[power] is everywhere and yet nowhere in particular, circulating in a dispersed fashion through multiple networks of social relations. . . .”

¹³⁸ Foucault, DP, 307. Also see Foucault, PK, 98: “Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. . . . In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application.”

¹³⁹ See Foucault, DP, 128: “The point of application of the penalty is not the representation, but the body, time, everyday gestures and activities; the soul, too, but in so far as it is the seat of habits. The body and the soul, as principles of behavior, form the element that is now proposed for punitive intervention.”

¹⁴⁰ Foucault, DP, 137.

¹⁴¹ Foucault, WK, 42.

¹⁴² See Foucault, DP, 26: “[T]he power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to ‘appropriation,’ but to dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess; that one should take as its model a perpetual battle rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory. In short, this power is exercised rather than possessed.”

¹⁴³ Foucault, DP, 172; also see DP, 77-8, 137, and 157.

¹⁴⁴ Foucault, DP, 201.

¹⁴⁵ See Foucault, DP, 187.

¹⁴⁶ See Foucault, DP, 205: “The Panopticon, on the other hand, must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men.”

¹⁴⁷ Markula and Pringle, for example, in their linkage of Foucault’s theories and the diet and exercise industry, reveal the ways in which modern gyms, as well as diet and exercise magazines, perform the panoptical function of submitting a subject to a perpetual disciplinary gaze. See Markula and Pringle, 43ff.

¹⁴⁸ Foucault, DP, 202-3.

¹⁴⁹ Foucault, DP, 183.

¹⁵⁰ Foucault, WK, 45.

¹⁵¹ Foucault, DP, 180.

¹⁵² Foucault, WK, 48.

¹⁵³ Foucault, PK, 119. Also see Timothy O’Leary, *Foucault: The Art of Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 24: “it becomes possible for Foucault to develop a picture of a power which operates by inciting, cajoling, producing, normalizing and ‘governing’ sexuality, rather than by repressing, silencing and denying it.”

¹⁵⁴ Foucault, DP, 194. Also see, for example, Foucault, DP, 170: “Discipline ‘makes’ individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise. It is not a triumphant power, which because of its own excess can pride itself on its omnipotence; it is a modest, suspicious power, which functions as a calculated, but permanent economy.”

¹⁵⁵ Foucault, DP, 217.

¹⁵⁶ See Foucault, PK, 98.

¹⁵⁷ Foucault, DP, 27.

¹⁵⁸ Foucault, PK, 133. Also see Foucault, PK, 93: “We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.”

¹⁵⁹ In this regard, it is interesting to see Foucault’s somewhat anti-Nietzschean disposition towards truth: “truth isn’t outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn’t the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power.” While this does not blunt the effect of Nietzsche’s work on the free spirit, it does significantly alter the free spirit’s access to truth, now seen as a more immanent creation within power relations. The “truth” of the free spirit would then be the truth from which the free spirit extricates herself and the ways in which the free spirit produces her own truths.

¹⁶⁰ Foucault, DP, 155.

¹⁶¹ See Edward McGushin, *Foucault's Askesis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), xx: “[discourses] free us to be true only by fabricating a certain truth and arranging the spatial-temporal world to direct individuals toward that truth.”

¹⁶² See Foucault, WK, 56.

¹⁶³ See O’Leary, 28: As O’Leary states, “the relation between truth and sexuality that obtains today is a mutually constitutive one: our sexuality has come to be a domain in which a secret truth is hidden, while the truth of our subjectivity has come to be grounded in our sexuality.”

¹⁶⁴ Foucault, WK, 69.

¹⁶⁵ Foucault, PK, 94.

¹⁶⁶ Foucault, E, 292.

¹⁶⁷ Foucault, PK, 80. Also see McGushin, 18: “To the extent that a relation of power, a practice of some kind or another, is not necessary and inevitable, it is fragile, vulnerable, potentially reversible—a relation of power and its techniques is, in light of its perpetual reversibility, always a strategy for conquest.”

¹⁶⁸ Foucault, E, 167. Also see Foucault, PK, 142, where “there are no relations of power without resistances. . .”

¹⁶⁹ Foucault, WK, 96. Also of interest in this regard is an interview given by Foucault in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961-1984)* [FL] (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), 224, where the questioner asks, “Q: ‘Where there is power, there is resistance.’ It’s almost a tautology, consequently. . . .” To which Foucault replies, “Absolutely. I am not positing a substance of resistance in the face of power. I am simply saying: as soon as there is a power relation, there is the possibility of resistance. We are never trapped by power: we can always modify its grip in determinate conditions and according to a precise strategy.”

¹⁷⁰ One might argue that this hardly constitutes “resistance.”

¹⁷¹ This is contrary to the critical theoretical account of power, where power always exists within a dialectical framework.

¹⁷² Joseph Rouse, “Power/Knowledge,” *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed., Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 108.

¹⁷³ Steven Hicks, in his “Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Foucault: Nihilism and Beyond,” in *Foucault and Heidegger: Critical Encounters*, eds., Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 100, captures this more normative element within Foucault’s account of resistance: “By advocating a strategy of rebellion against the often malevolent ways in which we have already been defined, categorized, and normalized by the dominating technologies of power of modern institutions, Foucault may also hope to show that the undesirable effects of specific disciplinary practices are not necessarily inevitable. . . .”

¹⁷⁴ Foucault, E, 168.

¹⁷⁵ Foucault, E, 315.

¹⁷⁶ See Foucault, *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture* [PPC] (New York: Routledge, 1988), 155: “Criticism is a matter of flushing out that thought and trying to change it: to show that things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see that which is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such. Practicing criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult.”

¹⁷⁷ As Markula and Pringle, 32, note, genealogy for Foucault is “an examination of the relations between history, discourse, bodies and power in an attempt to help to understand social practices or objects of knowledge that ‘continue to exist and have value for us.’”

¹⁷⁸ Foucault, PK, 97. Also see Foucault, E, 315, where genealogy is constituted as “a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying.” Leslie Paul

Thiele, in “The Ethics and Politics of Narrative: Heidegger + Foucault,” in *Foucault and Heidegger: Critical Encounters*, eds., Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 224, also gives a clear analysis of the genealogical project with respect to subjectivity.

¹⁷⁹ Foucault, PK, 117.

¹⁸⁰ Foucault, E, 315-6. Also see James Bernauer and Michael Mahon, “The Ethics of Michel Foucault,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed., Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 144.

¹⁸¹ As O’Leary, 100, states, “the legitimate task of the genealogist is not only to record this history but to offer a new interpretation, one which will disassociate and dissolve the coagulated truths of the past.”

¹⁸² Foucault, PPC, 155-6.

¹⁸³ Foucault, FL, 225.

¹⁸⁴ It is no coincidence that these categories map onto the themes already described in previous chapters, namely, if thinking is to be “critical and creative,” it coincides with my contention that life as art, as a process of re-constructing our ways of living and thinking, does so by aligning itself with the critical, affirmative, and creative dimensions of art, or, in a more Nietzschean fashion, with the scientific and artistic elements of the free spirit.

¹⁸⁵ Foucault, PPC, 107.

¹⁸⁶ See Foucault, PK, 133: “It’s not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time.”

¹⁸⁷ Albeit in a complex and often non-directive process.

¹⁸⁸ Foucault, FL, 213. O’Leary, 101, is also illuminating here: “But a fiction is not merely a false or inaccurate telling of events; a fiction is a production, a creation, a transformation of reality; fiction is as much verb as noun.”

¹⁸⁹ Foucault, FL, 261.

¹⁹⁰ The creative deployment of forms of truth and illusion should thus be seen as a critical hallmark of life as art.

¹⁹¹ Foucault, PK, 145. O’Leary, 96, also sees the notion of theory as a tool as part of the reason why Foucault may be accused of creatively interpreting some of the data in his historical analyses: “Foucault clearly does not conceive of the writing of history as the faithful recording of the past; for him the past is not so much another country as another tool—a tool with which to intervene in the present for the sake of a future.”

¹⁹² Foucault, FL, 301, italics added.

¹⁹³ Edward McGushin, 16, summarizes this dimension of thinking well: “[Thought invents] the world anew—creating new kinds of relationship, new practices,

assigning new meanings to old practices and relations. It is a response, but not a solution. Rather, thinking is the activity that opens up a problem and prepares the conditions for many possible solutions to it.”

¹⁹⁴ Foucault, E, 316.

¹⁹⁵ Foucault, E, 290. Also see, in this regard, Foucault’s rejection of the Marxist materialist subject in PK, 58: “what troubles me with these analyses which prioritize [Marxist] ideology is that there is always presupposed a human subject on the lines of the model provided by classical philosophy, endowed with a consciousness which power is then thought to seize on.”

¹⁹⁶ Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of the History of Sexuality* [UP], trans., Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 8.

¹⁹⁷ Bernauer and Mahon, 147.

¹⁹⁸ See O’Leary, 109: “The subject is neither a given nor a necessary condition. It is an achievement which emerges in the interstices of the power/truth/self triangle. . . ”

¹⁹⁹ Needless to say, this concept has critical consequences for life as art inasmuch as it specifies the form of subjectivity one must assume in order to practice the art of self-creation called for by Foucault. One cannot assume, as Camus perhaps does, that the self is simply a given form which creatively modifies her own life. Foucault’s critique is more radical. It requires that the self be amenable to self-constitution by means of both self-directed and other-directed forms of agency. While this does not obviate the critical theoretical call for negative rationality or the phenomenological call for embodied poetic thinking, it does at least prescribe that subjectivity not extend beyond the presupposition of a rational or embodied subject capable of negative thinking or the experience of being, respectively. And, positively, it means that the various dimensions of the self perceived to be static or fixed—one’s “sexuality,” one’s pleasures, or one’s way of living—be seen as the sites of possible modification.

²⁰⁰ Foucault, WK, 157.

²⁰¹ Foucault, E, 137.

²⁰² Foucault, PK, 191; also see FL, 212.

²⁰³ Foucault, E, 165.

²⁰⁴ See Foucault, PPC, 116: “it is a matter—I don’t say of ‘rediscovering’—but rather of inventing other forms of pleasures, of relationships, coexistences, attachments, loves, intensities.” Also see FL, 218.

²⁰⁵ See Foucault, PPC, 12.

²⁰⁶ For an excellent discussion of the four dimensions of ethical subjection, see Marli Huijer, “The Aesthetics of Existence in the Work of Michel Foucault,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 25, no. 2 (1999): 69-70, as well as O’Leary, 12.

²⁰⁷ Foucault, E, 266.

²⁰⁸ Foucault, UP, 43.

²⁰⁹ Foucault, E, 96.

²¹⁰ Foucault, E, 260.

²¹¹ Unfortunately, for the Greeks the ethical subject was often seen as gender-specific. I have here kept that specificity, as I frequently did with Nietzsche. Note, though, that *Foucault's* ethics, as well as the ethics of life as art, would be gender-neutral in orientation.

²¹² Foucault, UP, 73.

²¹³ See Foucault, E, 269.

²¹⁴ See Foucault, UP, 23.

²¹⁵ Foucault, UP, 51-2.

²¹⁶ Foucault, E, 95.

²¹⁷ See Foucault, E, 253.

²¹⁸ See Foucault, E, 259: "Concerning food, it was the relation between the climate, the seasons, the humidity or dryness of the air and the dryness of the food, and so on. There are very few things about the way they had to cook it; much more about these qualities. It not a cooking art; it's a matter of choosing."

²¹⁹ Foucault, UP, 101.

²²⁰ Foucault, UP, 93.

²²¹ This concept is explored in some detail in O'Leary, 127.

²²² Foucault, UP, 101-2.

²²³ One should note the consonance here with the concept of the body developed in both Marcuse and Merleau-Ponty.

²²⁴ Foucault, UP, 92.

²²⁵ This is, of course, a theme made most explicit by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

²²⁶ Foucault, UP, 57; also see 62 and 91.

²²⁷ McGushin, 77.

²²⁸ Foucault, UP, 68.

²²⁹ Foucault, UP, 64. Also see Foucault, UP, 70: "the individual has to construct a relationship with the self that is of the 'domination-submission,' 'command-obedience,' 'mastery-docility' type. . . . This is what could be called the 'heautocratic' structure of the subject in the ethical practice of the pleasures."

²³⁰ Foucault, UP, 86.

²³¹ Foucault, E, 229.

²³² Foucault, UP, 81. Also see Foucault, E, 293: “the care of the self appears a pedagogical, ethical, and also ontological condition for the development of a good ruler. To constitute oneself as a governing subject implies that one has constituted oneself as a subject who cares for oneself.”

²³³ Foucault, E, 287. Also see Foucault, UP, 79: “the form of supremacy [a man] maintained over himself [was] a contributing element to the well-being and good order of the city.”

²³⁴ Which some commentators, such as Pierre Hadot, have frequently suggested.

²³⁵ See McGushin, in particular, for an examination of the unpublished 1984 lectures. *Parrhesia* may also mean “free speech” or honesty.

²³⁶ Foucault, E, 93; also see McGushin, 59, where Socrates is seen as practicing *parrhesia*.

²³⁷ Foucault’s unpublished 1984 College de France lecture, as quoted by Jakub Franek, “Philosophical Parrhesia as Aesthetics of Existence,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 39 (2006): 117.

²³⁸ Foucault, E, 285. Also see Foucault, UP, 86: “one could not practice moderation without a certain form of knowledge that was at least one if its essential conditions. One could not form oneself as an ethical subject in the use of pleasures without forming oneself at the same time as a subject of knowledge.”

²³⁹ Franek, 128.

²⁴⁰ Foucault, *The Care of the Self: Volume 3 of the History of Sexuality* [CS], trans., Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 43.

²⁴¹ Foucault, CS, 103.

²⁴² See, for example, Foucault, CS, 57.

²⁴³ Foucault, CS, 60.

²⁴⁴ Foucault, E, 101.

²⁴⁵ As Foucault reflects in CS, 50-1: “[Meditation enables] one to commune with oneself, to recollect one’s bygone days, to place the whole of one’s past life before one’s eyes, to get to know oneself, through reading, through the precepts and examples that will provide inspiration, and, by contemplating a life reduced to its essentials, to rediscover the basic principles of a rational conduct.” Also see *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁴⁶ Foucault, CS, 64.

²⁴⁷ Foucault, E, 240.

²⁴⁸ Foucault, E, 209.

²⁴⁹ Foucault, CS, 41.

²⁵⁰ McGushin, 97. Also note here the tacit opposition to the work of Nehamas and others who see both Nietzsche and Foucault as inscribing the self within textuality.

²⁵¹ Foucault, CS, 52-3.

²⁵² Foucault, CS, 160.

²⁵³ Foucault, CS, 149.

²⁵⁴ Foucault, CS, 71.

²⁵⁵ Foucault, CS, 50.

²⁵⁶ Foucault, E, 267.

²⁵⁷ Foucault, UP, 139.

²⁵⁸ Foucault, UP, 251.

²⁵⁹ Foucault, E, 254; also see E, 266.

²⁶⁰ O’Leary, 76. O’Leary also argues, as I do in the following paragraph, that the aim of a Greco-Roman aesthetics of existence was self-formation, not the prescription of a definite aesthetic form for the art of living. Contrary to this assessment, Jakub Franek argues in favor of beauty as a specific aim of Greco-Roman ethics: “While it is true that Foucault is interested mostly in the process of self-formation, it is also important for him that this process results in a beautiful life. He says explicitly that the Greeks practiced moderation because they wanted to live a beautiful life and leave memories of a beautiful existence.”

²⁶¹ Foucault, E, 271.

²⁶² Foucault, E, 256. Also see McGushin, 53: “Foucault frequently cautioned against the idea that contemporary philosophy must strive to recover its lost past or renew the ancient truths that have been forgotten. Furthermore, he made it clear that much in ancient ethics was totally reprehensible.”

²⁶³ Franek, 117.

²⁶⁴ Foucault, CS, 238-9.

²⁶⁵ Foucault, UP, 13. Also see McGushin, 134.

²⁶⁶ Foucault, E, 137; also see E, 282.

²⁶⁷ Foucault, E, 239; also see McGushin, xiii.

²⁶⁸ In the sense elaborated above, namely as fiction, fantasy, and perceptive illusion.

²⁶⁹ Foucault, E, 208; also see 273.

²⁷⁰ See Foucault, CS, 218.

²⁷¹ See Foucault, E, 262, where Foucault approves of the reference to Nietzsche in GS, 290, to give style to one’s life through “long practice and daily work.”

²⁷² Foucault, FL, 317.

²⁷³ Foucault, E, 261.

²⁷⁴ Foucault, UP, 10-1.

²⁷⁵ Numbers 2 and 4 in the introduction to this chapter.

²⁷⁶ See David Boothroyd, "Foucault's Alimentary Philosophy: Care of the Self and Responsibility for the Other," *Man and World* 29 (1996): 367.

²⁷⁷ See Boothroyd, 368. He continues: "In *Order of Things*, in his account of the discontinuous series of epistemes; the Renaissance, the Classical Age and the Age of Man, it is to Cervantes' figure of Don Quixote that Foucault turns to illustrate the transition between the first two systems of knowing and it is Velasquez's *Las Meninas* which bears the trace of the moment of transition between the second and the third. These works of art function in this way, transgressively; without being wholly caught up in either the preceding or the coming system. The work of art works outside of time; not only historical time, the time of continuity, but also outside of the time of any system; it works on the borders, 'in between time.'"

²⁷⁸ O'Leary, 86.

²⁷⁹ As in critical theory or phenomenology.

²⁸⁰ See Foucault, E, 310ff.

²⁸¹ See the First Excursus.

²⁸² Foucault, E, 312.

²⁸³ Foucault, E, 312.

²⁸⁴ Michael Ure, "Senecan Moods: Foucault and Nietzsche on the Art of the Self," *Foucault Studies* 4 (2007): 48. Also see Ure's analysis on 24ff. It is clear from Ure's essay that he places undue emphasis on the influence accorded to dandyism in the thought of Foucault.

²⁸⁵ Foucault, E, 89.

²⁸⁶ Foucault, E, 177; also see E, 225.

²⁸⁷ Kevin Thompson, "Forms of Resistance: Foucault on Tactical Reversal and Self-Formation," *Continental Philosophy Review* 36 (2003): 131.

²⁸⁸ See McGushin, 106.

²⁸⁹ Boothroyd, 381. Also see Paul Allen Miller, "The Art of Self-Fashioning, or Foucault on Plato and Derrida," *Foucault Studies* 2 (2005): 56.

²⁹⁰ Foucault, E, 298-9; also see O'Leary, 158 and Bernauer and Mahon, 153.

²⁹¹ Foucault, E, 256. Also see Hicks, 102: "Hence, the only 'ethico-political choice' we have, one that Foucault thinks we must make every day, is simply to determine which of the many insidious forms of power is 'the main danger' and then to engage in an activity of resistance in the 'nexus' of opposing forces."

²⁹² See Hicks, 105: "Thus, far from being an instance of the vain desire for mastery and control, we might view Foucault's 'pathos of struggle' as a nonascetic creative strategy for preserving and even enhancing those marginal 'spaces' and 'saving'

nontechnological practices within which ongoing struggles for self-creation and dignity can occur. . . ”

Chapter 6: Conclusion

I: Life as Art

Life as art is the persistent attempt to actualize the aesthetic in and through one's living, seeing, and thinking. This means integrating the *essence* of the work of art into how one shapes the contours and dimensions of one's being—acts of resistance and affirmation, forms of thought which are negative and positive, and the systemic integration of each modality of existence into an overall project, a self. What emerges in the artful life, just as in all successful works of art, is an autonomous creation which bears within it the traces of its production, but remains greater than the sum of its parts.

The artful life is made possible in the space created through the aesthetic discourses of the 18th and 19th centuries as well as the Death of God proclaimed—and then actualized—in the 19th and 20th centuries. Something has been lost, and life as art is one of the critical discourses which asserts itself as a remedy. Yet what life as art confers is neither redemption nor a new form of belief; rather, it offers a viable and meaningful alternative to political, economic, or contemporary theocentric forms of living, thinking, and believing. Life as art, instead of offering doctrine, ideology, or orthodoxy, is a store of techniques and ways of thinking which allow one to create a liberated existence, meaning within immanence, and, as Foucault acknowledges, a self. As an alternative to contemporary modes of framing one's life, the artful life is one which is allowed to sacralize and affirm the various dimensions of existence while also forging a space for a different life through acts of resistance. Inasmuch as the experience of Being and what-is-given is integrated into one's daily life, then the everyday becomes a sacrament to the

world in which one lives, moves, and has one's being. This is balanced by the constant effort to foment a creative space into which the artful life or society may be constructed. Just as the artful life is one which is revelatory and affirmative, it must also be resistant and negative, countering forms of normalization, administration, and objectification. The self can only be a construction, and Being experienced, if salvation is gained from forms of living and thinking which constrict the possibilities for individual autonomy and liberation. In this dual sense, life as art redeems the self and the earth after the withdrawal of God.

The artful life does so by turning one's life into a production informed by aesthetics, not—as in dandyism—a work of art. This means that the artful life is to bear the essential elements immanent within the work of art: negativity, positivity, and creation. Thus, from critical theory, the artful life attends to particularity and the construction of alternative and non-administered forms of life. From phenomenology, the artful life allows Being to arise through the various modalities of one's body in both thought and expression. And, from an aesthetic ethics, the artful life is one attuned to the production of character and the deployment of the aesthetic in everyday life. Cumulatively, each points to the fact that the artful life is *creative* and autonomous, an ongoing process whereby one continually introduces new forms of living and thinking for an encounter with Being, a counter to objectivating and normalizing ways of being, and to create an aesthetics of existence. Each contributes to the overarching project of producing a life that models itself on the essence of the work of art and seeks to transform the various components of the everyday into sites for aesthetic intervention.

This process, as Nietzsche noted, may require the production of new identities, masks, and values. It may also require, as Marcuse and Foucault saw, the creative fictioning of oneself, the introduction of fantasy and dissimulation as a means to produce new identities and ways of being. Life as art is not simply the production of a liberated space or the happening and expression of Being in the present—it is the sometimes fictive production of a self who depends on acts of liberation and affirmation in order to become.

If life as art is to be a viable alternative to certain dominant modes of living, then, the redemption it offers is neither given nor prescribed: it is self-wrought. One no longer discovers or is given meaning—it is the outcome of a process of creation, fashioning, and whittling. One no longer applies the usual store of techniques to one's life—one must continually re-strategize, think “against” oneself, and remain open to new visions for the future. Nor is one a “self” to be found, discovered, manipulated, or confessed—minimally, the self is a rational body-subject who forms itself and its world through practices and embodied modes of thought. This self is then continually (re)created through sensualized, revelatory, and strategic modes of conduct, themselves modeled on aesthetic imperatives. Thus, whereas other ways of living and being determine meaning and autonomy through ritual, doctrine, or democracy, life as art affirms the present—as Nietzsche's ideal types portended—through a valuation of the self as it is continually produced in the future.

The self-creation demanded in life as art is not narcissistic, though, as the artful life is one which is forged through the continuous problematization and rejection of things as they stand in advanced Western societies. Birthed in the malaise of the late 19th century and hardened in the struggles which surrounded World War II, the Holocaust, and the Cold War, life as art is the imperative to think against, beyond, or through the

present state of affairs and the ways in which it constricts social and individual possibilities for emancipation and well-being. Life as art is necessarily intertwined with forms of thinking which assess, and then propose constructive modes of relation to, present forms of oppression, normality, or objectivation. Just as art is seen as a source of autonomous critique and a locus of resistance, the artful life is to be seen as a polyvalent expression of critique against the ways in which advanced industrial societies captivate, penetrate, and deform human intentions and desires.

I would argue that it is in this mode that we must see the collective effort by critical theorists, phenomenologists, and Foucault to re-assess the role of philosophy as one of framing the ideal life in relation to the historical exigencies of the present. For each axis of reflection, to live and think artfully *is* to practice philosophy in its ideal form, simultaneously rejecting the present and finding resources within it to aid in the transformation of the future. This persistent attempt to re-enchant the philosophical enterprise reveals the profound ways in which life as art is an effort to re-appropriate the critical, aesthetic, and ethical functions guarded by the role of philosophy. By re-envisioning the ideal role of philosophy, life as art gains the autonomous and liberating role played by philosophy historically.

Hence Nietzsche, Marcuse, Heidegger, Marion, and Foucault constantly return to the Greeks, not only as part of an effort of re-appropriation, but as an attempt to revive the critical and normative spirit of Greco-Roman philosophy and to inscribe it within the artful life. Part of this effort is the attempt to recover Greek notions of *aisthesis*, *poesis*, *techne*, Being, “care of the self,” and so forth. More generally, however, the return to the Greeks marks a return to a form of reflection which constantly linked the aesthetic life

with an autonomous and liberated philosophical life. In Aristotle, for example, the artful life is the effort to apply theoretical constraints (*theoria*) to the deployment of daily practices (*phronesis*). And, furthermore, the *theoria* which guides *praxis* is aesthetic. The return to the Greeks should be seen as part of a systematic effort to re-cast the ideal life as one intertwined with aesthetics and the artistic concerns for autonomy, liberation, and a persistent re-appraisal of the subject and her relation to the world. Life as art becomes the philosophical life inasmuch as it uses aesthetically informed forms of thinking and being to both diagnose and remedy the ills of the present.

As is evident in the dual forms of aesthetic judgment as well as an aesthetic ethics, these forms of thinking are not singular in method or orientation. Indeed, life as art comes with the demand that thinking be polyvalent in its forms of expression. In this regard, Nietzsche's early examination of the free spirit as possessing a "double brain" is telling—in order to become an ideal subject, one must be able to think in multiple forms. For Nietzsche, this meant being able to "think" both scientifically (*wissenschaftlich*) and artistically, vacillating between the "cold" and "hot" elements of thinking. After Nietzsche, this means being able to suspend the tension between negativistic, affirmative, and strategic forms of thinking. To think artfully, one must constantly be willing and able to vacillate between forms of thinking which are disparate in origin but singular in focus and *telos*. To live artfully, one must be hardened through resistance, imbued with meaning through affirmation, and crafted through creativity.

This does not mean that life as art is a series of disparate motifs and ways of being, however. Just as the free spirit lives through the gay science, the construction of one's self is based on the persistent effort to *unify* forms of thinking and action into the

concrete modalities of one's life. This entails the possibility that certain non-normalized practices are multivalent in nature: acts of pleasure are both sensual and revelatory; acts of solidarity are both just and intersubjective; acts of creativity are both resistant and poetic. If life as art is to be actualized, it must do so by strategically defining those acts which are both resistant *and* affirmative. This occurs through the constant problematization of forms of practice and the possibilities they hold for resistance and the experience of Being. While the artful life may "think" in polymorphous forms, it acts in a unified manner oriented towards the production of a self.

Life as art is thus a way of being in which the concerns for justice, Being, liberation, or, most importantly, the creation of a self and its world are animated by the task of thinking. Thinking, in life as art, is subordinate to the goal of living artfully: the imperative within life as art is the way in which artful thinking illuminates a creative space for artful living. *It is living itself which unites the distinct moments in life as art*—the artful life cannot be an isolated philosophical task or even one which is solely revelatory, resistant, or creative. Rather, the artful life is the sustained effort to concretize the three distinct aesthetic foci seen in this study: particularity and sensuality; Being and embodiment; creativity and self-formation. It is the unitary *deployment* of these polymorphous modes of thinking and living which forms the basis for life as art.

Therefore, while I have presented three "trajectories" which individually outline the positive, negative, and ethical moments in life as art, each is to be seen as part of the overall task of creating a self and world which are imbued with the aesthetic desiderata for justice, Being, and creativity. Each is necessary for the artful life as a whole, though each moment plays a different role. The critical theoretical demand for justice,

particularity, and sensuality opens up the necessary space for creative and ethical intervention. The phenomenological demand for thinking beyond thinking and the openness to Being and revelation allows for an affirmation of the immanent realities of daily life. And the aesthetic ethics of Camus and Foucault shows concrete ways in which the aesthetics of critical theory and phenomenology can be deployed in relation to the realities of the present. Here, an aesthetic ethics *actualizes* the twin forms of aesthetic judgment. All three are necessary moments within an artful life which seeks to meaningfully mold itself through negativity, affirmation, techniques, technologies, and fictions.

It is the constant work and happening of problematization, resistance, creation, and openness, then, which forms the soul of life as art. If life as art is to be a meaningful and viable alternative to forms of normalization and integration, materialism, or theocentrism, then it must do so by founding practices and techniques which sacralize daily life and affirm the Being of beings. Contrary to a theocentric existence, it solely affirms—through both thought and act—the blessing of immanence and the prose of the world. Contrary to a materialist existence, it rejects the reduction of the individual and society to mere economic and political needs and names a higher demand for resistance and sensuality. Contrary to a political or purely cultural existence, it denies the circumscription of the individual to prescribed forms of conduct or seeing the world, instead opening up new vistas for self-formation and seeing the world. And, contrary to a crass articulation of life as art, it is not merely the attempt to make oneself beautiful, a better lover, a better cook, a mystic, or a social rebel; it is the coherent attempt to form a way of life which minimizes domination, takes seriously the world which one creates,

imbues life with Being and gratitude, and sees each as an integral part of a total effort—the formation of character.

It is this attempt to transform the everyday that allows for life as art to be seen not only as a philosophical, historical, or theoretical formation, but, instead, as a unique way of living and being that makes life meaningful without external justification. Cooking, for instance, is to be re-envisioned as an art of selecting, choosing, and creating foods that are pleasurable and ethical; exercise is a means of attending to and de-normalizing the body; marriage and friendship are vehicles for relations which are non-normalized, pleasurable, and solidary; one's political, cultural, leisure, and artistic commitments are sites of resistance and autonomy; and one's work can be a source of pleasure and creativity. In each, one attempts to cultivate practices which are both resistant and revelatory, such that one's life—and not simply the disparate modalities which compose it—is itself an aesthetic creation, a form of resistance *in itself*, a form of blessing and openness *in itself*. It is this seamless coordination of the various aspects of one's existence, the execution of an aesthetic blueprint, which allows for life as art to be philosophically coherent, and, more importantly, existentially viable.

To be sure, the artful life is not the traditionally religious life. It offers neither assurance nor ritual. Yet, for those of us cast out of Eden, it offers a way to live simply, honestly, justly, and poetically. Part of this effort consists in recovering modes of thinking, living, and seeing which have been left behind. Part of it consists in confronting the present with new strategies, techniques, blessings, and labors. And part of it consists in an allegiance to the future, and the hope for new realities.

II: The Philosopher and His Shadow

I turned off the narrow gravel road and onto a seldom-traveled two-track, downshifting as my gears grumbled at the bottom of another rise. This was the third such road, as my directions only indicated to “turn right at clearing before switchback.” Apparently David had not realized how many switchbacks or clearings there were here. Or maybe he wanted me to get lost.

Just as I began to look once again for a place to turn around, he silently emerged in another clearing ahead. Leaning against a pine, David nearly merged with the forest. He held a thermos full of coffee in between his hands, presumably to stay warm in the cold morning air. Warm wisps of breath came from his mouth, appearing from a haven of flannel and a wool cap his wife had likely sewn for him years ago. His legs, shirt, and boots were covered in a patina of dirt.

I rolled down the window on my approach, letting the chilly October air inside the cab of my car. “Glad you could make it. Hope you didn’t have any trouble getting here.” I nodded as if to agree. “Just park there next to my pack. My car is down the road a ways.” I lurched the car forward and parked it next to an empty pack frame that was sparsely adorned with ropes, two water bottles, and a small military shovel. David’s compound bow lay next to the pack, arrows held fast in a plastic quiver.

I had never been hunting before, though you could hardly call this hunting. When I had expressed an interest in obtaining my own food, David had offered to take me hunting. “I have to warn you, though, it usually takes a few days, and there’s a lot of waiting.” Given my job and the high likelihood of my impatience, we decided to find a rather elaborate compromise. David would track for a few days, and, if he didn’t call me,

I would rendezvous with him in the early morning and hunt with him for the day. Now, after having driven most of the night, I crawled out of the car and began filling a large backpack with water, granola bars, and sunblock.

David approached me and was clearly excited. “I tracked a buck to the edge of a clearing about two miles away. If we head up this trail, we’ll be downwind of him.” I was too tired to respond, so, again, I just nodded. “And make sure you don’t have any lotion or deodorant on.” I saw him pick up a handful of sand and he began to rub it into his hands and neck. “Helps mask our scent.” I took the cue and did the same, massaging the cold earth into my skin.

“Heading up” the trail was a bit of a lie. After donning my pack and lacing up my shoes, we began an abrupt ascent up a mixed sand and rock trail that made immediately for a saddle between two rises on a ridge. Within minutes I was reaching for air, angry at the stolid figure ahead of me working his way effortlessly up the trail. I tried to keep pace, but within a few minutes, I was already behind. David stopped and turned around, gazing at the ground we had already gained. “You’ll be rewarded at the top. I promise.” And with that, he slowly pivoted and went into motion again, his calves flexing against the hard rock.

I eventually settled into a slow step-and-breathe pace, though one considerably slower than David. He allowed me to linger back and made his way up the rise, where the morning light was beginning to peak through the trees.

I found David at the top of the saddle, looking quietly out on the valley below. Once I arrested my breathing, the world came into focus. A sea of green and brown lay beneath us, bathed in the dawn light. The warming fall air was lifting a wave of steam

from the ground below, which was crawling slowly up the mountainsides, a finger of which was reaching toward us on our perched shoreline. I looked over at David, who was drinking it in. His eyes closed for a moment as the first wisps of steam passed over us like a wave, and then they re-opened. As if fully awake, he blinked a few times and muttered something under his breath. I wondered what I was doing here with this eccentric old man.

“Where we’re headed is just down the trail a bit and up the valley.” I nodded in agreement and replied, “Are we to come out the same way we came in?” half wanting there to be some other form of exit. “I’m afraid so,” he said, looking back at me and then turning once again to head down the trail.

The descent was easy enough, and I soon found myself creeping up the valley behind David, who had drawn his bow in anticipation and was walking, knees half-bent, almost sideways through the underbrush below a large meadow. We slowly crept forward until we found ourselves at the edge of a clearing. David’s hand came up to stop my progress, and I quietly squatted beside him.

After a few minutes of sitting, I grew impatient. “I can’t see anything. Is anything there?” His eyes remained trained on the small meadow, steam still dancing in the morning light. “Don’t try so hard,” he said. “Just let things come into focus. Let the landscape tell you where things are.” I relaxed my eyes and let the landscape infiltrate them, allowing the soft yellow of the winter vetch to mix with the dark browns and greens of the pines bordering the meadow.

My focus was averted by David lifting his bow slightly, enough to remove an arrow from the quiver and hold it in his left hand. I looked in the direction of his vision,

and once again allowed the landscape to collapse around shapes and colors. Movement slowly appeared, and, against the din of a raven and the creaking of trees in the wind, one could hear the crunching of frost on the ground across the meadow. Just as David raised the bow to his shoulder and notched an arrow in one movement, a large deer came into the clearing immediately in front of us.

David had chosen his spot well, likely the result of three days of tracking and patience. The deer was broadside to us, his haunches rippling in the early morning light. My nerves tensed as I heard the arrow slowly pulled back, the stone point reflecting the rays of the sun. As I turned my head again to watch the deer, the arrow slipped into the distance. My heart sunk as it caught the deer above his front leg, below the shoulder girdle. I would later find out that it went through his heart and lung, though, upon being hit, the powerful stag leapt up and bolted for more than a hundred yards before coming to a stop beside a stream up the valley.

The deer lay in the brush, gasping, its eyes asking for something we could not give. David approached the deer quietly, muttering again under his breath. David knelt over the deer and placed his right hand across its neck, calming it as the heaving of its chest slowed to its last beat. A tear rolled down his eye, David wiping it away in haste. He muttered again, this time reaching into his pocket with his left hand and extracting a small pouch of sage leaves, which he sprinkled over the fallen male. The ground, warming beneath the deer and the early morning light, began to give off its morning steam.

The silence was broken by a series of commands and abrupt movements. "Please hand me my pack," David said solemnly. I handed it over, and he removed a large buck

knife and the trash bag. “I’m sorry if this. . .,” his voiced faded off, as he half looked at me and the deer. “Can you help me move him more onto his back?,” he said, grabbing one leg and pulling the deer across the grass, the end of the arrow wobbling as we both moved the deer to a flat place next to the trash bag.

I hadn’t fully prepared myself for this part of my adventure. David slowly inserted the knife above the deer’s genitals, and, quickly tracing his midline, opened up the animal in a series of deft movements. Blood trickled from the deer’s skin as it flopped open, exposing the abdominal cavity. David worked the knife in between the spaces of muscle, bone, fat, and organs, and, after rolling the deer onto his side, extracted the intestines, liver, and heart (though it had been pierced by the arrow), and placed them into the trash bag. The bladder, lungs, fat, and pancreas were set aside. He handed the bag to me to tie up and place in another bag, which was then placed into my pack. After more cutting, the empty carcass was taken to the creek and David washed the cavity in the stream, his hands massaging the inside of the deer as they worked water into the body, allowing it to mix with blood and dirt.

The body was wrapped in cheesecloth and mounted on David’s pack using a liberal amount of rope and bungee cords. It weighed at least 100 pounds. The silent funeral was concluded when David removed his shovel and dug a small hole, into which were placed the lungs, bladder, fat, and pancreas. The hole was shallow and David was careful not to pierce the entrails. “For the rest of the forest,” he said under his breath.

Packs mounted, we moved slowly out of the valley and into the afternoon light. We stopped frequently to readjust David’s pack and rest, which gave me time to catch my breath and wonder again what had just happened. David seldom talked, so I took to

asking him questions as we worked our way again to the saddle. As we approached our dawn resting place, I began to wonder what he had muttered under his breath as the sun rose and as the deer was sighted, killed, and dressed. “What were you saying to yourself as you dressed the deer?”

“Prayers,” he said, pausing afterwards as if he wanted to say more, but didn’t.

“But you don’t go to church, and you told me that you never did.”

“That’s true.” He stopped again to readjust his pack and look out across the valley, the deer’s lifeless body bouncing slightly with his movements. “But that doesn’t mean I can’t be thankful for what is given.”

I next saw David at his home a week later. After a quiet meal at a diner off the highway and before we parted, David asked me to come over and enjoy the fruits of our—or really his—labor. As I pulled my car into the gravel drive, I saw David through the garden gate, hunched over a patch of vegetables and pulling at a dandelion. He raised his head in recognition of my arrival and smiled.

I had only been to David’s house once before. It was a few years earlier, immediately after his wife had passed away. I didn’t know David at the time, though much hadn’t changed in that regard over the past year and a half. At that time, the home was filled with old friends and family who milled about and hovered above him like gnats, making sure he was coping with the loss. He dealt with them amicably, often filling their glasses and grabbing their jackets before they left, upon which he would always say, “Don’t worry about me. I’ve got plenty of work to keep me busy.”

The house was considerably quieter now, and David, wiping a muddy arm against his forehead, gestured for me to go inside and get warm. I eagerly assented, as the sun was setting and the high desert was growing cold. I walked in through the front door, over which stood a humbly carved sign, probably kitsch purchased on a trip to Germany, which said: “Die Wohnen der Natalie und David.” A fire crackled in the stone fireplace at the opposite end of the room, burning juniper and pine and filling the home with a thick fragrance. The walls were thickly plastered, though insets had been custom built into the walls, inside of which stood *yei* and *kachinas*. The floor was made of brick, though it was mostly covered with sheep’s wool rugs and wooden benches that had clearly been hand-carved. The ceiling was buttressed by two large *vigas*, which held up a thick roof of gnarled *piñon* pine and plaster. The center of the room had a small skylight, through which the evening sky could be seen, greeting the warmth of David’s six walls below.

“I hope you found the place alright,” David said behind me as he entered from a small bathroom that adjoined the kitchen. He was washing his hands clean of dirt, and smelled of earth and rain. “I did,” I said, continuing to take in the room around me, as the light danced on walls which had likely been painted with shapes, figures, and flowers at some point by his wife.

“Where did you find this place?” I said, noting its old colonial style.

“I didn’t. We built it on the weekends while we lived in the city. Before I was a carpenter I also worked construction and did some contracting.” David now let his eyes wander once again through the room, allowing them to alight on the fireplace in front of us.

“It must’ve taken you thirty years,” I thought aloud, thinking of Jung’s Tower which I had read about years before, though David’s home did not attempt to reach the heavens as did Jung’s home.

David gave out a chortle. “I wish it were so. I don’t think I’ve ever finished working on it, though I’d say it’s been about 43 years since we laid the foundation stone at the foot of the door behind you.” I turned to note the backside of the door, and saw two stones flanking either side. It faced the eastern garden, filled with the drooping stalks of carrots, onions, and pea blossoms.

David’s voice called me back from my exploration of the room. “We made everything here with an idea in mind.” His hand wandered over the insets in the walls and the bookshelves that protruded above the wooden benches. “The spaces in the walls were originally thought of to make window openings, but we found the empty space makes for a good spot to put our little *yeis*.” His hand also gestured towards the fireplace, flanked by river stones and topped with pictures of old friends, many of whom were likely gone. “Nat always wanted our friends to be warm,” he laughed. “But I like it that they’re there to greet me as I make the evening fire.”

I wondered why David would invest so much time into his house. He saw the question in my face, and, looking at the small skylight and the waxing moon, he said, “Lots of people work on cars or their jobs. We worked on this,” as he said, staring into the middle of the room.

He grabbed my shoulder and turned me towards the kitchen. “Well, I promised you a meal. I still have to cook the vegetables that I just gathered, but let’s go into the kitchen.”

The kitchen was equally homey, though I worried that David could get lonely in such a space. A large wooden island stood in the middle of the kitchen, and the stove stood against the back wall, bordered by smaller river stones than the fireplace. The oven glowed with warmth on the inside, and the smell of pine resin in the den gave way to cooking venison and sage. The kitchen was encircled in cabinets which were only interrupted by two large bay windows at both the east and west ends of the room. Inset in each cabinet was a carved label, many of which were plain: “SPICES” and “JAMS,” for example. Others begged a question, such as the tall cabinet into which was carved “SMELLS,” over which my hand lingered for a moment. “That’s where we put things to be composted,” David added as he began cleaning and chopping carrots, turnips, and one pathetically small onion.

“One always has one’s garden,” David said cheerfully as he placed the chopped carrots into a bowl. As David methodically diced the turnip and onion, my eyes turned to the countertop, over which hung pots, pans, and, fittingly, drying meat. An index card sat neatly on a card holder, on which was typed “**Roasted Venison Leg.**” I looked curiously at the recipe card, which read like a manual for full use of the animal:

1. After meat has aged for more than 3 days, clean and skin leg, placing skin aside. Scrape skin immediately!
2. Saw through tibia if necessary. Remove hoof.
3. Wash thoroughly with cold water.
4. Pat dry and add salt, pepper, ground sage, and other spices. [Note: At this point was a hand-written note, directing David to a recipe for red chile encrusted venison.]
5. Rub with olive or avocado oil, whichever is freshest.
6. Place in oven at 475° for 1.5-2 hrs.
7. Remove from oven and let cool. Remove meat from bone and place bone and marrow in freezer.

From the smells accumulating in the hearth, I assumed the meat was close to done. David mixed the vegetables with salt, pepper, oil, and garlic, and placed them on a battered cookie sheet. He then placed them below the venison in the oven.

We talked quietly as the meat and vegetables cooked, the smells of the venison permeating the vegetables and the entire kitchen. A timer went off, and David opened the oven door and cautiously poked the meat with his index finger, after which he removed the meat from the oven and placed it on the table to rest. It cracked and sizzled as the fat was still rendering into the pan, mixing with sprigs of sage and rosemary. “Look familiar?” David asked as I glanced at what was once the deer’s rear thigh.

“Not really,” I answered back cautiously. “It’s. . .”

“Different? That’s part of cooking well—turning something into something else.”

“I agree. But isn’t it a lot of work, just for a roast?”

David could sense my skepticism. Four days of hunting, a day of cooking, months of gardening—all of it culminated in what appeared to be a pile of roasting meat which sat, steaming, on David’s countertop. “That assumes it’s just food. It’s not about what we eat, though. It’s about *how* we eat.”

“What about the time spent, though?” I asked again, looking for something more.

“It all seems a little. . . much.”

David grinned. “That’s the point. Everything around me, as you can tell, is a ‘little much.’ Especially what I eat. It is going into my body, after all. . .” His voice trailed off as a second timer went off, signaling that the meat was rested and the vegetables ready to leave the oven.

We sat in one of the bay windows of the kitchen at a little table surrounded by drying herbs and chiles, which hung in bundles from hooks above the windows. The deer was served in long slices and ringed with the roasted vegetables. David poured a glass of red wine. “Did you make this, too?” I said half-jokingly. “Believe me, I tried,” he replied with a look of disappointment. “But it always tasted like alkali. Can’t grow berries here, apparently. Or maybe I’m just not good at turning grapes into wine.”

The meat was tender and sweet, even if a bit greasy. The first bite swept through my mouth like a wave, and I tried to hold onto its fleeting taste. David recognized me, and, taking his first bite, closed his eyes and muttered another short prayer to himself. The vegetables were equally sensuous, and, in David’s humble home, I began to see the pleasures of his own life.

Yet something in me rebelled against what I felt was perfectionism, even selfishness. The food, the drink, the carving, the garden, the days away to hunt—what good did it do? Taking in another bite, I couldn’t help but ask. “Everything here seems so . . . contrived. Why do you do all this?” I said, gesturing towards the drying herbs and then staring at my plate, which now sat half-finished.

David paused thoughtfully, the chair creaking slightly as he leaned back in it and let his arms fall to rest on the table. His eyes brightened and his forehead lifted slightly. “I learned early on that the best thing I could do was tend to my own garden and to create something that blessed the world.”

“Hence the prayers. . . ”

“Yes, in a way. But that’s just a part of it. The home is a blessing, too. As are my friends. And the slightly undercooked venison you’re eating.” His reply forced me to

stare again at my plate, now almost finished. The venison's scent still wafted into the kitchen, mixing with the dawning chill of a fall evening.

"Isn't that selfish? I mean, who are you helping out here, separated from everyone else?" I had begun to question David's way of living months before, but hadn't said anything until now. Here, in the flickering light of the kitchen, my worries came to the fore. I added, "You can't just stop working."

David's response was quicker now. "I never did. You're right that I did retire, but I've continued to work." He paused now, trying to find the right words, his mind pushing through the wine. "Actually, my work is more important now, though it's not as concrete as cabinets or this house."

"And what's that?"

"Myself."

I went forward, acting as if I didn't hear his last comment. "Does that mean living in the fog and keeping alive the spirit of lost friends? What are you really creating here? It seems you're simply keeping alive what's already gone."

My question hung in the air far too long. Only after a moment did I realize what I had really said. David's eyes wandered about the room, probing the carved little wooden doors, the rocks, and the flickering light for an answer. He leaned back, rubbed his eyes, and seemed lost again in thought as his eyes reached toward the moonlight above. Was he feeling guilty?

He finally broke the silence. "Maybe I am living a bit of a fantasy." And then, all of a sudden, his face lightened. "But I still make a good dessert." He left the table and

shuffled to the refrigerator, extracting two cups filled with berries and whipped cream, and noticing that I had cleared my plate, placed it deftly in front of me.

I left shortly after finishing my dessert and another glass of wine. David and I chatted about politics, the weather, and his early work as a tradesman and unionist. The uneasiness of the dinner conversation still lingered, however, and, even though David sent me away with another helping of venison wrapped in foil and a promise to invite me over for marrow stew, I feared that he might not call. As my car pulled out of his drive, David appeared forlorn and contemplative, reinforcing my fear. I watched as he quietly pivoted and worked his way up the walk and into his home.

With the conversation we had receding but a feeling of regret beginning to set in that I had gone too far in my probing of David, I was happy when he called a few weeks later and asked if we could meet in town on a Tuesday morning and take a walk. I found him that morning in The City Café, a small diner in the heart of town adorned with a small bar and Spanish-style murals of the Apocalypse on the ceiling. The walls were art deco green, and the waitstaff generally young and eccentric. Not the type of place I expected to see David. I was even more surprised when the waitress appeared to be refilling David's juice and holding a conversation with him.

"How are you this morning?" he said, smiling and leaning back in his chair as I walked forward past the cash register.

"Fine, fine. I had a hard time parking, though."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I'm afraid I don't have to worry about that." David replied, taking in the last bite of a pancake with no syrup.

“Why’s that?”

“Oh, I do a little volunteer work for the city on Tuesdays and Thursdays. They let me park here for free in exchange for my services. You’ll actually be helping me today.”

I was curious. David hardly seemed the type to work for the city, and the skills of a carpenter and tradesman were rarely the sort the city needed. “What kind of work do you do?” I asked.

David’s eyes brightened and pushed his plate out in front of him. His eyes wandered across the Apocalypse above us, and settled onto the cold November morning in the street behind me. “Oh, just a bit of monitoring. I’ve been doing it since I moved here more than 40 years ago. Before I developed a trade, I worked with the Civilian Conservation Corps, building roads, bridges, that type of thing. We also helped build the little diversion dam that sends water into the different parts of the city. Since then, I’ve volunteered with some of my retired friends to make sure everything is running like it was designed to.”

“That sounds simple enough,” I said, thinking more of the cold outside and the morning than the rather pedestrian task of looking at water works.

“It is. But I think you’ll enjoy this. I feel that maybe I’ve been. . .” he paused and signaled the waitress for his check. She recognized his subtle nod and began tabulating his pancakes, juice, and a healthy side of eggs. He continued, “misunderstood. I think a walk to the dam might help you see a bit more of my work.”

David collected his check and, after leaving a tip, we left the City Café and walked out and into a blustery fall day. It was cold and windy, the last leaves of the trees

swirling onto the street from above. David and I zipped up our jackets and began walking west, towards the river and out of town.

Though our town had been built up considerably over the past few years, it was still small and had not yet been fully integrated. The city was bisected by a river, and a small downtown stood on its east bank, along with a series of high end homes, gated communities, and the fruits of suburban sprawl. The west bank of the city was a rambling mass of poor homes and disconnected streets, inhabited mainly by immigrants and the permanently disenfranchised. David would likely have built many of the streets that now crumbled and fell into disrepair on the west side of town, as well as some of the homes here on the east side. Downtown was a series of ringed streets that enveloped a small plaza with shops and restaurants, the City Café being the most non-traditional and flamboyant.

We walked briskly out of the center of city and across the streets which ringed it, stopping at traffic lights and musing more than once at small restaurants and *panaderias* with baking bread. After we turned a corner, David pointed to a small house and smiled. “I helped build that home. Framed it when I was young and then re-did the cabinets and front porch a few years later.” The home stood alone next to a small park with swings and a low-bridge for children to run over and under. The front porch, likely by David’s design, opened up onto the park and child-bridge at an angle, its slender carved crossbeams forming a frame for the playing children and the bridge. David laughed. “Not sure why that bridge is there, other than the children. There hasn’t been water here in years.” I noticed that the bridge stood above a constructed gravel “stream,” whose flow terminated in a see-saw.

Our walk continued, with David pointing out his work as a carpenter and with the Civilian Conservation Corps, the latter being devoted to making roads and public works. “Most of my work early on was on the other side of the river. Pipes, sewage, that type of thing.” His eyes grew wistful as he looked off towards the west. “I loved it when I could see folks moving into their new homes, the way they smiled and laughed and couldn’t move boxes quick enough.” His lower lip twitched as he stumbled over his words. A fierce wind rallied and knocked us slightly sideways as we continued walking.

“But? . . .”

“But then I had a hard time going back to those neighborhoods. They fell apart. Dogs chained to trees, that kind of thing. The poverty was too much for even their joy to overcome. You could see it in their faces. After that, I vowed to make things better.”

David seemed lost in thought. I let the pause linger, and lightheartedly tried to change the subject with a comment about one of the restaurants we just passed. “Good crepes,” I added. David’s face lightened for a moment, as a thought crossed his mind. “Natalie always loved crepes. Said they were better than sex. Not sure if that was a comment about me, or about my cooking.”

We continued on, the birds above us buffeted by the winds, fluttering like leaves off a tree. As the bridge spanning the river began to loom in the distance, David took on a decidedly more serious tone. “I’m sorry if I’ve confused you,” he began, his eyes gazing off towards the western horizon and the poor neighborhoods which lay beyond the west bank of the river. His walk slowed to a stroll, and he seemed to be measuring his words along with his steps. “You are right, of course, that I’ve spent much of my life working

on things which appear to be of little consequence. My home, the food I eat, the friendships which pass by, even these roads and sidewalks we've been seeing."

"I didn't really mean that. . . ." I began to mutter, though I had probably meant it at the time. I tried to look at David to gauge his emotion, but his gaze was fixed on the bridge ahead and the river beneath.

"I know you didn't. But I want you to know that those are only part of a larger project, one that includes what's on the other side of the bridge."

"What kind of project?" I asked, curious to see what kind of project might unite the various trades David had adopted throughout his life. "Perhaps beauty?" My question came as we began to cross the old steel bridge which had once served as a railroad tressel. A strong wind blew from the north, causing the bridge to make a shrill cry as its rivets pressed against the steel girders. Swallows flickered in and out of the bridgeworks below, descending onto the water beneath for food. David looked out at the river, the eddy of water in the diversion dam above us, the bridge, and the two banks it brought together. We stood in the middle of the bridge, our walk brought to a momentary pause.

"Balance," he said, looking at me for the first time since our conversation began. "It's a project I began after I left the Corps and became a tradesman. I wanted to make something more than just homes and benches. So I began gathering the raw materials, and have been working ever since." His last sentence came as we began walking again, working our way towards the west bank of the river, where water plunged from a small diversion dam into a series of concrete stockades.

"What does that mean, though? 'Balance' between what?"

“Between the different parts of one’s life, of course. My hearth and my belly; work, play, and the earth. And justice, of course. Perhaps that’s the hardest part for someone else to see. I try to make it all fit together into something tangible.”

“Why is it the hardest to see? Shouldn’t it be the most obvious?”

“It is and it isn’t,” David answered elliptically. His gaze wandered again at the river as we slowly worked towards the opposite bank and the diversion dam. The wind picked up again, pushing even the swallows below headlong into the bridge. “Sometimes living itself is a way of being just.”

“Like a monk?” I looked at him and began to smile. “Or a hermit?”

He understood my joke, but his eyes were still somber. He thought for a moment, considering an answer. “Or both at the same time,” he said, his hand now fumbling about in his pocket, just as he had weeks before as he searched for the sage pouch.

“So why are we here, then? Isn’t your work at home?”

David seemed to anticipate the question as his hand settled on a set of keys in his pocket. He slowly thumbed through a number of labeled keys, and, finding the right one, approached a chain-link gate at the end of the bridge that opened onto the diversion damworks and the concrete stockades. “Selflessness comes in many forms.” We stopped at another gate and he paused to find another key. He then turned to me, and, unlocking the gate, muttered, “Sometimes being home isn’t enough.”

His words trailed off as we descended down a flight of metal stairs that sat above the concrete stockades. Water gushed beneath us, the sound echoing off the walls of the bridge above and the concrete on our left and right. The water rushed into three separate columns, each of which flowed into a large steel pipe at its terminus. Debris floated on

the top of water above each pipe as black meshed strained out sticks, baby dolls, and water bottles. The din was almost impenetrable. I followed David as he proceeded down a gangway underneath the bridge and above the steel pipes, which, only forty feet beyond us, descended into the ground, likely to be distributed to the different parts of the city.

David pointed to the pipe nearest to us. "That pipe there goes to the east side of the city," David yelled over the echoes of rushing water and the rattling traffic above. He peered over the railing and tapped a water gauge on top of the pipe. It held steady and he pulled out an embossed City notepad from his winter jacket, where he recorded the time and status of the pipe. He moved to the next pipe. "And this one goes to downtown." David repeated the process of tapping the gauge and ensured that it was working. Another notebook entry was duly made. "These measure the amount of water going to each part of town. The City uses it to calculate city taxes and the cost of water. I helped build these little diversions and the pipeworks when I first came here. "

We came to the third pipe. "This goes to the *barrio*." He said, tapping the gauge once again. Curiously, he then squatted on his knees and lowered himself onto his stomach, half-rolling over to look at the pipe, now above. He motioned for me to join him, and I lowered myself onto the cold steel gangway, repeating his rolling movement, but in the opposite direction. His hand traced the large diversion pipe, cold with the rush of near-freezing water. His gaze terminated in a small structure just below the gauge, hidden from view. "What's that?" I asked, my hand unknowingly tracing the midline of the pipe again to where David's hand had terminated.

David simply pointed further down the pipe, and, taking that as a cue, I pushed myself along the cold gangway, my head now hanging precariously over the ground

below. Behind a small baffle, a second pipe had been artfully welded onto the first, bypassing the water gauge. It was invisible from all but this vantage point, and, even then, it appeared to be part of the intended structure of the diversion pipe.

I wormed my way back towards David, who now stood near the railing, blowing warm air into his hands and looking at me as I struggled to make it again to my feet. “Is that a mistake?” I asked, perhaps knowing the answer in advance. David, perhaps not hearing me, only smiled and recorded the time and status in his notebook.

David retired the City notebook to his jacket and we began our walk back up the stairs and out from under the bridge. He looked back at me as he held open a gate, allowing me to move through. “Let’s get back to someplace warm.” With that, David slowly closed the chain link gate behind him, securing the lock.

We emerged onto the bridge again, and David looked up the river to watch as a heron swept above the surface of the water, plunging itself into the icy current to pull out a tiny fish. The bridge wailed again as the wind swept downstream, and we both braced ourselves against the cold. We then began our slow descent back towards the city.

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