

Being and the Imaginary: An Introduction to Aesthetic Phenomenology and English Literature from the Eighteenth Century to Romanticism

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BEING AND THE IMAGINARY: AN INTRODUCTION TO AESTHETIC
PHENOMENOLOGY AND ENGLISH LITERATURE
FROM THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY TO ROMANTICISM

a dissertation

by

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Being and the Imaginary: An Introduction to Aesthetic Phenomenology and English Literature from the Eighteenth Century to Romanticism (Abstract)

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This investigation outlines and applies what I have termed Aesthetic Phenomenology – a method of interdisciplinary criticism founded on the intersections of Martin Heidegger’s existential phenomenology, Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics, and Wolfgang Iser’s literary anthropology. This study traces the articulation of Dasein’s fundamental ontological structures outlined in Heidegger’s philosophy. A concern with Dasein and the issue of its Being, specifically in relation to the aesthetic, are prominently foregrounded in many works of eighteenth-century and Romantic period English literature. Hence conceptions and investigations of the imagination become central during this period. Yet the idea of the imagination itself as a faculty is amended and supplemented when it is brought into play with what Iser terms “the imaginary,” which is conceived as the domain of possible worlds and modes of Being.

In the first chapter, “Aesthetic Phenomenology: A Critical Encounter,” I outline how a phenomenologically grounded aesthetic must account for the interplay of the domains of the artist, artwork, and recipient in what I call an “aesthetic equation.” The second chapter, “Between Fundamental Ontology and the Imaginary: A Genealogy of Aesthetic Phenomenology,” traces the principle landmarks defining the topography of our investigation. “The Aesthetics of *Insein*” deals with how Being is projected and articulated in regards to Heidegger’s conceptions of “understanding,” “interpretation,” and “worlding,” as well as his distinction between the “real” and “reality.” “The Aesthetics of Attunement” is concerned with the opposition between everyday and authentic Being and the quality of aesthetic experience as both *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. The aesthetic functions as an analogue to Heidegger’s conception of “conscience” as a “call” which leads to Being becoming “resolute” and taking up the path to its “authentic,” ownmost self and returning to its “there.” In “The Undiscovered Country and the Mortal Bourne: There Be Monsters,” I delve into the potentially negative side of the imaginary and discuss the implications of, and dangers inherent in, the transgressive qualities of the aesthetic.

The writings of Samuel Johnson are explicitly guided by the ontological and moral issue of the *choice of life*. The first part of the chapter measures Johnson’s “ontological surveys,” which address Dasein’s range of possible attunements, specifically as conducted in the poems “London” (1738), “The Vanity of Human Wishes” (1749), and “On the Death of Doctor Robert Levet” (1782). In “The Temporality of Idleness: Aesthetic Ramblers, Adventurers, and Idlers and the Issue of Authenticity,” I consider both the negative and positive aspects of idleness as attunement, which recurs in Johnson’s periodical essays. The next section, “The Domain of the Aesthetic in Johnson’s Criticism,” posits that for Johnson the aesthetic provides a realm wherein a range of possible projections of Being are disclosed. The final section, “The Devouring Imaginary and the Struggle of Resolution,” investigates the obverse side of Johnson’s relationship to the imagination and the imaginary.

As the leading philosopher of the imagination in England during this period, Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poetry and prose is directly engaged with the issue of Dasein’s ontological projection and the disclosure of horizons of Being. “The Imagination vs. the Imaginary,” deals first with what I term the “voluntary imagination” as it is revealed in Coleridge’s so-called “conversation poems” as a form of *Erlebnis*. The obverse side of the voluntary imagination is the “compulsory imaginary,” which in a form of experience conceived as *Erfahrung*, the contours and consequences of which are drawn out through a readings of “Fears in Solitude” (1798), *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798 / 1834), and “Kubla Khan” (1797-1799?). The awareness of the failure of the imagination to order experience and life becomes evident in Coleridge’s “Black Period” poems: *Dejection: An Ode* (1802), *Constancy to an Ideal Object* (1804-7), *Ne Plus Ultra* (1811), and *Limbo* (1811). Here the imagination as creator and site of joy is replaced by the abyss of the imaginary. Coleridge’s imaginative failure eventuates his pursuit of what I call the “Philosophic Imaginary” – a process initiated in the *Biographia Literaria* (1817). The Coleridge section concludes with a consideration of the philosophic imaginary’s legacy as revealed in essays about Coleridge by Algernon Charles Swinburne, Walter Pater, and Arthur Symonds.

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At the end of a long undertaking, when one pauses to recollect the entire process from a perspective of (at least momentary) completion, it is fitting to acknowledge those without whose participation the project itself would have been impossible – so here I pause to recognize those without whom this dissertation would never have been completed. First, I thank James Najarian for his participation in my oral exams and stepping up to take on the responsibility of directing my dissertation after the passing of Father J. Robert Barth – and especially for his timely efforts traversing hazardous bureaucratic seas when a committee crisis struck. Next I would like to thank my two readers: Dennis Taylor for his careful reading of the manuscript, his encouraging comments, and his insightful connections between the main *foci* of my dissertation and its wider religious implications; and Jeffrey Hanson, who emigrated from the Philosophy department and brought a true philosophical rigor and understanding (as well as a copy editor’s eye) to his reading. My wife Junko for conscientiously proof-reading the final manuscript – Junko, who nine years ago (and seemingly only yesterday) left all she had known behind and risked everything by trusting her heart and coming with me from Wisconsin to Boston, has done so much for me that any outward show of appreciation is but a pale shadow of my true obligation. Finally (though hardly least), I thank Professor John. L. Mahoney, who exemplifies in the highest degree what Dr. Samuel Johnson holds forth as the proper “*Character & Duty of an Academick.*” From my first day at Boston College, Mr. Mahoney has fathered me through my doctoral career; and I am happy and proud to have him as a mentor, colleague, and friend.

IN MEMORY OF
J. Robert Barth, S.J.

DEDICATED TO

Junko, my wife

Without whom everything would be nothing:
Like the wind through winter trees,
Or a new moon in the midnight sky...

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Act R* Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U Pr., 1978).
- AR* Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, ed. John Beer, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 9 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1993).
- ASJ* Walter Jackson Bate, *The Achievement of Samuel Johnson* (New York: Oxford U Pr., 1961).
- BL* Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, eds. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 7 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1984).
- BPP* Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana U Pr., 1988).
- BT* Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper, 1962).
- CL* Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Pr., 1956-1971).
- CM* Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Marginalia*, eds. George Whalley and H.J. Jackson, 6 vols., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 12 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1980-2001).
- CN* Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, eds. Kathleen Coburn and Merton Christensen, 5 vols. (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1957-2002).
- C Phil.* Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana U Pr., 1999).
- DSM-IV* American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994).
- FCM* Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana U Pr., 1995).
- FI* Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U Pr., 1993).
- Friend* Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Friend*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 4 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1969).
- IM* Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale U Pr., 1987).
- J Works* Samuel Johnson, *Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, 18 vols. (New Haven: Yale U Pr., 1958 -).
- J Lives* Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. G.B. Hill, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford U Pr., 1905).

- Lects 1808-1819* Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1808-1819 On Literature*, ed. R.A. Foakes, 2 vols., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 5 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1987).
- Lects 1818-1819* Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1818-1819 On the History of Philosophy*, ed. J.R. de J. Jackson, 2 vols., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 8 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 2000).
- LS* Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lay Sermons*, ed. R.J. White, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 6 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1972)
- N* Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, trans. David Farrell Krell, 4 vols. (San Francisco: Harper, 1991).
- OWL* Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper, 1971).
- P* Wolfgang Iser, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U Pr., 1989).
- PLT* Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper, 1971).
- PH* Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: U California Pr., 1976).
- PW* Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, ed. J.C.C. Mays, 3 vols., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 16 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 2001).
- RB* Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge U Pr., 2002).
- SJ* Walter Jackson Bate, *Samuel Johnson* (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998).
- SW&F* Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Shorter Works and Fragments*, eds. H.J. Jackson and J.R. de J. Jackson, 2 vols., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 11 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1995).
- TM* Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1998).
- TT* Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk*, ed. Carl Woodring, 2 vols., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 14 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1990).

I. Aesthetic Phenomenology: A Critical Encounter

Throughout the eighteenth century and into the advent of Romanticism (to the re-evaluations of late Romanticism and beyond), numerous literary works display overt concerns with Being as it is projected and reflected through an aesthetic medium, and thus focus on the ontological dynamics and moral dimension of the aesthetic. Hence during this period, we see conceptions and investigations of the imagination as the capacity of aesthetic projection; and therefore, we find at the same time the imaginary and the sphere of potentialities-for-Being, becoming central. Yet the very idea of the imagination itself is transformed when the imagination as a more or less voluntary faculty is subsumed by the imaginary, which is conceived as a realm of possible worlds and modalities of Being as yet unrealized. I have accordingly chosen to investigate what I see as central figures illuminating distinct moments and developments of aesthetic Being during the historical period under consideration: Samuel Johnson and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. I have also chosen figures who are both artists and philosophers, since such a dual orientation demands a marked degree of aesthetic self-consciousness and self-reflection from its practitioners, and thereby also provides us with a clearer line of sight and arena for our investigations. This co-operative “union of philosophy and literary and aesthetic criticism” conceived as “a direct and vital reciprocity between these disciplines,” in the view of Ernst Cassirer, first emerges during “THE eighteenth century” – a period which “is very fond of calling itself the ‘century of philosophy,’” while “it is not less fond of calling itself the ‘century of criticism.’” In fact, “The two phrases are only different expressions of the same situation,” and thus this “union ... is evident in all the eminent minds of the century”¹ – a tendency which continues, if not noticeably strengthens, into the Romantic Period.

Being and the Imaginary at the same time seeks to outline a program for an aesthetic phenomenology as a method of aesthetic, and more specifically a literary, criticism. It is primarily founded on the individual philosophies of, and the intersections between, our principal precursors: Martin Heidegger’s existential phenomenology, Hans-Georg Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, and

¹ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koellen and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1979) 275.

Wolfgang Iser's literary anthropology. Insofar as these figures will be applied retroactively to the authors and literary works which are the principal subjects of our investigations, we are "fully aware that this violates a cardinal law of cultural and current historical studies, namely initiating a dialogue between historically conditioned texts and the present," but we hold with Philip C. Rule that indeed "meaning can transcend its historical origins."² Our investigation explores issues of the relation of the fundamental ontological structures outlined in Heidegger's philosophy to the aesthetic projection and articulation of Being in the domain of aesthetics. Our investigations are, therefore, concerned with the inter-actions of the imagination and the imaginary, the temporalizing of Being, Dasein's homelessness in the world of the real and its quest to uncover its own authentic Being. In human Being's projective capacities resides the potentiality for it to be able to locate itself and its "there," which subsequently may in turn enable it to attain what Heidegger calls its ownmost, authentic [*eigentlich*] Being as a Da-sein.³ Conversely, we will explore the abyss which opens up when Dasein confronts its own null basis and whenever the past becomes a location of loss and the future is foreclosed or seen solely a site of hopelessness and dread, while concomitantly the present becomes an endlessly deferred site of dislocation, suspended hollowly between the two. These situations, both in their positive and negative aspects, are prominently fore-grounded in Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment literature, and are among the principle defining factors of the

² Philip C. Rule, S.J., *Coleridge and Newman: The Centrality of Consciousness* (New York: Fordham U Pr., 2004) 4. Rule adds in a footnote as a further means of justification which is also relevant to our present undertaking: "I find validation of such a dialogue in David P. Haney's recent study, *The Challenge of Coleridge: Ethics and Interpretation in Romanticism and Modern Philosophy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001)."

³ "Dasein" in Heidegger's usage is usually translated as "Being-there," or less frequently as "There-Being." To parse out the component parts: "*da*" is commonly translated as "there," the noun "*das Sein*" as "being," which is related to and the verb "*sein*" as the infinitive "to be." In conceiving *Dasein* as a technical, philosophical term, Heidegger apparently draws upon the verb "*dasein*," which in its common usage means, "to be there." "*Da*," however, may also be translated as "here," which has led some to employ the somewhat unwieldy construction "Being-here/there" – a construction which we shall avoid. The reader, nevertheless, will receive some benefit by hearing the secondary meaning of "here" as an echo to the first in the course of our investigations, insofar as in becoming *resolute* Dasein's "there" assumes (both grammatically and figuratively) more of the character of a "here." While in ordinary German usage the noun "*das Dasein*" primarily means either "existence" or "presence," only the former sense is strictly applicable to *Dasein* in our context. "Existence" is relevant to specifically human Being [*Sein*], whereas "presence" in the sense of the at-hand [*Zuhanden*] or the ready-to-hand [*Vorhanden*] is an attribute of things which are extant, or the extant in general [*Seiende*], which the dictionary denotes simply as "being" (*Collins German Dictionary*, 1991 ed.).

“modern,” the issue of which as time goes on confronts us with an ever-increasing urgency and strange sense of panic.

Aesthetic phenomenology is a philosophy of aesthetics, as well as a hermeneutic practice, which investigates works of art in terms of their tripartite ontology: the Being of the artist, the Being of the artwork itself, and the Being of the audience, which comprise what we will term the *aesthetic equation*. This procedure is grounded in the existential-ontological structures of human Being (*Dasein*) as they have been disclosed through Heidegger’s phenomenological investigation of fundamental ontology – structures which are articulated and shared by all three elements of the aesthetic equation. Beginning with the fundamental structures of *Dasein*, our approach works to articulate the thematic developments and implications of such ontological structures as they are disclosed and lived out in the domain of the literary-aesthetic. In and through the aesthetic, we open ourselves to an encounter with Being in a way which is not possible in other areas of endeavor; and therefore, the aesthetic is a “creative” way to counter what Heidegger refers to as “the abandonment of being”⁴ as “initially the collapse [*Verfall*] of the understanding of being and forgottenness of being” (*C Phil.* 47). When we truly encounter the aesthetic, we not only have an experience of a work of art, but we emerge into and enjoy an aesthetic experience that we both deliberately take up, enter into, and undergo as something imposed upon us both under conditions of constraint and alienation, as well as emerge into the enlightening horizon of a dawning freedom. The aesthetic is also a way of knowing and a form of truth through which we explore the imaginary as a domain of alternative potential ways of Being – a domain from which we may further return to ourselves out of the world of the everyday into which we have been thrown, recollecting ourselves as if always for the first time coming out of cacophony towards our ownmost, authentic Being. For Iser, the aesthetic in general, and “great literature” in particular, “is characterized by its presentation of insoluble human predicaments” concerned with what it means “to be” (*P* 247), and hence from this starting-point literature explicitly and in a unique manner raises existential-ontological issues. But this is not to say that we intend *Dasein* to wrap itself in itself, confined in the precincts of its “I” as a subjective, solipsistic cocoon by merely reasserting a

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indian U Pr., 1999) 44; hereafter *C Phil.*

return (or retreat) to the absolute autonomy and self sufficiency of a post-Kantian “subject.” Nor do we wish to endorse any merely escapist aesthetic – for in the end we must inevitably return from our forays into the aesthetic back into the world of the real and our Being-with [*Mitsein*] others.

Aesthetic phenomenology is both an enactment and reversal of what Heidegger terms in *Sein und Zeit* (1927) a “thematic existential anthropology,” which seeks “to present the factual existentiell possibilities in their chief features and interconnections, and to Interpret them according to their existential structure.”⁵ For our part, we will not only consider “factual existentiell possibilities” as they occur in specific artworks and “Interpret them according to their existential structure”; but also will move in the opposite direction and outline the “existential structure[s]” underlying an ontological aesthetics,” and then use these structures as a basis upon which to investigate “factual existentiell possibilities in their chief features and interconnections.” An “*existentiell*” possibility is one that played is out “through existing itself” (*BT* 12) – a possibility which is necessarily potentiated by an underlying existential-ontological structure. Heidegger cautions against

misinterpreting *Being and Time* in this direction, i.e. ‘existentiell-anthropologically,’ and of seeing the interconnections of disclosedness, truth, and Dasein from the perspective of a moral resolve – instead of *the other way*, proceeding from the prevailing ground of Da-sein and grasping truth as openness an dis-closedness, as temporalizing-spatializing of the free play of the time-space of be-ing. (*C Phil.* 60-61)

Yet he adds “this misinterpretation is basically excluded ... if from the beginning we hold on to the grounding-question of the ‘meaning of be-ing’ as the *only* question” (*C Phil.* 61). For this reason, we must never lose sight of aesthetic phenomenology’s grounding in fundamental ontology, and we have sought to maintain this focus by initiating our investigations with the explication of the primordial, existential-ontological structures underlying “the interconnections of disclosedness, truth, and Dasein,” and only then

⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper, 1962) 301; hereafter cited as *BT*, followed by the relevant page number/s of the German edition.

moving on to consider the existentiell movement (a movement which is still an outgrowth of Dasein's existential-ontological character) of Dasein towards enacting "a moral resolve" made possible by the moment of vision grounded in resoluteness [*Entschlossenheit*]. To ex-ist is directional, either toward the Dasein itself or other beings – in other words, existence is always a form of projection conceived as a Being-towards. Dasein "is ontically distinguished" from other mere entities "by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it" (BT 12); and therefore, Dasein is not an ontical being, but is an ontological Being.⁶ "Issue" must here be understood in a dual sense: firstly, as an issuing-forth of Being as projecting; and secondly, as a point of contention, between Dasein and itself, Dasein and its world, and Dasein and the world. Being as ontological is structurally distinct from ontical entities merely occurring in the world as presences at hand, even though "the question of existence is one of Dasein's ontical 'affairs'" (BT 12); since as always already contextualized within a series of worlds, Dasein's existence plays out specifically through its involvements in and with these worlds. Dasein's ontological status is rather due to its ability to reflect on and project itself, as well as to its "understanding of existence in general" which "is enclosed in every existential understanding" (BT 11). In other words, Being's reflexivity and projective capacities are the conditions of its ontological freedom as worlding Being. This same ontological freedom also underlies the phenomenological method, wherein the method itself "solicits a radical shift of perspective (*Blickswendung*) whereby imaginative consciousness may reflect upon itself."⁷

The movement of issuing-forth as ontological projection is constitutive of, and common to, all three terms of the aesthetic equation: the artist issues-forth into an artwork through the act of creation; the audience issues-forth out of themselves to enter into the space opened out by the artwork through both passive and active reception; and the artwork issues-forth as its own world, and thus with its own distinct dimensions of Being. Dasein's issuing-forth as projection is founded on its temporal structure. This temporal orientation, extending out of the past as a having-been, and centered in the present as the moment of making-present, regards the future as the possible site of its ownmost, authentic potentialities-for-Being,

⁶ "Ontical" refers to the manner of being of mere things as presences-at-hand, which are more or less static. While Dasein, regardless of its instantiation, can never be merely present-at-hand, due to its ability to project itself and its temporal structure, and hence its futural character.

⁷ Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining* (New York: Fordham U Pr., 1998) 5.

since its “essence lies in the fact that in each case it has its Being to be, and has it as its own” (BT 12). Here we see the issue of Dasein’s Being as a point of contention, for if the future is the sphere of possibilities, one must choose a distinct, authentic direction from a multiplicity of potential ways of Being, or else remain irresolute. This choice is inevitably accompanied and conditioned by some degree of contention between an intending and what has transpired in the past or current conditions either as an enabling or limiting factors, or some admixture of the two. There is no absolute free will, but rather the freedom of our will is to a lesser or greater degree conditioned by our situation, both personal and historical. Yet this does not have to be the case with the aesthetic. We maintain (and here we diverge from Heidegger’s own viewpoint) that Dasein, in the sphere of the aesthetic, is able to enjoy a pure and perfect freedom of Being. The fact that the liberating powers of the aesthetic and the imaginary access a primordial part of our Being is vividly demonstrated by children’s love of stories in general, and particularly of those which treat the fantastic or absurd. As instantiated in specific works, the aesthetic provides a space wherein potential modes of Being are foregrounded and played-out, and thus is especially open to, and receptive of, a thematic ontological investigation. The aesthetic provides a domain wherein possible projections of Being may be tried on through Dasein’s explicitly putting itself at risk by hazarding its own identity and previous tenor of Being by willingly sacrificing itself and giving itself over to an other. In this situation “what is at stake is nothing less than a humanity, a being-human determined by the essence of being.”⁸

An aesthetic phenomenology, as a thematic anthropology based on Existential Phenomenology, is concerned with the way in which the aesthetic “*shows itself in itself*” (BT 28). Since “*phenomenology*” as “the *method of ontology* is nothing but the sequence of the steps involved in the approach to being as such and the elaboration of its structures,”⁹ (BPP 328), an aesthetic phenomenology is analogously a series of steps which approach aesthetic Being as such and seeks to elaborate the structures underlying the aesthetic itself and aesthetic experience in general. Thus our approach is similar to Todorov’s definition of “*Poetics*” as a discipline that

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale U Pr., 1987) 204; hereafter *IM*.

⁹ Albert Hofstadter, “Translator’s Introduction,” *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, by Martin Heidegger (Bloomington: Indiana U Pr., 1988) 328; hereafter *BPP*.

aims at a knowledge of the general laws that preside over the birth of each work. But in contradistinction to such sciences as psychology, sociology, etc., all of which read phenomena through the controlling lens of a specific discipline, it seeks these laws within literature itself. Poetics is therefore an approach to literature at once ‘abstract’ and “internal.”¹⁰

Yet this is not to say that the aesthetic is involved solely in self-absorbed isolation. Wolfgang Iser has also structured his “idealized model of text-processing along phenomenological lines,” but he has done so with an eye which also looks beyond the boundaries of what too often defines the field of aesthetics in the common accepted view, since “a phenomenological description allows us to focus on processes of constitution that occurs not only in reading but also in our basic relations to the world in general” (P 49). Yet in the realm of the aesthetic, what exactly comprises that which shows itself is multidimensional, and hence problematic. Does the work reveal itself as a discrete and self-sufficient object? What is the relation between an artwork and the context of an artistic movement or reaction, a national tradition, a historical epoch, or a trans-historical tradition? Or is the work primarily an instrument for the self-expression of a particular artist, or is it merely the veiled vehicle for an insidious “ideology”? Or is the work not further determined by the way in which it is received by its audience, and as such is it not also potentially an arena of self-discovery, site-specific to any one who engages with the work; or is the self merely in thrall to some deeper, determinative structure? Or is any one of these perspectives too limited on its own merits, and thus each one of these questions serves to point to a larger network? All that is certain is the unavoidability of the aesthetic equation, regardless of however the various external factors may play out, and for this reason an ontological interrogation of the factors of the aesthetic equation will serve us as the grounding for our investigations.

The same question might be asked of the aesthetic that Heidegger asks of Being – which is to say, what do we mean by “aesthetic”? Originally, the Greek “αἰσθητικ-ός” meant “of or pertaining to αἴσθητά,

¹⁰ Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction to Poetics*, trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Pr., 1981) 6.

things perceptible by the senses, as opposed to νοητά, things thinkable or immaterial.”¹¹ This is still essentially the sense in which Immanuel Kant uses the term in relation to the “transcendental aesthetic,”¹² which as the “outer sense” of “space” and the “inner sense” of “time,” provides the grounding required for external and internal intuitions (Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* 67). It was not until Alexander Baumgarten “first formulated” a “new ‘science’ of aesthetics ... in his *Aesthetica* (1739) and *Metaphysica* (1739)”¹³ that “aesthetics” receives its “first modern use” (Engell 96). In this modern sense, “aesthetic” as an adjective “pertain[s] to the appreciation or criticism of the beautiful”; while “the aesthetic” or “aesthetics” as a substantive, collective noun is “the philosophy or theory of taste, or of the perception of the beautiful in nature or art.”¹⁴ Thus the philosophy of aesthetics is concerned not only with the parameters and development of aesthetic judgment, but also with what constitutes the ontology of the beautiful. Here we note a bifurcation in the significance of the term. Aesthetics is concerned both with our ability to detect the beautiful *ab extra*, as well as with our ability to delineate the beautiful in-itself. Thus from the beginning, the philosophy of aesthetics is concerned not only with how the aesthetic shows itself through its reception by an audience, but also with the way in which the work of art shows itself through itself. Here we find the initial hints that will determine our starting point and manner of proceeding: the aesthetic cannot be limited to the scrutiny of a fixed and static object, but rather must be conceived in terms of a series of interactions between distinct, yet interdependent Beings. We must at the same time bear in mind that all three elements have the character of Dasein as they are constituted by projections of specific understandings of Being. For while all three elements of the aesthetic equation are daseinal Beings in their own right, they come to fullness only when they merge in the event of reception. Iser also advocates the centrality of reception, and thus defines an “aesthetic” object as one which “both initiates and pre-structures the actual response” (P 51).¹⁵

¹¹ “Aesthetic,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, New Ed.

¹² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin’s Pr., 1965) 66.

¹³ James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard U Pr., 1999) 93.

¹⁴ “Aesthetic,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, New Ed.

¹⁵ Here the aesthetic shows a similarity to the species of revelation, insofar as that which is revealed or occasions a revelation commences the process of revelation itself and lays out the conditions beforehand

Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics also recognizes the interplay of the elements of the aesthetic equation along these lines. Ricoeur initially posits an "autonomy of the text" which as "threefold" addresses all three terms of the aesthetic equation: "with respect to the intention of the author; with respect to the sociological conditions of the production of the text; and finally, with respect to the original addressee." The first autonomous dimension emerges when "what the text signifies no longer coincides with what the author meant; verbal meaning and mental meaning have different destinies" and "implies the possibility that the 'matter of the text' may escape from the author's restricted intentional horizon, and that the world of the text may explode the world of its author." The same possibility which "is true of psychological conditions" also holds for "sociological conditions, even though he who is prepared to liquidate the author is less prepared to perform the same operation in the sociological sphere." The aesthetic work itself, through its ability "to transcend its own psycho-sociological conditions of production," is further able "to open itself to an unlimited series of readings," which are relevant to their own "socio-cultural contexts." This is to say that "the work *decontextualizes* itself" only "to *recontextualize* itself differently in the act of reading."¹⁶ Thus in Ricoeur's analysis, the literary work of art also has a daseinal Being of its own independent of its circumstances, while at the same time it accrues a multiplicity of potential ways of Being in relation to its recipients across a range of temporal moments and cultural situations.

We can see the conception of the aesthetic as a tripartite event already underlying the Latin "*pulcher*," which as meaning "beautiful, fair, lovely," implicitly perceives the multi-layered interplay which potentiates the aesthetic well before it is explicitly voiced in the post-Enlightenment definition of "aesthetics" specifically as a science of the beautiful. Through its etymological "connection with *pol-ire*,"¹⁷ the conception of *pulcher* [beauty] is connected to the first moment of the aesthetic equation. As something shaped out of previously existing materials, this aesthetic is conceived as an endeavor which is

wherein a given revelation will take place. The confluence of revelation and the aesthetic, while implicitly operative in the mythological grounding of fundamental cultural artworks and more explicitly found as a functional principle in Greek drama's conflation of state spectacle, mythology, and personal psychology; becomes progressively more pronounced during the course of the eighteenth century, reaching its apogee in Romantic aesthetics and its Victorian inheritors.

¹⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge U Pr., 1998) 91.

¹⁷ "Pulcher," *Cassell's Latin Dictionary*, 1955 ed.

constituted by the imposition of technique, which includes such activities as “polish[ing], fil[ing],” conducted in order to “make smooth,” or else to generally “adorn, embellish, ... polish, [or] finish”¹⁸ some matter or content into a distinct form. All of these processes are not only part of the work as created (which is to say *artificial* in a strict sense), but also bring to light “*pulcher’s*” etymological correlation with “*parēre*,” since these process finally allow the work itself “to appear” or “becomes visible”¹⁹ – which is say, they permit it to “shine forth”²⁰ as an individual Dasein, which may eventually become resolute and recognize its own distinct spirit. “In German” the conception of shining is etymologically related to the notion of beauty, for “the word *scheinen*, meaning to shine as well as appear, is itself related to the word *schön*, meaning beautiful.”²¹ Thus we find that in “*Truth and Method*, Gadamer” defined “the concept of the beautiful – understood as ‘radiance,’ as that which self-evidently ‘shines forth’” (Malpas 288). In fact, the notion of shining-forth is not exclusively the “ontological dimension” of the Roman and “the Greek conception of the beautiful,”²² for it is precisely the notion of shining-forth which pivotally links all three moments of the aesthetic equation through the Being of the artwork as a self-presenting. For Gadamer “the self-presentation of the thing in the event of understanding is something expressed by [the] concept” of “*die Einleuchtende*, ‘that which shines forth.’”²³ At the same time, the artwork through its shining-forth is connected to the third, receptive moment, for “the enlightening perspective is the self-presentation of the thing itself” in regards to the “particular horizon” (Schmidt 78) of the recipient. In this context, “the beautiful in connection with the comprehension of the intelligible is *einleuchtend*. Literally a ‘shining-in,’”

¹⁸ “Pōllo,” *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary*, 1955 ed.

¹⁹ “Pārēo,” *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary*, 1955 ed.

²⁰ The phrase is borrowed from Heidegger’s essay “The Thing”: “Whatever becomes a thing occurs out of the ringing of the world’s mirror-play. Only when – all of a sudden, presumably – world worlds as a world, only then does the ring shine forth, the joining from which the ringing of earth and heaven, divinities and mortal, wrests itself free for that compliancy of simple oneness” (*Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter [New York: Harper, 1971]) 182; hereafter *PLT*.

²¹ Jeff Malpas, “Beginning in Wonder: Placing the Origin of Thinking,” *Philosophical Romanticism*, ed. Nikolas Kompridis (New York: Routledge, 2006) 297.

²² James Risser, “Hermeneutics of the Possible: On Finitude and Truth in Philosophical Hermeneutics,” *The Specter of Relativism: Truth, Dialogue, and Phronesis in Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt (Evanston: Northwestern U Pr., 1995) 125.

²³ Lawrence K. Schmidt, “Uncovering Hermeneutic Truth,” *The Specter of Relativism: Truth, Dialogue, and Phronesis in Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt (Evanston: Northwestern U Pr., 1995) 76.

as we say (for example) in “the expression ‘an enlightening experience.’” Such “enlightening refers to the fact that something has come to light in the sense that something becomes clear in coming upon us” (Risser 125). Shining-forth as enlightening finally becomes more or less explicit (though not necessarily explicitly thematized) for the recipient, since in the end “the enlightening is experienced by the cognizer as enlightening” (Schmidt 79). Both the artwork and the audience take part in delineating the aesthetic as a shining-forth, and thus “drawing from the texts of Plato, Gadamer argues that the beautiful in relation to Being is such that it collapses the distinction between illuminated and illuminating” (Risser 125). In other words, the work and its recipient emerge into a shared Being, which at the same time shares something of the Being of the artist her/himself as its initiator.

But the aesthetic shining-forth associated specifically with the notion of *parēre*, which eventuates both the illumination of the artwork and the illuminating of the recipient’s ontological horizons, first demands the audience’s active *greeting* of the aesthetic, and thus makes any passivity in aesthetic reception impossible, if the full dimensions of the aesthetic event are indeed to be brought into play. When we greet someone or something, we at the one and the same moment welcome, and are open to, that which is being greeted. Greeting additionally entails both addressing and responding, not only in the moment of greeting itself, but further in the subsequent interactions to which greeting serves as a prelude. What must not be forgotten, however, is that such a greeting must first and last pay its respects to that which is greeted in the act of greeting itself. The situation of greeting is not a one-sided subjective experience, wherein one comports oneself according to the fleeting dictates of whim, but rather we comport ourselves with both respect and deference, yet without forfeiting who we ourselves are, for an event of greeting will ultimately fail if it is deficient on either side. In the context of *parēre*, the aesthetic is not only something that is merely perceived in the sense of being taken in through the senses, and which thereby becomes “clear” or “evident.” Instead, *parēre* further implies something which one must “be obedient to.”²⁴ Hence the aesthetic is not merely something perceived, felt, or even interpreted; but it rather shines forth out of its own Being as that which it itself is, and in this manner it imposes its own distinct claim upon its recipient.

²⁴ “Parēre,” *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary*, 1955 ed.

The audience must also come wholly forth to *greet* the work if the *call* of the aesthetic imperative is not merely listened to, but truly *heard*. Thus we can see that the greeting performed by the recipient is threefold: we welcome an artwork by standing back at a proper distance to allow it the space in which to establish itself and maintain its integrity; we address ourselves to it by approaching it in an attentive, respectful manner, and through investing ourselves in the encounter in a mode of responsiveness; and if the encounter is successful, we welcome it fully by entering into the horizons it discloses. If the coming-together is unsuccessful, we retreat – yet retreat necessarily forestalls the aesthetic, for aesthetic investigations, in the words of John Keats, “require a greeting of the Spirit to make them wholly exist.”²⁵

Joseph Addison, in the first of his papers on the *Pleasures of the Imagination* (*Spectator* “No. 411. SATURDAY, JUNE 21.” [1712]), offers a rough sketch of the threefold greeting performed by the recipient in the aesthetic event.²⁶ Firstly, the recipient “is let into a great many pleasures” which are evoked by the aesthetic, and which disclose and define their own aesthetic world – a word indicated by Addison’s spatial metaphor. The recipient is permitted access into this space both through her/his own attunement as what Addison terms Being “of a polite imagination” (4: 338), as well as through the self-disclosure of the aesthetic itself. Secondly, we address ourselves to the aesthetic through a conversation, such as (for example) when we “converse with a picture” (4: 338). This conversation is amicable and takes place between two Beings with a shared horizon of interest, in an atmosphere of mutual respect, and thus one so disposed may “find an agreeable companion in a statue” (4: 338). Thirdly, the recipient invests her/himself in the aesthetic conversation not only as a responsive “companion,” but furthermore responds personally insofar as she / “He meets with a secret refreshment” (4: 338) as a result of the aesthetic event. As a “meet[ing] with,” this response is simultaneously troped as a mode of greeting and encounter.

Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* (the first section of the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* [1790]), also posits that such a tripartite greeting occurs when we encounter the beautiful. In this encounter, the concepts of the understanding [*Verstand*] must be brought into free play in relation to

²⁵ John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard U Pr., 1958) 1: 243.

²⁶ Joseph Addison, *The Works of the Right Honorable Joseph Addison, A New Edition, with Notes by Richard Hurd, D.D. Lord Bishop of Worcester*, 6 vols. (London. 1811) 336.

the beautiful – a process of play which paradoxically requires both our active and passive participation in aesthetic reception. We welcome something which is beautiful by regarding it with disinterest. Such disinterest is a holding-back on the part of the audience, so that the beautiful can show itself as it is itself. At the same time, such disinterest guarantees that our faculties will not be stuck on any preexisting, fixed idea, and thus may be allowed free play in the act of aesthetic contemplation. Kant defines this disinterest as “a merely formal purposiveness, i.e., a purposiveness without a purpose,”²⁷ specifically designating this purposiveness as merely “formal,” since this allows us to “at least observe a purposiveness as to form and take note of its objects” (Kant, *Critique of Judgment* 65). The free play of concepts that the understanding puts into play in the act of the intuition of the beautiful is the way we both greet it and invest ourselves. Our response in meeting the beautiful is a “feeling of pleasure” (Kant, *Critique of Judgment* 44), which in turn occasions (and for Kant demands) the reflective, aesthetic judgment, “it is beautiful.” The response phase in Kant is somewhat limited from the perspective of our investigations, insofar as Kant does not provide a fully developed ontological aesthetic; and therefore, he does not address Dasein’s mode of Being as either disclosing or projective. Kant’s aesthetic judgment is by his own definition “not a logical judgment,” and hence “*cannot be other than subjective*” (Kant, *Critique of Judgment* 44). While an aesthetic judgment is presumably universal as the judgment of a *sensus communis*, it remains effectually constrained by the subjective, since it is by definition tied to the subjective sensation of pleasure. Kant’s conception of aesthetic response is similarly constricted. As a subjective feeling of pleasure, the outcome of the aesthetic is most likely a more or less soporific influence, rather than an incitement or path towards the moment of vision. The artwork demands an engaged response from its recipient which respects not only the integrity of the work of art, but also looks back toward the recipient her/himself.

The aesthetic, however, is all too often seen as a self-evident concept, and hence is simply glossed over or even foreclosed to further investigations. Such a passing-over often occurs in much the same way that Heidegger details in regard to the supposedly foregone question of Being and the nature of the “is.” The designation of something as “aesthetic” may be simply accepted as a “‘universal’ concept” (BT 3), which is to say as something which is so obvious that it does not seem to need further investigation. Such

²⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987) 73.

is often the case with works which we look back on over a certain distance of time – works which we commonly say have stood the “test of time.” In these instances, the individual work of art is set down as a “masterpiece” or a “classic,” and as such is said to be a paragon of its type, and hence thought to be beyond reproach, and frequently even further critical scrutiny or questioning. In such instances, we refuse to believe that so many previous assessments have been mistaken, and consequently we defer to their judgment. In extreme cases, this position may lead to a radical conservatism, from which perspective only works of the past are worthy to be deemed “art.” Under the dominance of this view, which holds that “the appearance of art as something historical,” which is to say as something cordoned off and sequestered in the past, we are subject to “the delusion of a culture that holds that only what is already familiar to us from our cultural tradition is significant.”²⁸ The state of affairs is similar with works of more recent date, although in these cases the route to assessment is a sort of instinctual reflective judgment. In these instances, the aesthetic is set up as taking in such an expansive field that in the end the term is all but meaningless. The aesthetic becomes the dupe of radical subjectivizing, wherein whatever is labeled “art” must be “art,” and hence is susceptible to the vagaries of mere fashion trends. Such a perspective takes the aesthetic as something which is supposedly “self-evident,” and thus in this reflexive and automatic “understanding” of the aesthetic, its “meaning is still veiled in darkness” (*BT* 4). This attitude is often displayed by adherents of so-called “progressive” views of the arts who, in their mania for whatever is new and their desire to repudiate the very idea of a tradition as nothing more than a reactionary, conservative atavism, are continually on the prowl for novel artistic means to replace the supposedly worn out modes of the past. Such an attitude “is sustained by the delusion” which underlies “the critique of ideology,” which “claims that history should begin anew, since we are already thoroughly familiar with the tradition in which we stand and can safely leave it behind” (*RB* 46).

The second manner in which the aesthetic is bypassed takes place whenever the aesthetic is denied its own domain and fundamentally subsumed and dominated by the taxonomy of some other alien discipline, such as “frameworks taken from psychoanalysis, Marxism, and social theory in the broader

²⁸ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge U Pr., 2002) 46; hereafter *RB*.

sense” (P 264). While information drawn from diverse fields may be relevant to a specific artwork and may also provide a worthwhile means of access and valid focus, this approach cannot wholly determine our investigations in an *ad hoc* fashion, lest the aesthetic becomes little more than the documentation of a therapeutic practice, a case study, or an economic or newspaper report. In such cases, alien “heuristics” are “taken from other disciplines and imposed on literature.”²⁹ The emphasis on “theory” which has particularly plagued the study of literature was initially advanced as a rearguard action designed to combat the feeling that “literature has, to a large extent lost its social validity in contemporary society, and it was the attempt to counteract this erosion that led to the breakthrough of theory.” In order to justify its social utility and supposedly bestow upon it relevance, “literary theory became increasingly dependent on the relationship between literature and society.” Thus literature came to be increasingly governed by “theory,” for literature became a subject for study “only under conditions that were relevant to the preoccupations of that society.” In this way, “literary theory” was determined by more or less activist concerns, and thus “fell under the influence of prevailing social objectives, which as commonplaces of the time scarcely needed literature as a medium through which to articulate themselves” (P 215). “Theory” became its own justification, its own impetus and end, and “insofar as it served to legitimate criticism, it tended more and more to draw on other disciplines, thus imposing alien orientations on literature, very often to its disadvantage” (P 264). Thereby the aesthetic qualities of the text are overwritten by something *ab extra*, which “in extreme terms ... means that the literary text would then be the illustration of this meaning existing outside itself” (P 5). In such cases, any possibility of authentic aesthetic response is forestalled, because “the hermeneutic feedback is blocked or even obliterated if one sets out with an established theory for which one seeks support in literature. The literary work is then downgraded to the status of an illustration for the theory in question” (P 50). Such oversights also occur in such a broadly-termed field as “cultural studies,” as well as in various “historicist” schools, for while “no one will deny that literary texts do contain a historical substratum ... the manner in which literature takes it up and communicates it does not seem to be determined merely by historical circumstances, but by the specific aesthetic structure

²⁹ Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U Pr., 1993) xiii; hereafter *FI*.

inherent in it” (P 5). The danger incurred by impositions of extrinsic structures increases proportionally as the dominance of the interpretive template increases. While any of these areas may be brought into play in the study of particular works of art to which they are relevant, to do so at the outset of any investigation more or less without respect to its specific focus inevitably distorts the development of any study – which Coleridge characterizes in *The Science and System of Logic* (1822), as “reducing all to the one that chanced to exercise a predominant attraction.”³⁰ J. Hillis Miller notes the covering up which occurs due to the prevalence of this third manner when he writes:

I believe it is a severe limitation of literary and cultural study today that a good bit of it tends not to interest itself much in what might be called the religious or ontological dimensions of writers’ and cultures’ ideologies in favor of a more or less exclusive infatuation with the three mythological graces of contemporary humanistic study: Race, Class, and Gender.³¹

Under the auspices of such “infatuation[s]” (Miller xi), the aesthetic is defined and restricted by something outside itself. If it were the case that the aesthetic is indeed wholly dominated and determined by some external structure, then aesthetic expression itself becomes superfluous. For example, in the specific case of literature, “if a literary text could be reduced to one particular meaning, it would be an expression of something else – namely, of that meaning whose status is determined by the fact that it exists independently of the text” (P 5). But is literature specifically, and the aesthetic in general, superfluous? Does it express something unique, or is it only a species of ventriloquism surreptitiously spoken by the virtually faceless purveyors of some ideology? What happens when the “ontological dimensions” not only “of writers’ and cultures’ ideologies,” but also the ontological dimensions of the individual existences, experiences, and actions which comprise them are encountered, and potentially altered, in and through the aesthetic?

To get at the ground of the aesthetic, we must dare to bring the domain of ontology into our investigations, and in so doing open the modalities and breadth of Being associated with, revealed though,

³⁰ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Shorter Works and Fragments*, ed. H.J. Jackson and J.R. de J. Jackson, 2 vols., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 11 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1995) 2: 1018; hereafter *SW&F*.

³¹ J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (Urbana: U Illinois Pr., 2000) xi.

and potentially changed by, the aesthetic. Insofar as the current trends in literary criticism often subsume human Being beneath “alien orientations” of supposedly determinative structures, what is required is at least a partial reversal of current trends: “Instead of subjugating” a specifically aesthetic “medium to theories successful in other realms of thought or social practice, we must make the medium the starting point if we are to pinpoint the indexical value it appears to possess” (*P* 264) – an “indexical value” which is directly relevant to, and dependent upon its relation to, Dasein. Dr. Samuel Johnson recognizes the value in such a task and endorses what is essentially a phenomenological method, specifically as distinguished from more or less “scientific” methodologies, in the *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765): aesthetic “works” are “not raised on principles demonstrative and scientific, but appealing wholly to observation and experience.”³² “Scientific” methodologies, on the other hand, by working with previously established definitions, inevitably end up constricting the aesthetic, for “science ... being fixed and limited, admits of no other variety than such as arises from new methods of distribution, or new arts of illustration” (*J Works* 4: 282). In the end, all efforts “To circumscribe poetry,” or the aesthetic in general, “by a definition will only shew the narrowness of the definer.”³³ An aesthetic phenomenology, as it is opposed to the foregone and wholesale dominance of any alien structures, is above all an effort to reclaim Dasein for itself. But this does not mean that an aesthetic phenomenology merely desires to swaddle Being in a solipsistic cocoon. By allowing Dasein to enlighten the space of its Being, new modes of praxis are potentiated for humanity at large. “Pragmatically” considered, the “objective” of an aesthetic “anthropology” in its most general formulation is to “seek to diagnose the human condition” (*P* 279). Yet this diagnosis is not exclusively concerned with merely detecting diseases, and for this reason “need not be confined to stressing deficiencies; it may also bring out desires, needs, and necessities which may now take their rightful place through fantasy” (*P* 279). This should not be misunderstood to imply or sanction any predominantly psychological or physiological views of aesthetic experience (for even the term “experience” can be categorized in more than one manner, as we shall see later). When “Viewed extrinsically” aesthetics are

³² Samuel Johnson, *Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, 18 vols. (New Haven: Yale U Pr., 1958 -) 7: 59; hereafter *J Works*.

³³ Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. G.B. Hill, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford U Pr., 1905) 3: 251; hereafter *J Lives*.

“senseless, nonsensical, and therefore nihilistic. For if the aesthetic is just a matter of physiology, then the essence and reality of art dissolve into nervous states, into processes in the nerve cells.”³⁴ The same holds true for a system of aesthetics determined exclusively in psychological terms, for the mind or subconscious in this case is no less “extrinsically,” and therefore reductively, defined. We shall instead seek to (in a variation on a phrase of Heidegger’s found in *On the Way to Language*) *reflect on the aesthetic qua the aesthetic*: “Instead of explaining [the aesthetic] in terms of one thing or another, and thus running away from it, the way to [the aesthetic] intends to let [the aesthetic] be experienced as [the aesthetic].”³⁵ For only “by using the special nature of” the aesthetic medium, will we be able “to open up insights into our human equipment” and “make” the aesthetic itself “an instrument of exploration” (P 264) of our humanity. We do not wish to be interpreted as positing here a hegemonic concept of “humanity” masquerading as a universal, but which is rather covertly and actually based on the assumptions and obsessions of one particular segment of humanity which sets itself up as sole adjudicator of what is or is not “universal”; for the various types and works of art endemic to a cultural community need to be approached and addressed in terms relevant to their own distinct and unique Being – a Being inevitably influenced by various environmental factors. Our encounters with the aesthetic thus demand in regards to all factors of the aesthetic equation a radically individual approach both in regards to the investigator her/himself, as well as to that which is explored and uncovered through the investigation.

As a distinctively human event and experience, aesthetic investigation falls under the aegis of the discipline of the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*), or what is generally referred to in English as “the humanities.” The initial movement of the term, however, was from England towards the Continent, for the “German term *Geisteswissenschaften*” originated as a translation of John Stuart Mill’s English term ‘moral sciences.’”³⁶ During the nineteenth century, the term “moral” and “morality” were defined in light of Being as projection. Morality, in Matthew Arnold’s formulation, is a question of the projective

³⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, trans. David Farrell Krell, 4 vols. (San Francisco: Harper, 1991) 1: 92; hereafter *N*.

³⁵ Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper, 1971) 119; hereafter *OWL*.

³⁶ Joel Weinsheimer and Edward Robinson, “Translators’ Preface,” *Truth and Method*, by Hans-Georg Gadamer (New York: Continuum, 1998) xviii.

modalization of Dasein as a lived response to its situation; thus “the question, *how to live*, is itself a moral idea.” From this perspective, “a large sense is of course to be given to the term *moral*. Whatever bears upon the question, ‘how to live,’ comes under it.” This question is central to our humanity, and thus “it is the question which most interests every man, and with which, in some way or other, he is perpetually occupied.”³⁷ Similarly for Thomas Carlyle, the “Moral” is a “power, manifested chiefly” in “Conduct.”³⁸ Morality is realized in action, in Being-in-the-world as Being-towards, and not solely in self-encircling “Self-contemplation” or “self-seeking” (Carlyle 3: 12). “Conduct,” as a leading-with (i.e. *con-duct*), acknowledges that the self is not wholly self-contained, but can find itself only through that which exists beyond it, either in the world or another Being. In the aesthetic equation, the other is potentially represented by all three terms of the aesthetic equation: the artist, the audience, and the artwork – and whatever truth is disclosed through the aesthetic is evolved through the interactions and reconciliations of these terms. Here we enjoin the ongoing philosophic and aesthetic tradition which David P. Haney sees as rooted in “Romantic and modern efforts to broaden moral considerations beyond the narrowness of systematic rules to a consideration of the question of ‘how we should live’ that has obsessed poetry from the beginning.”³⁹

Conceived generally as a way of knowing, the human sciences disclose a form of truth which is distinct from that promoted by the so-called “hard sciences” as a form of aesthetic truth. Thus, such a truth will hardly meet the empirical standards of objectivity or verifiability demanded by conventional science – but this does not mean that what it discloses is any less true, for it may be ontologically more true, if one is willing to admit varying degrees and forms of “truth” beyond those affirmed by either propositional logic and its methods of “consequitive reasoning” (Keats 1: 185), or confirmed exclusively through the trials and errors of scientific method. In the view of Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, such forms of truth are at play in all forms of discourse, and hence he concludes that “there can be no kind of writing

³⁷ Matthew Arnold, *English Literature and Irish Politics*, ed. R.H. Spencer, *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* IX (Ann Arbor: U Michigan Pr., 1973) 45.

³⁸ Thomas Carlyle, “Characteristics,” *Carlyle’s Essays*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Riverside Pr., 1872) 3: 11.

³⁹ David P. Haney, *The Challenge of Coleridge: Ethics and Interpretation in Romanticism and Modern Philosophy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State U Pr., 2001) 78.

which relates to men and manners where it is not necessary for the author to understand poetical and moral truth.”⁴⁰ In fact, the aesthetic is oftentimes a more commodious conveyance for the truths which are most important for us, since what in the view of science are “mere lies,” when they are “judiciously composed” – which is to say, when they are in an aesthetic form – “can teach us the truth of things beyond any other manner” (Shaftesbury 1: 223). Such aesthetic and ontological truths speak less to the world of the real and reason and more to the reality of the imagination. The aesthetic like “the polite masters of morality, criticism, and other speculations abstracted from matter, though they do not directly treat of the visible parts of nature,” nevertheless “often draw from them their similitudes, metaphors, and allegories,” and in this way “a truth in the understanding is as it were reflected by the imagination” (Addison 4: 375).

Gadamer for his part sees the human sciences as diverging from “modern science” due to the fact that the latter is concerned with the “true” as verifiable through “mathematical methodology” (TM 20), whereas the former “is not nourished on the true but on the probable, the verisimilar” (TM 20-21). This type of knowledge is akin to “Practical knowledge, phronesis,” since both are “directed towards the concrete situation,” and “thus it must grasp the ‘circumstances’ in their infinite variety” (TM 21). Here again we see the intimate relationship between the aesthetic and praxis in regards to the problematic of existing. In being directed towards the question of how to live in the world, “The human sciences ... are ‘moral sciences,’” in that they are concerned with “moral knowledge (phronesis),” as opposed to the “theoretical knowledge (episteme)” which is the goal of the natural sciences” (TM 314). Truth in this case is not the correspondence between a datum of knowledge possessed by a subject and a certain given object, but is rather a truth evolved through processes of understanding worked out through existing.

The turning towards “the concrete situation” as a locus of truth in the domain of aesthetics as opposed to a system of abstract “rules” first becomes clear in regards to parallel changes in the concept of scientific method in the eighteenth century. Cassirer posits that “the inner transition by which the domination of classical theory in the realm of aesthetics is broken corresponds exactly from the point of view of method with the change which takes place in the theory of natural science between Descartes and

⁴⁰ Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manner, Opinions, Times*, ed. John M. Robertson, 2 vols. (London: Grant Richards, 1900) 1: 216.

Newton. Both “transition[s]” seek to “free the mind from the absolute predominance of deduction” and instead “to make way for the facts, for the phenomena, for direct observation – not to the exclusion of deduction but side by side with it” (297). While “Basic principles are not to be abandoned,” they instead “Are to be adapted to the phenomena” itself, rather than “subordinated to certain principles possessing *a priori* validity” (Cassirer 297-298). Herein we discover the origins of the phenomenological method in aesthetics, for now “The method of explanation and deduction gradually approaches that of pure description” (Cassirer 298). Here we also find the introduction of the recipient as a constitutive element in the aesthetic event. Since such “description does not begin directly with works of art,” but rather “attempts first to characterize and ascertain the mode of aesthetic contemplation”; therefore, “It is no longer primarily a matter of artistic genres, but of artistic behavior, that is, of the impression which the work of art makes on the spectator and of the judgment he passes on his impression for himself and for others” (Cassirer 298). In its concern with “artistic behavior,” this new methodology takes up an ontological orientation as an exploration of ways of Being-towards evidenced in, and enacted through the aesthetic. Yet this methodology does not abandon itself to any variety of radical subjectivity, since “the impression which the work of art makes” is still qualified through a series of “judgment[s],” which are valid not only for the one enacting the judgment, but must (at least to some degree) be “universally” valid – which is to say, it must in some way be accessible within the context of the with-world [*Mitwelt*] as a way of Being-with [*Mitsein*].

For our purposes, we are similarly concerned with “the concrete situation” of understanding expressed as a specifically aesthetic understanding – or perhaps we should rather say, way of understanding. Such an understanding is not applicable to instances where we understand some-thing by grasping some matter at-hand, such as a mathematical problem, or the manner in which to carry out a defined mechanical task, or even comprehend some historical happening. For in these instances, there is a delimited, finite rudimentary matter which must be grasped by the understanding [*Verstand*]. Such a “nuts and bolts” understanding does not require any investigation, for everything is more or less spread out before us, even if a particular piece of evidence is missing. Even in the case of historical matters, it is often the case that gaps in understanding are overcome through the finding of an object or document which had been lost or previously unknown to be extant. There is no so-called “science of art” which is able to

“replace” or “surpass the experience of art” (*TM* xxii); and therefore, an aesthetic understanding is only negotiated and evolved through Dasein’s existing, which in its very structure and articulation is unsystematic. Aesthetic understanding is akin to the way we use “understanding” when we speak of understanding ourselves or someone else. It implies a diversity of components, comprising both experiences themselves and their circumstances, as well as those undergoing the experience. Similarly, Gadamer’s conception of “understanding” is not limited to the common understanding as “*Verstehen*,” but is understanding in the sense of “*Verständigung*, ‘coming to an Understanding with someone,’ ‘coming to an agreement with someone,’ and *Einverständnis*, ‘understanding, agreement, consent.’” Thus we see that Gadamer conceives of understanding as an evolving process. Simultaneously invoking all three senses of “understanding,” “Gadamer posits a three-way relation: one person comes to an understanding with another person about something they thus both understand. When two people ‘understand each other’ (*sich verstehen*) they always do so with respect to something” (Weinsheimer, “Translator’s Preface” xvi). Thus, in this context, under-standing is literally a “standing-under,” wherein two individuals come to an understanding in reference to, and under the aegis of, a third, distinct issue. Iser also underscores the centrality of this sense of coming to an understanding in regards to our interactions with a text, in spite of the apparently problematic fact that “there is no such frame of reference” such as that which governs “the partners in dyadic interaction” when they are in a “face-to-face situation,” since “a text cannot adapt itself to each reader it comes into contact with.” The reader is nevertheless able to evolve an understanding, since “the codes that might regulate this interaction are fragmented in the text,” and thus they may “be reassembled” or “restructured” in order to evolve a shared “frame of reference” (*P* 32). In order to arrive at an understanding, the reader must read her/himself into a text. The text as a “third something” or “*tertium comparationis*” (*P* 32) creates a shared dwelling space as a world of its own where all three terms of the aesthetic equation may converge, and it presents the incentive to enact an understanding as a process through which the text itself is disclosed, while simultaneously providing the termination to which understanding returns. While for Gadamer’s hermeneutics this “third something” is the domain of the work of art itself, the same conditions are equally relevant to all three elements of the aesthetic equation. If we posit either the artist or the recipient as the starting point, then the locus of termination to which the

understanding returns is similarly shifted. An aesthetic understanding emerges from the conversations between artist, an artwork, and the audience, and requires the mutual openness and responsive reflexivity of all three elements in play together to make conversation possible. Aesthetic understanding as *Verständigung* not only allows us to share the horizons of all three terms, but also puts into play (and hopefully hazards, if we are able to enter wholly into the game) our own horizons. Such an understanding opens up the possibility for the recognition of new potentialities-for-Being, for “When we understand what someone says to us, we understand not just that person (his ‘psychology,’ for instance), nor just his or her ‘view,’ but we seriously consider whether that way of looking at a subject has some validity for us too” (Weinsheimer, “Translator’s Preface” xvi-xvii). The aesthetic holds out modalities of Being which may be assumed, tested, and then either wholly or in part discarded or accepted. In short, the “philosophical importance of art” (*TM* xiii) is due to “The fact that through a work of art a truth is experienced that we cannot attain in any other way” (*TM* xxii-xxiii), an experience which by definition is outside our sphere of experience. We may assume, since art is under the rubric of *die Geisteswissenschaften*, that such a “truth” is qualitatively different from a scientific truth, since under this heading an “experience of truth ... transcends the domain of scientific method” (*TM* xxii). The aesthetic discloses existential truths of Being.

Now we must ask: what is the nature and locus of such existential truths, if (as claimed previously) they are dependent on the tripartite structure of the aesthetic equation? Is one moment of the equation more dominant than the other two? Does the artist merely express her/himself in a work, or does she/he encode some covert meaning in the work’s ostensible form – and, by breaking this code, will we be allowed to share in, and subsequently transmit, the artist’s secret? Does aesthetic-truth shine-forth exclusively from the work of art as some emanation of its Being? Or does it await us on a pedestal at the end of our investigation like a prize awarded after a race has been run? Is the meaning of a work evolved through the audience’s experiences, and as such is its truth at best idiosyncratic? Or is it not rather the case that aesthetic truth is the result of the energies and tensions subsisting in, and created by, the interactions of all three elements of the aesthetic equation?

Such questions, we fear, are premature at this point. First we must detail the ontological structures undergirding both Being and aesthetic-Being, without losing sight of the inter-workings of the whole

aesthetic equation. Therefore, since the aesthetic is inextricably interconnected with the provinces and dynamics of specifically human Being, we must turn our focus towards the origin and terminus of our investigation, namely Dasein. But since Dasein itself is a continually evolving Being which repeatedly confronts the dilemma of its manner of Being as it issues-forth, the logical point for us to begin is with the projective, modalizing capacities of Dasein as *Insein*.

II. Between Fundamental Ontology and the Imaginary: A Genealogy of Aesthetic Phenomenology

a. The Aesthetics of *Insein*

i. Dasein and the Articulation of Being

Dasein is able to simultaneously disclose and confront itself through an aesthetic medium – but how does it originate and enter into the matrices of the aesthetic equation? Earlier we spoke of Dasein as “issuing-forth” into the aesthetic sphere, both as author and audience, and in this way it gives voice to itself as a speaking-out or a responding – which itself is a form of speaking-out, especially if the recipient authentically responds to the aesthetic event. Thus we are concerned with Dasein as a projective Being. But if we are to work out consistently how Dasein articulates itself as it projects itself onto a range of modalities of Being, we must first unveil the primordial, ontological structures of Being that provide the signposts tracing Dasein’s way to language, and which underlie and make possible Dasein’s projection.

Dasein’s ability to articulate itself, in the sense of giving-voice-to or speaking-out, as well as structuring, is based on the concept of *Insein*⁴¹ – an ontological condition which also fundamentally makes possible aesthetic-Being insofar as it is a specific illustration of *Insein*. The expression “Being-in” should not be taken to indicate any rude spatial sense, which is to say a circumstance of literally being in something, since in this ontologically erroneous sense of “‘in’ we mean the relationship of Being which two entities extended ‘in’ space have to each other with regard to their location in that space ... All entities whose Being ‘in’ can be thus described have the same kind of Being” evidenced by the “present-at-hand,” and as such are more or less fixed in their manner of Being, and different in kind rather than degree from the Being incumbent upon Dasein. As Being-present-at-hand, such entities’ “ontological characteristics” are determined as “*categorical*” (BT 12). For this reason, human Being can never be categorically determined by an alien structure imposed upon it *ab extra* – structures which include such things as economic systems, or societal constructs of race, class, or gender. Nor does it matter if such structures appear to reside within Dasein itself, as is the case with various psychoanalytic theories; for subconscious

⁴¹ “*Insein*” literally translated means “In-Being” or (in its more common version, notably as found in the McQuarrie and Robinson translation of *Sein und Zeit*), “Being-in.”

contents, especially as they are conditioned by the super-ego, or as the pathological to some previous threatening, inassimilable, or guilt-ridden experience, are equally imposed from without. Even the various stages of development posited by such theories are triggered by, and dependent on, external circumstances. Human Being, precisely because “in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it” (BT 12), is able to both reflect on and project itself, and thus differs in kind from such categorical entities. Opposed to this form of Being is the “state of Dasein’s Being” as *Insein* as an “existential” (BT 54). As an “existential,” Dasein “comports itself understandingly towards” its own “Being,” a self-referentiality which is predicated on “the formal concept of existence.” Therefore, “Dasein is an entity which in each case I myself am,” a condition which Heidegger terms “Mineness” (BT 53). It is the idea of self-owning implicit in “Mineness” which ultimately “makes authenticity and inauthenticity possible” (BT 53), and thus it is concerned with each Dasein’s there – the “there” [*da*] of Da-sein as its ownmost ontological domain.

Understanding gets worked out concretely through the projection of an “interpretation [*Auslegung*],” which “is grounded existentially in understanding” (BT 148). This is to say that understanding is the foundation that provides the basis for a definite outgrowth manifested in an interpretation. An interpretation is a “development of the understanding,” in which “the understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it” (BT 148). An interpretation unpacks what slumbers only *in potentia* in the understanding and wakes it to breath. In this way, through being instantiated in an interpretation, understanding “becomes itself” (BT 148). But when understanding “become itself” this does not mean that it reaches some fixed point of completion and stasis wherein we may rest securely. Understanding, due to its futural orientation, is an ongoing enacting of interpretations, for “To understand means ... *to project oneself upon a possibility*, in this *projection* to keep oneself at all times in a possibility. A can-be, a possibility *as possibility*, *is there* only in projection, in projecting oneself upon that can-be” (BPP 277). To draw back from entering into possibility by withdrawing projection is to “merely reflect on some empty possibility into which [one] could enter and, as it were, just gab about it,” in the inauthentic manner of the “idle talk” of the they, and hence the understanding fails and Being itself is no longer disclosed. When “the Dasein projects itself upon a possibility, it is projecting itself in the sense that it is unveiling itself as this can-be, in this specific being ... the projection is the way in which I *am* the

possibility; it is the way in which I exist freely” (*BPP* 277). The articulation of Being carried on through interpretation is a process of ongoing self-conscious (at least to a certain degree) self-modalization, since “this entity, the Dasein, has its own being in a certain way under control, as it comports itself in this or that way toward its capacity to be, as it has already decided in this or that way for or against it ... it is occupied with its *ability to be*” (*BPP* 276). The self of Dasein is not a fixed, reified artifact, but instead “is free for specific possibilities of its own self. It is its own most peculiar able-to-be” (*BPP* 276). This freedom is revealed through the manner in which Dasein departs itself in relation to its world, “because by its concept understanding is free self-understanding by way of an apprehended possibility of one’s own factual being-in-the-world, it has the intrinsic possibility of shifting in various directions” (*BPP* 279). Thus, “if the Dasein is free for definite possibilities of itself, for its ability to be, then the Dasein is in this *being-free-for*” (*BPP* 276) – that is to say, Dasein is free to articulate itself and its world, which are soundings of one another.

In order for Dasein to comport itself both in regards to its world and its Being, interpretation must be articulated concretely, and here “language *now* becomes our theme *for the first time*” (*BT* 160). Language, for its part, has its “*existential-ontological foundation*” in “*discourse or talk [Rede]*” (*BT* 160-161), and as such “*is existentially equiprimordial with state-of-mind and understanding.*” For as “the Articulation of intelligibility,” discourse “underlies both interpretation and assertion” (*BT* 161). Through the mode of assertion, interpretation is realized in its most basic form, and we first become aware of our world beyond the limitations of a view that is mired in the concern with the equipmental context of “Something *ready-to-hand with which* we have to do or perform something,” and instead may focus on its object as “something present-at-hand.” In this way, that “which we encounter is given a definite character in its Being-present-at-hand-in-such-and-such-a-manner” (*BT* 158). While such an appropriating is most obvious when we take up some at-hand thing and uses it in an equipmental context in order to [*um zu*] perform a definite chore, it is no less operative (although less obvious) when some thing is taken up into an aesthetic context in order to play a certain role. It is through the mode of asserting that Dasein’s relationship to itself and its world can be modalized as a distinct “relating” (*BT* 159) of Dasein to its environment. Here, due to the problematic surrounding “The Interpretation of the ‘is,’” which is to say the

problem of how we articulate the elements of our world, we enter “into the context of problems belonging to the existential analytic,” and thus at the same time are faced with the issue of the “assertion and understanding of Being” as “existential possibilities for the Being of Dasein itself” (BT 160). Here we can see that our “relation to being,” specifically as an “*assertion and understanding of Being* [italics mine],” is ultimately dependent on our relation to “language” (IM 51) as the ground and medium of our projective Being. Whatever we can claim to know is found and founded in language as it discloses Dasein’s world, for “Knowing,” as an outgrowth of concern, is “the chief exemplification of the ‘soul’s’ relationship to the world” and involves “addressing oneself to the ‘world’ and discussing it (λόγος) – thus functions as the primary mode of Being-in-the-world” (BT 59). In language we take up the world in a meaningful way, which is to say, in a way that is relevant and matters to us.

Through language we give voice to our self and our world, and in such speaking we structure both through articulation. This assigning, creative, and reflexive “relation to Being” (IM 51) is fore-grounded in aesthetic, literary discourse, and as such is one of the central interests of an aesthetic phenomenology. The overlap between *Insein* and Dasein’s articulation of its world through language is especially foregrounded in loco-meditative, poetic works. The *locus classicus* of this type of poem is James Thomson’s *The Seasons* (1726 [1746]). In the opening lines of *Winter*, the first of the seasons to be written and originally intended as a stand alone work, after an opening imperative to the reader to “SEE, Winter comes to rule the varied year,”⁴² the poet appropriates Winter’s “rising train – / Vapours, and clouds, and storms” as his “theme” (2-3) – a “theme” which will be structured and amplified in accordance with the poet’s worlding. The effects of nature are not valued wholly for themselves, but more importantly for Thomson “exalt the soul to solemn thought / And heavenly musing” (4-5). Nature as the world of the real becomes a reflex of Thomson’s own ontological reality: the “glooms” are “kindred” (5) and even the “horrors” are “congenial” (6). We find the same processes underlying Thomas Gray’s *Elegy Written In a Country Churchyard* (1750). In the opening of the poem, as “THE curfew tolls the knell of parting day, / The lowing herd winds slowly over the lea, / [and] The plowman homeward plods his weary way” the everyday world of the real

⁴² James Thomson, *Poetical Works*, ed. J. Logie Robertson (London: Oxford U Pr., 1965) 185; all future citations from this edition will be cited only by the corresponding line number/s of the relevant poem.

closes down “and leaves the world to darkness and to” the ontological discretion of the speaker of the poem.⁴³ The overwriting of the world of the real by the ontological reality of the speaker is underscored in the suspended moment of the opening as an extended “Now,” wherein as twilight passes sensual nature is diminished and there “fades the glimmering landscape on the sight, / And all the air a solemn stillness holds” (5-6).

When expression is conceived along ontological lines, the Being of a particular Dasein emerges through language from within itself both on and in its own terms, for “In expression something interior is immediately present” (*TM* 212). This ability is not something accidental to Dasein, but pervades its primordial structure and is an essentially aesthetic-poetic phenomenon: “Language is the primordial poetry which speaks being” (*IM* 171). Language cannot have been “invented,” since it “pervades” human-ness and “enables” Dasein to be what it is (*IM* 156). Language, therefore, is primordially part and parcel of Dasein’s Being as Dasein. Yet we can learn what characterizes a specific human Being, or more universally considered some trait of Being-in-general common to a historical period or region, only through some accessible phenomenon. Language provides just such an “accessible phenomenon, and through language enunciated by Dasein as the speaker of Being, “we learn who man is ... when he creates original poetry, when he builds poetically” (*IM* 144). In this way, aspects of Dasein’s ownmost world can be exteriorized and may in turn take on a daseinal structure of their own through language as a poetic speaking. At the same time, language also imposes certain obligations on its speakers, since “language, understanding, sentiment, passion, building” as “part of the overpowering power” is that portion of the power which “reigns within him [Dasein], as the essent that he himself is, [and] must take upon himself” (*IM* 156). Language, in a sense, also speaks us, and in revealing to a Dasein who or what its Being is or could be, forces a confrontation wherein truth may be disclosed. The Being of a Dasein may not only be a responsibility we “take upon” ourselves, it may also be a burden which we take up in the hope that we can bear up under it so that we will not be crushed by it. In being spoken by language, we are also challenged by it – and sometimes overwhelmed. In this way, language can also disclose something that is alien to the

⁴³ Thomas Gray, *The Poems of Gray and Collins*, ed. Austin Lane Poole (London: Oxford U Pr., 1957) 91 [lines 1-4]; all future citations from this edition will be cited only by the corresponding line number/s of the relevant poem.

Dasein who speaks it – alien as something beyond it, something which Being has *in potentia*, but has not yet realized, and for which it yet does not have a name.

The aesthetic use of language as an expression of *Insein* corresponds to the use of language in general, in that it both creatively establishes and opens up Dasein and its world, for “Language itself is poetry in the essential sense,” which is to say it discloses Being “in the Open of saying and naming,” which is furthermore the site of “Building and plastic creation” (*PLT* 74). Even in our everyday lives we speak poetically. In a sense, we are each an analogous repetition of Edenic Adam placing and prizing things according to the sway of our hearts and the dictates of our intellect, giving shape to a world by bestowing a defining name on that which we encounter. When we transform everyday speech and speak aesthetically, we assume something of the divine *fiat* by going beyond simply assigning names to things already extant, and instead prepare the ground on which to ever again erect our own structures, as well as to disclose the open wherein we may encounter other Beings on their own terms. Yet we must be careful not to assign to such speaking an excessively subjective or absolutely determining power, since Dasein as thrown Being at the same time always already finds itself in a world – a world with its own structure and established nexus of interrelations. Aesthetic creation similarly escapes our controlling grasp and takes on a Being of its own: the elements of an aesthetic work, while “pervade[d] and guide[d]” by “the Open” of disclosive Dasein as creator, “remain their own ways and modes in which truth orders itself into work.” Art is precisely this “setting-into-work of truth” – a truth both of and outside Dasein, and only as such it “is poetry” (*PLT* 74). Poetry is both personal and impersonal, under the auspices of a particular Being and going beyond it, for it “is the founding of truth ... in a triple sense: founding as bestowing, founding as grounding, and founding as beginning” (*PLT* 75). This triune sense of founding embraces the three elements of the aesthetic equation: the artist enacts “founding as bestowing” through the act of creation; the artwork is “founding as grounding” through its translation into a discrete structure; and the recipient is “founding as beginning” through the active greeting of an artwork – and as such is a ever renewable beginning. As we have discussed previously, this truth is not truth in a logical or scientific sense. It is a coming to, or opening out of, possible ways of Being for the artist, which in turn become available for the recipient (though not in precisely the same manner): “Truth is a determination (a warranty or responsibility)

of the Dasein, that is, a free and freely seized possibility of its existence” (*BPP* 320). Truth is a process, a coming-to-truth and a coming-to-be of truth, enacted by and for a Dasein, which nevertheless when translated into poetic language transcends the aegis and limited situation of a specific Dasein:

Language therefore reveals itself to be an event, in the course of which the speaker’s projections, self-manifestations, and interpretations, and even his very awareness of all these things, are transcended (and so nullified) by himself. There is no other way to demonstrate the impossibility of translating the human self in its entirety into language; or to put it differently, language is only capable of representing the human self in the form of its alienation. (*P* 179-180)

Through language Dasein not only locates itself in its world, but also sacrifices itself by giving itself over to the world of the work itself, as well as eventually to the world of the recipient.

Yet the individual *Insein* of the artist is nevertheless preserved in “the concept of author,” which is “the correlate of the individuality of the work ... Man individuates himself in producing individual works. The signature is the mark of this relation” (Ricoeur 138) – the indication that it belongs to someone, the sign by which one indicates it is “mine,” and thereby the relation of the work to the Being of the artist is preserved. Here we can see the validity of bringing such things as biographical material and an artist’s own conception of her/his own work to bear in aesthetic phenomenology. What goes directly into any individual work from its source is not only important in itself, but is also the portal through which we must pass in order to relate a work to its wider cultural-historical sphere. An individual is a denizen who dwells in such spheres; they do not necessarily conversely inhabit the artist her/himself. We should not look first to a historical period or cultural milieu and only afterwards to a particular artist, but we should rather look first to the individual artist and only then see how they both coincide with, and diverge from, the wider provinces – for to see such global domains as unavoidably determinative, is to deny Dasein its ability to disclose potentialities-for-Being which have not yet been envisioned and to imprison it in the precincts of the “they” in a condition of unvaried lassitude.

But for the aesthetic-equation to function it must enable a repeatedly enacted “beginning” (*PLT* 75) extending beyond the work’s initial moments of creation, and hence we must turn to the aesthetic

Insein of the recipient. The “createdness” of an aesthetic work also provides the portal that makes it potentially accessible to a recipient, and thus “we must also be able to discover and experience the createdness explicitly in the work” (PLT 65) in our attempt to discover, as we commonly say, what an artist means or wants to say. But in saying this, we are also indicating our desire to enter ourselves into the work. The “preserving of the work” (PLT 66) enacted through a work’s reception is as necessary as the work’s initial creation by an artist in order that the work itself may “come into being” (PLT 66), for “if a work does not find preservers” (PLT 67), it cannot take on what Heidegger terms its “aesthetic form” (PLT 68). Here again we see the interdependence of all three terms of the aesthetic equation. Creator and recipient are both equally indispensable, and in fact a work’s recipients are creators in their own right and bring their own *Insein* to bear on the aesthetic, since “The preservers of a work belong to its createdness with an essentiality equal to that of the creators” (PLT 71). This is the point of entry for reader-response theory, which is also referred to as “reader theory” and “audience theory,” and has been defined as “less a critical school than a collection of disparate critics with a common point of departure.”⁴⁴ This “common point of departure” is the reader and the reader’s interpretive acts in connection with articulating a schematic interpretation of a text, and thus is a function of the reader’s *Insein*. In the *Spectator* No. 416 for Friday, June 27, 1712, Joseph Addison implicitly recognizes the constitutive quality of reader response for the aesthetic event, when he “examine[s] how it comes to pass that several readers, who are all acquainted with the same language, and know the meaning of the words they read, should nevertheless have a different relish of the same descriptions” (4: 359). Addison concludes that such a differential in “taste” must result from two possible causes: first, “from the perfection of imagination in one more than in another”; and second, “from the different ideas that several readers affix to the same words” (4: 359). In order to understand a text, and hence to respond to a work, a reader is compelled to articulate, and in so doing bring to the foreground of awareness, the process of textual construction inherently and intimately involved in the act of reading – a construction which is the reader’s mapping of an aesthetic world opened through the encounter with an aesthetic work involving both “imagination” and individual patterns of association.

⁴⁴ Michael Groden and Martin Kriesworth eds., *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U Pr., 1994) 606.

Through the interdependent actions of reading and composing an interpretation, as well as of forming a response, the reader assumes a function similar (though not exactly parallel in a strict one to one correspondence) to the role of the writer through the bringing to bear of the recipient's *Insein*. In her article "Writing and Reading: The Transactional Theory," Louise Rosenblatt (one of the oftentimes overlooked pioneers of reader-response theory) draws the conclusion that "the analyses of reading and writing processes reveal parallels in patterns of symbolization and construction of meaning."⁴⁵ Both reader and writer engage in acts of worlding: the writer articulates the world which is the text itself, and the reader's worlding takes the form of an interpretation of a text. Rosenblatt explicitly extends a share of the creative process to the reader, stating that "the reader, too, is creative ... the literary experience must be phrased as a transaction between the reader and the text."⁴⁶ Wolfgang Iser similarly describes the reading process "as a dynamic interaction between the text and the reader."⁴⁷ In the context of Transactional Analysis, Rosenblatt defines the terms "transaction" and "transactional" as

Consonant with the contemporary twentieth-century shift in thinking about the relationship of human beings to the natural world ... [this] newer paradigm, reflecting Einsteinian and subatomic developments in physics, emphasizes their reciprocal relationship. The scientist or "observer," in Niels Bohr's phrase, is seen as "part of the observation" (Rosenblatt, "Writing" 154)

While this "newer paradigm" did become dominant in the twentieth-century, it goes back further in that it is characteristic of the modern in general, and has its roots in the fissure between "subject" and "object" first rent open by Kant, wherein the *ding an sich* is veiled from us and all we are able to know is the manifold of intuition as it is united by the imagination under the aegis of conceptions supplied by our understanding. In an aesthetic domain, we are equally confronted by a work which lacks any in-itself [*an sich*]. Yet the aesthetic work stands resolutely before us and presents its own parameters, so our exchanges with it must be trans-actional – we both cross over into the aesthetic world of the text and return to

⁴⁵ Louise Rosenblatt, "Writing and Reading: The Transactional Theory," *Reading and Writing Connections*, Jana M. Mason ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1989) 153.

⁴⁶ Louise Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, and the Poem* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois U Pr., 1978) 34-5.

⁴⁷ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U Pr., 1978) 107; hereafter *Act R*.

ourselves, though we are (if the aesthetic experience we have undergone has had any authentic validity) changed to some degree by the experience. The very artificiality of a work of art paradoxically makes its reality more insistent than the elements that surround us in nature – elements that seem to become lost in a vaguely conceived environment. The aesthetic is closer to us, because it has the bearing of Dasein. As readers we project ourselves through the prism of a text and see aspects of ourselves both reflected in its mirroring and refracted by it. We become part of our reading, by “carry[ing] on a personal, dynamic, and unique activity” (Rosenblatt, *Reader* 15). In this scheme Dasein’s existing is played out, assuming form only through an enacted process of dynamic, aesthetic Being, which structures itself and its world through the accumulation and pattering of interpretations. Rosenblatt posits that “the transactional nature of language ... illuminate[s] what happens in reading” (“Writing” 157). Readers respond to textual signals and choose to focus on certain aspects of the text in a manner which she parallels to William James’ concept of “selective attention,” which is also known as the “cocktail-party phenomenon” (Rosenblatt, “Writing” 156), a process whereby the mind, when confronted by a variety of stimuli, selects what it will focus on, and what it will de-emphasize and allow to fade into the background din. Iser terms this the “Wandering Viewpoint,” a concept analogous to *Insein*, which he defines as “a means of describing the way the reader is present in a text” (*Act R* 118). Iser sees the viewpoint’s wandering as being the result of “the fact that the whole text can never be experienced at one time” (*Act R* 108), which in turn necessitates the condition that the “text can only be imagined by way of consecutive phases of reading” (*Act R* 109). “Thus,” Iser continues, “in the time-flow of the reading process, past and future continually converge in the present moment, and the synthesizing operations of the wandering viewpoint, enable the text to pass through the reader’s mind as an ever-expanding network of connections” (*Act R* 116). In the same way, Rosenblatt sees the “selective attention,” as “pick[ing] out elements that synthesize or blend into what constitutes ‘meaning’” (“Writing” 157). Therefore, we can see that meaning does not exist as a distinct, defined, and localized entity present in a text; but is rather something drawn out through, and accumulatively defined by, the wandering and selective *Insein* of the reader. An artwork is thus something that is simultaneously worked on and worked out through what Iser terms *acts of reading*.

The reader in relation to a text assumes what Rosenblatt terms a “stance” – a position taken up in relation to, and as a direction towards, a text. The reader’s stance, employed consciously or unconsciously, and existing as a result of a commingled array of personal and cultural factors, determines the reader’s “selective attitude” (Rosenblatt, “Writing” 158). These “selective factors”⁴⁸ thus “reflect the reader’s purpose” (Rosenblatt, “Writing” 158) – a “purpose” which is not single mindedly decided before any encounter with a text, but rather progressively metamorphoses and evolves as readings are accumulated and mutually influence one another. “Stance,” as a form of Being-towards, refers to the reader’s manner of approaching a text, in which method and purpose, either covert or overt, latent or manifest, are co-determining factors. The author also takes a “stance,” which is comprised of “the residue of past experiences of language” which “provide the material from which the text will be constructed” (Rosenblatt, *Reading* 163). However, unlike the reader, the writer is not supplied with a pre-given text upon which to act. Both audience and artist are worlding Beings, but the former is more of a tourist, while the latter is akin to an architect (a humble title which may be puffed up along with the artist’s ego through the influx of aesthetic hubris to swell towards the adjective “divine”). But at the same time, the recipient comes to inhabit the structure through which she/he wanders: “as the reader’s wandering viewpoint travels between all these segments” of the various orders of a text, it “bring[s] forth a network of perspectives, within which each perspective opens a view not only of others but also of the intended imaginary object. Hence no single perspective can be equated with this imaginary object, of which it forms only one aspect. The object itself is a product of interconnection” (*P* 35). An “aesthetic object” produced through an articulating reading “begins to emerge” when the reader plays “the positions given in the text,” voiced through description, narration, and dialogue, off against one another in a process of mutual “transform[ation]” (*P* 40). Aesthetic form is, therefore, not fixed as a self-contained icon, but is rather formed across the links of communicative inter-action.

The aesthetic equation is dependent on events of “*communication*,” wherein “the Articulation of Being with one another understandingly is constituted” (*BT* 162). As an articulation of Being grounded in an ontological understanding, communication is manifested as discourse. “Communication” should not be

⁴⁸ Louise Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration* (New York: MLA, 1983) 35.

understood to indicate “anything like the conveying of experiences, such as opinions or wishes, from the interior of one subject into the interior of another” (BT 162) as the mere transference of some piece of more or less subjective data. Instead, “in discourse Being-with becomes ‘explicitly *shared*’ (BT 162) – which is to say that it is authentically shared only when it has “been taken hold of and appropriated” (BT 162) understandingly as a potentiality for the projection of Being. The shared encounter with Being as *Insein* is fore-grounded in aesthetic discourse, and thus “in ‘poetical’ discourse, the communication of the existential possibilities of one’s state of mind can become an aim in itself, and this amounts to a disclosing of existence” – an “existence” which “is already ‘outside’” itself even as it begins to reach towards “understand[ing]” (BT 162). In communication “something is communicated in what is said-in-the-talk,” and “all talk about anything has at the same time the character of *expressing itself* [*Sichausssprechens*]. In talking, Dasein *expresses itself* [*spricht sich ... aus*] ... as Being-in-the-world” (BT 162). Talking is literally a speaking-out, an outing conveyed in both the German prefix “*aus*” and the Latin “*ex*” which is preserved in the English cognate “expression” and conspicuously emphasized by Heidegger in his italicizing of “*aus*.” Since Dasein “is already ‘outside’ when it understands,” we find that “What is expressed is precisely this Being-outside – that is to say, the way in which one currently has a state-of-mind (mood), which ... pertain[s] to the full disclosedness of Being-in” (BT 162), which itself is always already contextualized within a world. Communication is thus the coming to language of a shared world, literally a with-world, or co-*mundus*. In the field of aesthetics, this shared world is the work of art itself.

We can see that the aesthetic work itself occupies a pivotal position for the aesthetic equation as the medial point in the transactions between creator and recipient. The aesthetic-work has its own ontological status which must be preserved, and thus “the proper way to preserve the work is cocreated and prescribed only and exclusively by the work” (PLT 68). The ontology of a work of art also gives it access to the question of Being-in-general, and thus “creation itself is to be estimated according to the originality with which it penetrates to Being” (N 1: 220). Now we must investigate what comprises the ontological status of a work of art. We have spoken of both the artist’s *Insein* as an act of worlding and an artwork as disclosing or opening out a “world” – but what precisely do we mean in the context of an aesthetic phenomenology by “worlding” and “world”; and how do the ontological statuses of these worlds

participate in, and differ from, what we commonly mean when we say “world”? How is the aesthetic a space wherein Dasein may project, alienate, and find itself? We have seen that the worlds of creator and recipient become shared through aesthetic discourse – but are the worlds of artist, artwork, and audience exactly co-terminus? And if they are not identical, where and to what extent do they overlap? Are the worlds disclosed in the sphere of the aesthetic fixed and immutable, or are they the ever supplanted and re-supplanted results of an ongoing, dynamic process, which need to be rejoined as much as heard in order to truly enter into Being?

ii. Aesthetic Worlds: The Real and Reality

While the aesthetic is comprised of multi-dimensional border crossings transpiring between the worlds which provide its constitutive elements, the world of the work itself is nevertheless central to the aesthetic equation – as both a pivot-point for, and portal between, the spheres of the real and reality. For if (as we saw in the previous section) “Hermeneutics can be defined no longer as an inquiry in to the psychological intentions which are hidden beneath the text, but rather as the explication of the being-in-the-world displayed by the text,” then “What is to be interpreted in the text is a proposed world which I could inhabit and in which I could project my ownmost possibilities ... Reality is, in this way, metamorphosed by means of what I shall call the ‘imaginative variations’ which literature carries out on the real” (Ricoeur 112). Along similar lines, Addison posits that the aesthetic as the “talent of affecting the imagination” thus “has something in it like creation” and builds upon the real insofar as it “makes additions to nature, and gives a greater variety to God’s work. In a word, it is able to beautify and adorn the most illustrious scenes in the universe” (4: 376). While this capacity characterizes the aesthetic in general, it more particularly “sets off all writings” and provides “the very life and highest perfection of poetry” (Addison 4: 376). In this process, the aesthetic also discloses the imaginary, and through the gestalt of the fictive, “it bestows a kind of existence and draws up to the reader’s view several objects which are not to be found in being” (Addison 4: 376) – which is to say, it makes present things “which are not to be found” as presences-at-hand in the sphere of the real. The aesthetic through its “creation[s]” at the same time opens up the imaginary for the recipient and “fill[s] the mind with more glorious shows and apparitions, than can be found in any part” (Addison 4: 376) of the everyday environment [*Umwelt*].

A work of literature, although respectively bound to the daseinal situations of both its creator and its recipient, is also a “being-in-the-world” in its own right, and hence has a distinct Being of its own. The centrality and independence of the literary work in the aesthetic equation is formulated by the Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden:

The literary work as such is a purely intentional formation which has the source of its being in the creative acts of consciousness of its author and its physical foundation in the

text ... By virtue of the dual stream of its language, the work is both intersubjectively accessible and reproducible, so that it becomes an intersubjective intentional object, related to a community of readers. As such it is not a psychological phenomenon and is transcendent to all experiences of consciousness, those of its author as well as those of the reader.⁴⁹

While a literary artwork is indeed “a purely intentional formation” insofar as it “has the source of its being in the creative acts of conscious of its author”; and while its being on the other hand is also determined by the “community of readers”; it is nevertheless “transcendent to all experiences of consciousness,” either of “its author” or its recipient. The transcendence of the aesthetic is not only made possible due to the fact that as a distinct work it has a “physical foundation,” but is also ironically the result of its status as “an intersubjective intentional object.” The Being of any aesthetic work is comprised of, and qualified by, the *Insein*, or worlding, of both its author and its recipients – neither of which has the last word. As a function of *Insein*, the aesthetic “is not a psychological phenomenon,” but is rather an ontological phenomenon.

The same tension between world and worldhood informs the distinction between the “real” and “reality,” since worldhood provides the foundation for the concept of “reality” understood “as an ontological term” (BT 211). The term “reality” must be disabused of “its traditional signification,” wherein “it stands for being in the sense of the pure presence-at-hand of Things” (BT 211). In investigating “the *problem of reality*” (BT 201), Heidegger makes a distinction between “the world as the ‘wherein’ [das Worin] of Being-in,” which is the domain of *Insein* and reality; “and the ‘world’ as entities within-the-world” (BT 203), which is the natural environment and world of the real. Since “all the modes of Being of entities within-the-world are founded ontologically upon the worldhood of the world, and accordingly upon the phenomenon of Being-in-the-world,” it follows that “*Reality is referred back to the phenomenon of care*” (BT 211) as the ultimate grounding of Dasein’s Being as ontological-existential (as we saw above). Thus reality itself is a function of Dasein’s *Insein*, for “Being (not entities) is dependent upon the understanding of Being; that is to say, Reality (not the Real) is dependent upon care” (BT 212) – in other

⁴⁹ Roman Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, trans. Ruth Ann Crowley and Kenneth R. Olson (Evanston: Northwestern U Pr., 1973) 14.

words, when Being is ontologically conceived (as opposed to the ontical lineaments defining mere entities), it can only be conceptualized as a worlding, projective understanding. In this way, “we take our orientation from existentiality as Interpreted in an ontologically *positive* manner” (BT 212), and we are thereby enabled to conceive of Dasein as being defined by its potentiality for “possible modes” (BT 212) of Being-in-general as pure potentiality, without yet delimiting it to any lone mode of Being. Only through an understanding of the disposition of Being as worlding can there be a truly ontological conception of Being, for “only as long as Dasein *is* ... ‘is there’ Being” (BT 212). But this does not mean that the real is equally dependent upon the existence of Dasein, for “the fact that Reality is ontologically grounded in the Being of Dasein, does not signify that only when Dasein exists and as long as Dasein exists, can the real be as that which itself is” (BT 212). The real and reality are distinct domains, but are nevertheless interrelated in the same manner as world and worldhood. In fact, “the analysis of Reality is possible only on the basis of our having appropriate access to the Real” (BT 202). The real as the world of the everyday subsists around Dasein in its guise as an entity and provides its environment [*Umwelt*], but it is not ultimately determinative in regards to the question of the issue of its Being and its potentiality for Being-authentic. Dasein’s *world* is expressly “opposed to the concept of *environment*.” While “Environment [*Umwelt*]” is common to “all living beings” (TM 443), even those which are not human / daseinal, these other “living beings,” however, are “embedded in their environment,” and thus these “other creatures do not in the same sense have a relationship to the world” (TM 444). Dasein is further characterized by “freedom from the environment,” for we are able “To rise above the pressure of what impinges on us from the world,” “a freedom” which “implies,” and is implied by, “the linguistic constitution of the world” (TM 444), wherein resides our ability to articulate (in the sense of both speaking-out and structuring) our world.

Language as *discourse*, or a mode of *interpretation*, in the Heideggerian senses defined earlier, will provide us with our point of entry for this stage of our investigation, given the condition that (as we have shown previously) it is “language” which “opens up the whole of our world orientation” (TM 449). “World” here indicates Dasein’s own world, hence Gadamer’s use of “our” as a possessive pronoun. But at the same time, it also opens up the world of the real, for “In language the reality beyond every individual consciousness becomes visible.” In using the term “reality,” Gadamer specifies (also in keeping with

Heidegger's existential-ontological definition of the term), "it is 'relative to Dasein'" (*TM* 449). Language is constitutive for, and primordially alongside, our experience of the world, insofar as "we do not first have an extralinguistic contact with the world and then put this world into the instrumentation of language. To begin by assuming such a schema is to reduce language to the status of a tool, which fails to grasp its all-encompassing, world-constituting significance" (*PH* xxix). We converse with our world, not only by addressing ourselves to it, but also by listening to the world speaking to us, and in this conversation "linguistic formation is a schematization of the experience of the world" (*PH* xxix). The particular case of the aesthetic use of language similarly opens up world-spaces, for "the poeticising word" discloses the possibility of "a worlding world"⁵⁰ as a speaking if *Insein* – a speaking which is foregrounded in the aesthetic.

Since "the work of art provides a perfect example of that universal characteristic of human existence – the never-ending process of building a world" (*RB* 103-104), the sphere of the aesthetic itself is constituted through the interplay between the real and reality. This interplay was first theorized by Shaftesbury in "The fundamental thesis of [his] philosophy and aesthetics: 'All beauty is truth'" (Cassirer 313). In this equation, " 'truth' signifies ... the inner intellectual structure of the universe," which is to say it is a form of ontological truth, and as such it "can only be immediately experienced and intuitively understood ... in the phenomenon of the beautiful" (Cassirer 314). Therefore, in "the phenomenon of the beautiful," since it is a reflex of Being, "the barrier between the world within and the world without disappears" (Cassirer 314). For Shaftesbury, it is precisely "In the contemplation of the beautiful," wherein we "turn ... from" the world of the real as "the world of created things" towards the reality of "the world of the creative process" – which is to say, it leads to a movement away "from the universe as a receptacle of the objectively real to the operative forces which have shaped this universe and constitute its inner coherence" (Cassirer 316) – an "inner coherence" which insofar as it is articulated through the "operative forces" of *Insein* is ontological. This "inner coherence" of creative *Insein* is at the same time extended to the artwork itself, for any artistic "piece, if it be beautiful, and carries truth, must be a whole, by itself,

⁵⁰ *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana U Pr., 1995) 369; hereafter *FCM*.

complete, independent, and withal as great and comprehensive as [the artist] can make it” (Shaftesbury 1: 94). In this way, an artwork becomes a world of its own – a world which while it is indeed something “made,” nevertheless transcends its making as “a whole” which is “by itself, complete.”

Picking up where Shaftesbury leaves off, in the first of his papers on the *Pleasures of the Imagination* (*Spectator* “No. 411. SATURDAY, JUNE 21.” [1712]), Addison defines his conception of “the pleasures of the imagination or fancy” – terms which are interchangeable for Addison, and hence he says, “I shall use [them] promiscuously” – along similar lines to our phenomenological reading of the constitutive, worlding role of *Insein* in reference to the aesthetic and the distinction between the real and reality (4: 336). These “pleasures,” on one level, are “such as arise from visible objects, either when we have them actually in our view, or when we call up their ideas into our minds by paintings, statues, descriptions, or any the like occasion” (Addison 4: 336). From the point of view of either the active creation of the artist, or the openness of the recipient, it makes no difference whether the “visible objects” under consideration are “actually in our view” as a direct apprehension, or if they are evoked through an aesthetic medium. While Addison, on one hand, here seems to be endorsing a view of the aesthetic as a form of representation whereby and wherein we recall the image of “visible objects” through an application of the imagination as a faculty defined along the empirical lines such as we those detailed in the works of Hobbes and Locke, since “We cannot, indeed have a single image in the fancy that did not make its entrance from the sight” (Addison 4: 336); yet on the other hand, Addison extends this conception by also assigning to us “the power” not only for the effectually passive action of “retaining,” but also as the active capacity for “altering, and compounding those images, which we have once received, into all varieties of picture and vision that are most agreeable to the imagination” (Addison 4: 336-337). Similarly for the recipient, provided he/she is an individual “of a polite imagination,” the influence of an aesthetic reality oftentimes is more powerful in its effects than the real. Thus an imaginatively disposed individual “meets with a secret refreshment in a description, and often feels a greater satisfaction in the prospect of fields and meadows, than another does in the possession” (4: 338). Similarly in the case of the literary, “words, when well chosen, have so great a force in them, that a description often gives us more lively ideas than the sight of the things themselves” (Addison 4: 358). Eventually the influence of the recipient’s own worlding

Insein comes to blanket the world of the real in general, insofar as it is comparatively “more lively ... than” the actual “things themselves”; and hence “It gives him, indeed, a kind of property in everything he sees, and makes the most rude uncultivated parts of nature administer to his pleasures: so that he looks upon the world, as it were in another light” than that of the simple sunlight, “and discovers in it a multitude of charms, that conceal themselves from the generality of mankind (4: 338) who remain within the precincts of average everydayness. The split between the real and reality is also that of the material and the ontological as respectively mere presences-at-hand and Being as projecting. For this reason, imaginative Being does not desire mere “possession” of some thing, but rather finds “greater satisfaction in ... prospect[s]” as an extensive outlook, which reaches out towards the horizon of the possible, which demarks the site in terms of which the future is disclosed.

In accordance with Addison’s implicit recognition of the split between the worlds of the real and reality, he divides “the pleasures of the imagination” into “primary” and “secondary pleasures” (4: 337). The former category of pleasures “entirely proceed from such objects as are before our eyes,” and the latter “flow from the ideas of visible objects, when the objects are not actually before the eye, but are called up into our memories, or formed into agreeable visions of things that are either absent or fictitious” (Addison 4: 337). Again, in the first part of the definition of “the secondary pleasures of the imagination, Addison sticks to an empirical version of the “imagination” as a faculty whereby things are “called up into our memories”; but in expanding the power of this capacity to “form ... agreeable visions of things that are either absent or fictitious,” Addison pushes towards an ontological, aesthetic conception of the imagination as *Insein*, which at the same time is attuned by and to Being insofar as these “visions” are “agreeable” to their perpetrator. In this way, Addison also moves beyond a conception of the aesthetic as mimetic representation, insofar as “the ideas” we receive from the imagination are not derived from “visible objects” as copies or reproductions, but rather “flow” from them as an imaginative effulgence. As the organic evolution of an ontological, aesthetic reality out of the real world of “visible objects,” the imagination also evidences a transgressive power which reaches past the real and out into the imaginary towards heretofore ungrasped potentialities-for-Being. Even though “The pleasures of the imagination ... are not ... so refined as those of the understanding,” the latter of which “are, indeed, *more preferable*,

because they are founded on some new knowledge or improvement in the mind of man,” and hence disclose new potentialities-for-Being; “yet it must nevertheless be confessed, that those of the imagination” do not suffer from the comparison and evidence salient similarities, and hence “are as great and transporting as the other” (Addison 4: 337) in their ability to carry us beyond our present condition. Addison illustrates through an analogue of the processes of worlding the “transporting” capacities of the imagination to break through and carry us across the confines of the real, by citing as a hypothetical example the case of “a man in a dungeon,” who through the exercise of “this faculty ... is capable of entertaining himself with scenes and landscapes more beautiful than any that can be found in the whole compass of nature” (Addison 4: 337) – a comparative degree of beauty whose very transcendence also provides evidence of the influence of the imaginary.

In the aesthetic interplay between the real and reality, we can see one of the central paradoxes underlying the aesthetic: for “even if Art as beautiful semblance embodies a reality of its own, this in turn remains dependent on the given prosaic reality” – a “reality” which in our terminology, this should be taken to indicate the world of the real – “that it must transcend in order to set man free” (P 202). We should not, however, view this transcendence of the everyday as a “defect inherent in the humanistic concept” predicated on the fact that “Art draws its determination from what it sets out to remove” (P 202). We should instead allow that this setting-free may simultaneously enact a “canceling,” a “preserving,” and a “lifting up” of any “given prosaic reality” through what we shall define as the phenomenon of *aesthetic sublimation* [*Aufhebung*].⁵¹ While such transcendence is mandatory if Dasein is ever to find its ownmost “there” as Being-authentic despite the ever-present and insistent encroachments of the “they” [*das Man*],

⁵¹ Walter Kaufman, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1978) 236. “Hegel’s ‘*aufheben*’ has been the despair of his translators. He was satisfied to remark that this word means both preserving and canceling; his translators, however, were grieved to discover that it also means lifting up. Hegel apparently considered this the most obvious connotation and therefore did not mention it ... The Latin word ... *sublimare* ... means – in German – *aufheben*.” The term has a long history and “was used even in Medieval Germany as an adaptation of the Latin *sublimare*; and in modern times, Goethe, Novalis, and Schopenhauer employed it.” While Kaufman believes that “it was Nietzsche who first gave it the specific connotation it has today” (219), the use of “sublimation” for “*aufheben*” remains an effective translation. However, many people currently operate under the same misapprehension as Brill, who “claimed, in his Introduction to *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, that ‘sublimation’ is ‘another term coined by Freud’” (Kaufman 218), rather than seeing it as a common usage, with a history of various applications, in German philosophical discourses.

Heidegger repeatedly acknowledges that we all proximally and for the most part spend the vast balance of our days Being-with others in the precincts of the everyday. Yet this does not mean that our experience of the everyday cannot be altered as a result of our encounters with the aesthetic. In fact (as we shall see later), an aesthetic encounter (as opposed to a “confrontation” or “meeting,” which imply respectively excessive discord or disproportionate equivalence) is only successful if a reflection back into the real is ultimately accomplished – either positively as an apprehended potentiality-for-Being which can be applied existentially in the existence of the recipient; or negatively as a potentiality which, after it has been presented to us, we decide should not be appropriated. The concept of reflection is essential to the aesthetic in two senses: first, “reflection” as an act of thinking (reflecting on something); and second, “reflection” in the sense of an image being reflected back from a surface. For example, to the Romantic mind (cf. Hegel’s notion of “reflected unity”)⁵² the two acts are intertwined as far as the mind in the act of thinking takes the results of its perceptions and observations and, after the initial re-ingestion, interprets, elaborates, or supplements them with materials of its own. Goethe seems to have this latter idea in mind when he writes in *Faust Part II*:

I am content to have the sun behind me.
 The cataract there storming through the cliff –
 the more I watch it, the more is my delight ...
 But see how, rising from this turbulence,
 the rainbow forms its changing-unchanged arch,
 now clearly drawn, now evanescent
 and casts cool, fragrant showers about it.
 Of human striving it’s a perfect symbol –
 ponder this well to understand more clearly

⁵² G.W.F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford U Pr., 1977) 108.

that what we have as life is many-hued reflection. (4715-4727)⁵³

Such a conception of reflection also involves the interplay between the real (defined as external nature), and reality (the result of Dasein's worlding). Being as worlding functions in a manner analogous to a prism, standing between nature and the "sun," the point of refraction for the effulgence which enlightens the world. Dasein's projection is boundless insofar as it stands at the bar as is its own legislator, and hence is a fit "symbol" of our infinite "striving" – an infinitude which is in no way hindered by our essential, radical finitude, but is rather paradoxically made possible by it.

In *An Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland* (1749), William Collins notes this same interplay between the real and aesthetic reality "In scenes"⁵⁴ drawn from "The native legends" (186), which even while they "dar[e] to depart / From sober truth, are still to nature true" (188-189). Here "nature" refers not only back to the prosaic way things are, or to a more spiritualized *Natura*; but also to human "nature" and a form of truth grounded in *Insein*, for by departing from "sober truth" in favor of the imaginary, the aesthetic is enabled to "call forth fresh delight to fancy's view" (190) – a process wherein "fancy" or the imagination falls under the influence of the imaginary, which helps to structure an ontological reality. Collins further draws out the implications of the imaginary's influence on the imagination through the medium of the aesthetic by citing the example of "Tasso's art" (191) as expressed through *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1575). Not only is Torquato Tasso himself seen as being under the influence of the imaginary insofar as his "art" is "employ'd" by "Th' heroic muse" (191); but Collins himself as a reader also succumbs to its sway, personally recalling "How have I trembled" when reading of "TANCREDES" (192) deeds. Similarly, Collins also recollects "How" he has "sat, when pip'd the pensive wind, / To hear his harp, by British FAIRFAX strung" (196-197). The "British FAIRFAX" refers to Edward Fairfax (1580? – 1635), who translated Tasso's *Gerusalemme Libertata* under the title *Godfrey of Bulloigne or the Recoverie of Jerusalem* (1600); and therefore, we find a situation parallel both to Tasso's own appropriation by "Th' heroic muse" insofar as Tasso himself has "his harp, by British FAIRFAX

⁵³ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust I & II*, Trans. Stuart Atkins (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1994) 123.

⁵⁴ William Collins, *The Poems of Gray and Collins*, ed. Austin Lane Poole (London: Oxford U Pr., 1957) 305 [line 188]; all future citations from this edition will be cited only by the corresponding line number/s of the relevant poem.

strung,” as well as a model for Fairfax’s own process of being taken up into the imaginary as it is opened up for him through his translation of Tasso’s work. Like the Scottish people who are seen as giving full faith and credence to the “truth” of their “Popular Superstitions,” and hence at the same time to the imaginary; Fairfax also gives himself over to the imaginary as it is translated through Tasso with an “undoubting mind / [and] Believ’d the magic wonders which he sung!” (198-199). The process of being taken up into an aesthetic reality grounded in the imaginary is finally extended to include not only Collins, Tasso, and Fairfax, but any properly disposed recipient: “Hence at each sound” wherein the echoes of the imaginary are heard, the “imagination” of the recipient (be she/he reader or translator) “glows” (200) in response – an inner fire which is fuelled by an external breath much like Shelley’s image from *A Defense of Poetry* (1821) of the poet’s “mind in” the midst of the act of “creation ... as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness.”⁵⁵ Not only does Fairfax’s own “imagination glow” as a response to Tasso’s power; but as he composes “his warm lay” (201), Fairfax also becomes a source of heat, which “Melting ... flows” and dissolves boundaries between the real and aesthetic reality, between the worlds of the artist, the translator (who is an artist in his own right), and the recipient as it transfers its own fire and “fills th’ impassion’d heart” (202) and finally composes accord as it “wins th’ harmonious ear” (203).

As the point of intersection of the real and reality, the aesthetic also provides a portal wherein Dasein may access the imaginary as it is disclosed through the multidirectional transitions and transactions between the real and reality we have outlined – here like Dasein, the aesthetic reveals “the *character of overstepping*, of transcendence” (*BPP* 301). Through gaining admittance to the imaginary, Dasein oversteps its object status as a-being-in-the-world of the real and moves beyond the limitations imposed upon it by the real as the average, everyday world; and emerges into the world of the aesthetic work as a site for the disclosing of potentialities-for-Being. Now we must ask: where is this “open realm” (*RB* 72) of the imaginary, which is disclosed through the aesthetic located, and how do we go about achieving admission to it? From whence does this domain emerge? While previously we have made references to

⁵⁵ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: Norton, 1977) 503-504.

the influence of the imaginary, we must now determine more precisely what is the relationship between the imagination and the imaginary? How is this “transcendence” enacted; and does this transcendence not also depend on, and simultaneously enable a possible return to, immanence?

iii. Imagination and the Imaginary

As a Being which issues-forth through its projections, realizing its potentialities-for-Being by temporalizing itself in relation to its future, Dasein is primordially an imaginative Being. As part of Dasein's primordial structure, "the imagination" is a piece of "uniquely human equipment," which due to its ability to project beyond what is sensually grasped towards what may become, "comes in to operation when all our faculties have reached the limits of their capabilities" (*P* 214). Aesthetic phenomenology maintains that we transgress the world into which we find ourselves thrown and transcend a given present situation through imaginative acts. But the imagination, as a means of modalizing Being, concomitantly requires the domain of the imaginary, insofar as it provides a storehouse of potential ontological worlds. In our everyday lives, even though the imagination is almost continually active in regards to our ideational processes, these processes are nevertheless commonly concealed by the confusion attendant on the hurly-burly busy-ness of what passes for living and submerged in the stultifying rush of the mundane, and hence are not readily accessible to phenomenological investigation. The aesthetic in general, however, and "Literature" in particular, as spaces standing outside of the real as an alternative reality, provide "a means of insight into the workings and functions of the imagination" (*P* 213-214), while they concomitantly open up a portal to the imaginary.

Starting in "the Enlightenment," a period which first "created the idea of the imagination," the imagination becomes more and more "a rising element in thought" (Engell 3) – an element which is the source of Dasein's ability to project itself in ever new modes of Being. The imagination is influential in the development of all intellectual disciplines and "propelled literature, aesthetics, philosophy, criticism, religion and psychology into new regions" (Engell 3). "Imagination" (despite its various definitions and applications) is generally considered as an intentional faculty of consciousness with three primary functions: first, it is an agent of memory, which allows us to recall past things, places, events, and people through a process of ideation which represents them in immediate images in our minds; second, it is a means of unifying the manifold of perception; and third, it is an instrument of projection, either in a everyday form, which permits us for example to visualize the future, or a more overtly creative form, which

enables us to envision and depict what has never been or actually occurred through an aesthetic projection. The first function of the imagination is performed by what Coleridge calls the “FANCY,” which is uncreative and “must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.”⁵⁶ The fancy merely orders or re-orders what has been given to it beforehand. Kant’s conception of the imagination as *Einbildungskraft* exemplifies the second sense of “imagination,” wherein it functions as a mediating power which plays an “active” part in synthesizing “the *manifold* of pure intuition” supplied by the passive and receptive powers of perception with “the concepts which ... rest on the understanding” (Kant, *Reason* 112). The imagination, in this sense, is literally a power of bringing into one picture or image – i.e. “*in eins Bildung*.”⁵⁷ For Kant the imagination makes possible the activity of the understanding [*Verstand*]. The understanding is active and is synonymous with the “intellect”: the “intellect” or “the *understanding*” “has its own domain as a *cognitive power* insofar as it contains principles of cognition that are constitutive a priori” (Kant, *Judgment* 5), which it applies to the unified pictures supplied through the imagination. In this process, the “passive” power is (in Kant’s terminology) “sensibility” – the “(receptivity) for receiving representations through the mode in which we are affected by objects.” These objects of sensibility “yield ... us *intuitions*; they are thought through the understanding, and from the understanding arise *concepts*” (Kant, *Reason* 65). Coleridge’s notion of the “primary IMAGINATION,” which as the “power and prime Agent of all human Perception,” is identical with Kant’s *Einbildungskraft* – and while even as “primary” such a form of “IMAGINATION” is “a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM” (*BL* 1: 304), it is nevertheless merely a mechanistic “repetition” related to the common understanding [*Verstand*]. While Kant, in the *Anthropology*, does assign a productive capacity to imagination,

this does not mean that the productive imagination is *creative*, i.e. capable of producing a presentation of sense that was *never* before given to our power of sense; rather, we can

⁵⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 7 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1984) 1: 305; hereafter *BL*.

⁵⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn and Merton Christensen, 5 vols. (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1957-2002) 3: 4176. In keeping with the accepted critical practice, all references will hereafter be designated by the abbreviation *CN* followed by the relevant volume and entry number.

always show [from where the imagination took] its material (quoted in Kant, *Judgment* 94)

Therefore, the imagination remains limited for Kant in the same manner as Coleridge's primary imagination, in that its materials are always already a re-presentation of existing materials. "If the imagination is seen as a faculty" in the former sense, which is to say as reproductive, which is the case from Kant to Coleridge," it is conceived of as an active power, and as such it either "assumes its shape by presenting itself either as the organizer of interacting conditions of cognition" (*P* 275), as in the case of Kant's *Einbildungskraft*; "or as the underlying repetition of nature in the human mind" (*P* 275), as is the case with Coleridge's conception of the "primary imagination."

But what about the latter case of a projective imagination, such as Coleridge's notion of the "secondary imagination" (which Iser neglects to take into consideration in the passage above), or the German notion of *Phantasie*? Coleridge defines the imagination in the third sense as a "synthetic and magical power" (*BL* 2: 16) as an "Esemplastic" (*BL* 1: 168), or shaping and unifying, power. This imagination is the "secondary Imagination" which, in the oft-cited passage from the *Biographia*, "dissolves, diffuses and dissipates in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead" (*BL* 1: 304). The imagination dissolves the hard distinctions of oppositions: subjective and objective, the many and the one, unity and multitude, &c., "in order to re-create" them in a new, synthetic unity in a creative work of art – and if this process of creation "is rendered impossible," it at least performs the first half of a creative act, by translating, through its "*vital*" (in the dual senses of "necessary" and "central," as well as "living") activity, the "fixed and dead" materials which are its objects, transforming them into an "ideal unity" of subjective and objective. Hegel also "recognized the distinction between the Imagination and the Fancy"⁵⁸ – or in other words, the distinction between the projective and reproductive imaginations. This distinction, while not often explicitly posited in English philosophy, is common in German philosophy – although in German the terms are reversed in relation to their English

⁵⁸ Gian N. G. Orsini, *Coleridge and German Idealism: A Study in the History of an Idea* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois U Pr., 1969) 245.

cognates: “*Phantasie* is usually the higher, more creative faculty;” while *Einbildungskraft*, as “Jean Paul ... saw ... [is] simply reproductive and associative (even animals have it, since they dream and fear things).”⁵⁹

But how much of this power is voluntary, and how much does it also place us in the position of a receiver? Here the domain of the imaginary first begins to be disclosed.⁶⁰ In order to proceed along this line of investigation, we must first establish more precisely what we mean by “the imaginary.” For Iser “The imaginary is basically a featureless and inactive potential, which accounts for the failed attempts to grasp it cognitively” (*FI* xvii). In order to grasp the imaginary, we cannot simply picture it to ourselves in isolation, but we must experience it through something else which bestows on it a determinate form. The “products” by which “the imaginary becomes tangible” include not only the arts, but also “perception, idea, dream, and so on” (*FI* 184); while in the case of the “literary text,” it is “the fictive” which “becomes the mobilizing agent” (*FI* 185). For our purposes, “the literary text” is conceived as

a mixture of reality and fictions, and as such it brings about an interaction between the given and the imagined. Because this interaction produces far more than just a contrast between the two, we might do better to discard the old opposition of fiction and reality altogether, and to replace this duality with a triad: the real, the fictive, and what we shall henceforth call the imaginary. It is out of this triad that the text arises ... (*FI* 1)

Here we can see the same interplay between the real and reality which we previously schematized: “the given,” which is that which is presented in the sphere of the real, “interact[s]” with “the imagined,” which is the result of our projections, and hence in the sphere of reality. Our imaginings in turn draw on “the imaginary” and take shape as “the fictive,” and “the text” is thus the interplay of all three. But “If the imaginary can only be presented by way of a medium, then obviously it cannot be totally equated with that medium. It will always be something ‘other’” (*P* 277). The imaginary is “something ‘other’” in that it is distinct from our imaginings, existing beyond and independent of them. Any imagining is only a specific

⁵⁹ Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992) 187.

⁶⁰ The above discussion draws on selected aspects of my article “Coleridge Beyond Kant and Hegel: Transcendent Aesthetics and the Dialectic Pentad,” *Studies in Romanticism* 45 (2006): 465-481. For a more detailed exposition of the role of imagination and its relation to the reason, the idea, symbol, and the beautiful in Coleridge’s aesthetic theory, contextualized with the systems of Kant and Hegel, please consult the article in its entirety.

gestalt drawn from the wider ranging whole of the imaginary. Iser credits Johann Nicolas “Tetens” (*FI* 178) with the “progressive insight” which opens up the imaginary as a distinct sphere detached from consciousness, since “Everything in the imagination has come from elsewhere, and ultimately this means that the imagination is not self-activating but needs activating stimuli from outside itself” (*FI* 179). The imaginary is more than a sphere disclosed through various acts of the imagination, but in a sense is also an agent in its own right.

The notion of the imaginary as a determining influence over the imagination underlies many of our ideas concerning artistic creation. We often think of the creative artist as one who is inspired. “Inspiration” is literally an in-spiring, an in-breathing, derived from the Latin noun “*spīritus*,” meaning “*breathing*,”⁶¹ and the intransitive verb “*spīro*,” meaning “*to blow gently, blow, breathe*,” or “*to breathe, to draw in breath*.”⁶² “*Spiritus*” is synonymous with “*anima*,”⁶³ which is defined as “*wind*,” “*the breath*.” At the same time “*anima*” imparts an additional dimension, and may also refer to “*the vital principle, the soul*” and “*the rational soul*”⁶⁴ or mind. Thus “*spiritus*” is metaphorically equivalent to “*soul*” or “*mind*.” This in-spiring was originally thought to be conveyed by the gods, who breathed the divine soul or essence into their favored ones. Hence the poetic usage of “*spiro*” has the additional sense of “*to rush, to foam, ferment, roar*”⁶⁵ which is a result of the divine madness which the inspired individual may undergo in extreme examples. What is important for our present purposes is the fact that artistic inspiration is seen as being brought to the one inspired from somewhere outside or beyond her/him.

More formally considered, artistic creation is not solely an intentional act, but must also submit itself to the external, determining influences of the parameters of the aesthetic structure of a work. The work itself, as it takes shape and develops, becomes in a sense its own standard, its own topography – a criterion to which not only the recipient, but also the artist her/himself must yield. Thus “The artistic states are those which place themselves under the supreme command of measure and law” (*N* 1: 130). In assuming a

⁶¹ “*Spīritus*,” *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary*, 1955 ed.

⁶² “*Spīro*,” *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary*, 1955 ed.

⁶³ C.G. Jung, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self: Collected Works Vol. 9, Part 2*, Trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1978) 187.

⁶⁴ “*Ānīma*,” *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary*, 1955 ed.

⁶⁵ “*Spīro*,” *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary*, 1955 ed.

subordinate position, artists may succeed in “taking themselves beyond themselves in their will to advance. Such states are what they essentially are when, willing out beyond themselves, they are more than they are, and when they assert themselves in such mastery” (N 1: 130). When we will “beyond [our]selves,” we by definition cannot know exactly what it is that we are willing. In this way, the artist goes “beyond” her/himself by accruing something which was previously unknown or at least unrecognized. Such a self “assert[ion]” paradoxically attains “mastery” by foregoing contention and instead stands back as a witness to the work as it unfolds itself – which is to say as it articulates itself according to its own “measure and law.” While “To be an artist is to be able to bring something forth” as an active creating, at the same time “to bring forth means to establish in Being something that does not yet exist” (N 1: 69), which as such resides in the sphere of the imaginary. In holding ourselves back as witnesses, we are able to “dwell ... upon the coming to be of beings ... and see there with utter clarity their essence” (N 1: 69). The coming-to-be disclosed through the aesthetic foregrounds the process of coming-to-be of beings in general, while we withhold ourselves and tactfully allow the emergent “beings” to reveal their own “essence” on and in their own terms. We can see that aesthetic creation, as a “bringing-forth” and an “establish[ing],” even as it also stands back and dwells, requires the interplay of the imagination and the imaginary. While the imaginary is not only central to the idea of the imagination in general and provides its grounding, it may also be determinative of the imagination in both a reversal and expansion of the typical view of the causal relationship between the two; at the same time, the imaginary is dependent on the imagination for its activation. What was previously schematized as a unidirectional movement from the imagination towards the imaginary is not only reversed as a movement from the imaginary to the imagination, but at the same time we must still preserve the movement originating in the imagination as a “willing out beyond [our]selves” (N 1: 130) – even if that movement is only an openness to the imaginary.

The imagination as a means of accessing the imaginary is first put forth, though not yet explicitly thematized, by Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1668). At first, however, Hobbes restricts the imagination to an empirical function of the memory as assisting recollection. What “the Latins call *imagination*” and “the Greeks call ... *fancy*” is defined by Thomas Hobbes in “Chap. II: *Of IMAGINATION*” as a repetition of “that motion which is made in the internal parts of a man ... when he sees, dreams, &c.,” which “after the

object is removed, or the eye shut,” allows us to “still retain an image if the thing seen, though more obscure than when we see it.” Hence imagination is a form of “*decaying* sense,” which “weakens” with the passage of time.⁶⁶ Imagination in this initial view is not generative, but only a handmaid to “*memory*” (Hobbes 9). Hobbes later distinguishes between what he terms the “*simple imagination*,” which is the recollection of a previous sensation without any alteration; and the “*compound imagination*,” which is a compounding of diverse sensations (and thus equivalent to Coleridge’s definition of the “fancy”), and therefore “a fiction of the mind” (Hobbes 9). Yet while the ideation which is the result of the application of the latter is not real in the sense of referring back to something that actually exists, it nevertheless brings a new thing into existence as a denizen of reality. In Hobbes, however, the aesthetic consequences of these implications remain unexplored.

A similar dichotomy between the real and reality underlying the imagination, however, is found in the following chapter of Hobbes’s *Leviathan*: “Ch. III: *Of the Consequence or TRAIN of Imaginations*.” In this section, Hobbes divides “This train of thoughts, or mental discourse” into “two sorts. The first is *unguided, without design*, and inconstant, wherein there is no passionate thought to govern and direct those that follow to itself, as the end and scope of some other passion; in which case the thoughts are said to wander, and seem impertinent one to another, as in a dream” (Hobbes 12). In contrast to the first mode,

The second is more constant, as being *regulated* by some desire, and design ... From desire ariseth the thought of some means we have seen produce the like of which we aim at; and from the thought of that, the thought of means to that mean; and so continually, till we come to some beginning within our own power ... In sum, the discourse of the mind when it is governed by design, is nothing but *seeking*, or the faculty of invention. (Hobbes 13)

As “*regulated*” this train of mental “discourse” is “governed” by “desire” or “design” as a “*seeking*” of some specific, previously defined goal. It is a “faculty of invention” not in the sense we commonly mean today when we speak of inventors as individuals who come up with new devices, methods, or concepts; but it rather indicates a coming-into (literally an *in-venire*) a previously demarcated space. The second mode

⁶⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994) 8.

exemplifies a form of cause and effect reasoning as “a hunting out of the causes of some effect, present or past, or the effects of some present or past cause” (Hobbes 13), and as such is the basis of instrumental, scientific calculation. Such trains of imagination are limited in terms of their temporality and are thus constricted in their projective potential. When it is directed towards the past, “we call [it] *remembrance*, or calling to mind, the Latins call it *reminiscentia*, as a *re-conning* of our former actions” (Hobbes 13), and as such it is directed exclusively towards the past; when it is directed towards the present, all the elements and conditions are spread out in front of us in an equipmental context comprised of presences-at-hand; and when it is directed toward the future, such as in cases when “a man desires to know the event of an action” (Hobbes 13), it is a function of “*foresight ... prudence, or providence, and sometimes wisdom*” (Hobbes 14). “Event” should here be read as a coming-from or coming-out-of (in other words, literally as an *e-venire*), and thus is grounded in something we already have present-at-hand for which we posit a possible change or alteration. This supposedly futural mode is at the same time grounded in the past seen as a previous state of ontical affairs, in that “a *presumption of the future*, contracted from the *experience of time past*, so there is a presumption of things past taken from other things (not future but) past also” (Hobbes 14).

In the second mode, on the other hand, no matter how “unguided” any thought in this train appears to be, or “*seems* [emphasis mine] impertinent one to another” in the chain; one may “yet in this wild ranging of the mind ... oft-times perceive the way of it, and the dependence of one thought on another” (Hobbes 12). Here our mental discourse proceeds by analogy and similitude (both sensual and metaphorical) and is dependent on our disposition as a state-of-mind [*Stimmung*] considered as an attunement [*Gestimmtheit*] instantiated as an existentiell manifestation of *Insein*, and is thus is a mode of articulation relevant to the aesthetic. Hobbes, however, avoids pursuing the epistemological and aesthetic implications which herein arise; believing instead that since “Whatsoever we imagine is finite,” and “because whatsoever ... we conceive has been perceived first by sense”; we therefore “can have no thought representing anything not subject to sense,” and hence “there is no idea or conception of anything we call *infinite*” (Hobbes 15) – which is to say one which is not bound by the real. For Hobbes, we can conceive of something only when it exists within the horizon of the sensual. But how does Hobbes account for the idea

of the infinite arising at all, since “Whatsoever we imagine is finite ... there is no idea or conception of anything we call *infinite*” (Hobbes 15). While we may indeed have a word by which we can “call” something “infinite,” the word does not give rise in our “mind” to “an image of infinit[y],” so that “When we say anything is infinite, we signify only ... our own inability” to realize our conception (Hobbes 15). Yet Hobbes still preserves a space for Being-towards the “*incomprehensible*” or “unconceivable.” We take up “the name of God ... not to make us conceive him (for he is *incomprehensible*, and his greatness and power are unconceivable), but that we may honor him” (Hobbes 15). Through language we are able to establish a way of Being-towards the super-sensual, or that which is not an actual entity in our environment – which means for our purposes that we are able to establish a way of Being-towards the possible, as well as towards the imaginary.⁶⁷

Eventually the imagination comes more and more to be characterized not as an intellectual power employing choice or the will in reference to the sphere of the real, but rather as essential to Dasein’s projective structure as Being-possible. In the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, notably in the works of “Dugald Stewart and Thomas Browne” (*FI* 179), and I would add Edmund Burke as predating the two, there comes a change whereby “the notion of imagination” is seen less “as a faculty” and “begins more and more to assume the character of a process” (*FI* 180). This “process” moves beyond the self-sufficiency of the imagination conceived as an intentional faculty and sees it instead as an integrated moment in the aesthetic equation drawing on, influenced by, and incorporating the sphere of the imaginary.

Edmund Burke, in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), begins to open up the space of the imaginary as subsisting beyond, but accessible to, the

⁶⁷ Here we can see an aspect of the kinship between religion and aesthetics which stretches from Greek drama, through the Italian Renaissance, to its explicit thematization in Romanticism and Victorian literature (most notably in Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater), and its conscious manipulation in Modernism (as is evident in a large proportion of the works of such authors as William Butler Yeats, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot). In religion and aesthetics, since they both acknowledge horizons beyond the world of nature, we are able to transgress the real and dwell in reality. Reality is not tied to what is as actual, but is focused on the possible. The possible as pure potentiality is boundless, and hence infinite. Therefore, regardless of Heidegger’s conception of Dasein’s radical finitude, reality is effectively infinite. This also entails that the imaginary, since it is the domain of the possible, is similarly infinite.

imagination. “Burke, ... follow[ing] the lead of Addison,” places the imagination at the center of aesthetics, for “the imagination, with its ability to arouse passions and feelings and with its openness to the suggestions of words, that naturally forms the basis of all imitations” (Engell 148). Yet “imitation” should not be equated with a straightforward *mimesis* conceived as the production of a copy from a source as a one-to-one equivalence between the original and the imitation. For Burke aesthetic representation includes ontological and imaginary components. The aesthetic involves not only “passions and feelings” which are the effects of the artist’s mood and attunement; but also includes an attitude of “openness to ... suggestions.” In this way, the artist is placed in the position of a recipient of such suggestions, which arrive from outside her/himself, the suggestive potentiality orbiting around the words or images that provide both the form and content of a literary or pictorial work. From the side of the audience, the imagination for Burke plays a similar role. An imitation really comes to life only when it is actively engaged by the imagination of the recipient, which in its constitutive role is similarly not a simple receptor of sensual data, but rather an openness to external, imaginative influences.

This is especially evident in the case of “Poetry, which does not describe to the senses but engages the imagination of the hearer,” and thus “has as its business ‘to affect rather by sympathy than imitation; to display rather the effect of things on the mind of the speaker, or of others, than to present a clear idea of the things themselves’” (Engell 148). What is presented is of less importance than the manner in which it imaginatively “affect[s]” both the author and the audience, due to the “sympathy” effected through the shared space of an aesthetic reality. The aesthetic in the form of the poetic works on the recipient, and thus we find already in Burke the characterization of aesthetic experience as not an experience which one simply has in the sense of the German *Erlebnis*, but rather an experience which one undergoes, in the sense of the German *Erfahrung*.⁶⁸ These imaginative influences, however, are not sufficient in and of themselves to effect an aesthetic experience, but must also be met by the recipient’s own ontological attunements, for “the influence of most things on our passions is not so much from the things themselves, as from our

⁶⁸ For a detailed discussion of the character of the aesthetic as *Erfahrung*, please see the section “The Imaginary as *Erfahrung*: The Call and the Moment of Vision” (II.b.ii).

opinions concerning them.”⁶⁹ Thus “sympathy” provides a two-way conduit between the Being of the recipient and an aesthetic-world. In comparison with the latitude revealed through the imaginary, imitation is limited in the range of sympathetic responses it may evoke, for “there are many things of a very affecting nature, which can seldom occur in the reality, but the words which represent them often do” (Burke 1: 203). The “words” which Burke has in mind are abstract nouns and concepts, such “as war, death, famine, &c.”; as well as words which refer to “many ideas [which] have never been at all presented to the senses of any men but by words, as God, angels, heaven, and hell” (Burke 1: 203). These words present ways or forms of Being beyond what is directly presented in the real, and hence they draw to some degree on the imaginary. In giving form to the imaginary, such words have a power to affect us greater than that exercised by the mere sense-data depicted through direct imitation, and thus an aesthetic experience which draws on the imaginary may provide “an opportunity of making a deep impression and taking root in the mind, whilst the idea of the reality was transient” (Burke 1: 203). In fact, the capacity of the aesthetic to transcend the real is its peculiar power, and thus we find that the more ideal an art form is, the greater its sympathetic influence. Hence we find that “eloquence and poetry,” are equal or superior both to other aesthetic forms, as well as to nature or the real, in that they “are as capable, nay indeed much more capable, of making deep and lively impressions than any other arts, an even than nature itself in very many cases” (Burke 1: 203). This “capab[ility]” is due to the fact that “eloquence and poetry,” since they are linguistically based, are possessed of higher degree of ideality than “any [of] the other arts.” This linguistic base also makes them more ontologically accessible and equivalent to Being, since Dasein’s projective and structuring capabilities are rooted in the phenomenological conception of language as having its “*existential-ontological foundation*” in “*discourse or talk [Rede]*” (BT 160-161).⁷⁰

In his *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1792), Dugald Stewart further details the role the imagination plays in Dasein’s articulation of its potentialities-for-Being, as well as implicitly incorporating the imaginary as a necessary element in the context of the aesthetic equation. Stewart

⁶⁹ Edmund Burke, *The Works of Edmund Burke*, 9 vols. (Boston, 1839) 1: 203.

⁷⁰ Cf. “Dasein and the Articulation of Being” (II.b.i).

conceives of the “imagination” (a term which he “formerly gave the name of *fancy*”) ⁷¹ as part of Dasein’s primordial structure, in that it is “part of our constitution” (Stewart 333). Yet this is not to say that it possessed to the same exact degree by everyone. Since “imagination is not a simple power of the mind,” and as such “it is formed by a combination of various faculties ... *it must appear under very different forms, in the case of different individuals*”; as some of its component parts are liable to be greatly influenced by habit, and other accidental circumstances” (Stewart 336). The imagination is also central to aesthetics “as forming the groundwork of poetical genius” (Stewart 334; qtd. in *FI* 180) as a creative force. The imagination or fancy is thus fundamental to Dasein’s worlding, since it is the power which both differentiates and interrelates the real and reality. Due to the fact that it is “*not limited to objects of sight*” (Stewart 330), or “*even to the sensible world*” (Stewart 331), it makes it possible for us to transcend the real as it is presented to us through mere sense data, even though it surrounds us as a merely present-at-hand environment [*Umwelt*] and an equipmental context. At the same time, the fancy has a projective, moral (in the sense as he term is used by, for example, Arnold and Carlyle, as enumerated above) power, in that it is “the great spring of human activity, and the principal source of human improvement” (Stewart 367; qtd. in *FI* 180). The imagination also allows us to project ourselves onto our potentialities-for-Being, since “By bringing different abilities to work on one another, the imagination reveals itself to be a power of fusion that extends human beings beyond themselves” (*FI* 180). The imagination makes the temporalizing of temporality possible since “it prevents us from ever being completely satisfied with our present condition, or with our past attainments”; and forces our existentiell projection into the future in that it “engages us continually in pursuit or some untried enjoyment, or of some ideal excellence” (Stewart 367). This “power of fusion” not only extends us beyond ourselves, and hence into the sphere of the imaginary, but also vivifies our Being-with-others through its influence on “*sensibility*” (Stewart 351) and its encouragement and realization of “*sympathy*” (Stewart 353), an identification conducted by the imagination wherein we are able to place ourselves figuratively and imaginatively in the position of an other.

⁷¹ Dugald Stewart, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (Boston and Cambridge, 1855) 334.

Stewart extends this imaginative Being-with-others to the domain of the aesthetic. Other ways of Being are revealed to us through our imaginative identification with others, be they actual persons or fictional characters – the former permitting us to put into action “the duties of life” (Stewart 365) in the real world, the latter providing a prospect where we may elevate both our selves and our horizons. Through the sympathy generated by “*fiction*,” we are enabled to exempt ourselves from both “the rude intercourse of society” and “our own cares, and “By exhibitions of characters a little elevated above the common standard, they have a tendency to cultivate the taste in life; to quicken our disgust at what is mean or offensive, and to form the mind insensibly to elegance and dignity” (Stewart 366). While there are solipsistic dangers attendant on too great a degree of absorption in imaginative fictions, the aesthetic and the imaginary which it discloses, and which engages our imaginations, are essential to education from our earliest years. “Education” should be read in this context as an *e-ducere* – a leading conducted by someone or some force outside of the one being led. Stewart himself writes in a footnote: “I must acknowledge my own partiality for those performances of an earlier date, which describe *the adventures of imaginary orders of being*. [The Arabian Nights’ Entertainment, Fairy Tales, etc.]”; for such tales have “the important advantage of giving to the imagination of young persons a much more vigorous exercise” than other genres such as “novels,” which have a more realistic bent (Stewart 367). Works of these types, regardless of how uncommon they may appear to be, merely foreground what is true of the aesthetic in general, for they all to some degree “introduce us to new worlds, and make us acquainted with new orders of being” (Stewart 370).

Stewart, in his essentially phenomenological investigation of the imagination,⁷² also opens up the sphere of the imaginary as it is disclosed through the elements of the aesthetic equation. As a “power of fusion,” the imagination brings what is at first only a potential into actuality, an action that by definition must draw on the imaginary. But the imaginary is more concretely revealed by Stewart in his treatment of the imagination on relation to a reader. Particularly “In poetry, and in every species of composition”

⁷² Stewart himself points to his phenomenological tendencies in a comment he makes on his own method: “in order to render the subject more obvious to the reader’s examination, I shall, in the further prosecution of it, endeavor to convey my ideas rather by means of particular examples, than in the form of general principles” (Stewart 333).

(Stewart 339), we can see worlding enacted through the imagination of both author and audience. While the author “attempts, by means of language, to present to the mind of another the objects of his own imagination, this power is necessary, though not in the same degree ... to the reader” (Stewart 339). As we read or listen to words being read aloud, “we naturally feel a disposition to form, in our own minds, a distinct picture of what is described” (Stewart 339). But this picture is not, nor can it ever be, in exact conformity with the picture envisioned by the author in the act of composition; therefore, “the imaginations of two men” will never “coincide on such occasions” (Stewart 339). These divergences are due to the fact that “*Different ideas [are] raised by the same words in different minds*” (Stewart 340). The ideas evoked will diverge “according to the different habits of education of individuals, according to the liveliness of their conceptions, and according to the creative power of their imaginations” (Stewart 341). But if even “In the best description, there is much left for the reader to supply” (Stewart 341), and if no two “imaginings” will ever “coincide,” then our interpretations of a work must further draw on a sphere contained in, and at the same time beyond, the work itself – a sphere which makes possible and in a sense contains a range of possible interpretations – namely, the imaginary. As fictive, in the sense of not being representative of something actual in the real, a work not only in its initial creation draws on the imaginary, but continues to draw on it whenever it is actively received and realized through a reader’s interpretative concretizations which themselves give shape to the imaginary. A literary or other aesthetic work thus exists only in the process of the interplay between the imagination and the imaginary. But while for Stewart the imaginary is a necessary dimension of the aesthetic equation, it remains only an implicit part of the process, and not an explicitly theorized domain of its own.

In the development of Romanticism, Iser posits that the imaginary begins to emerge in its own terms when it underwent a “massive revaluation, “focused on “its operational nature, which involves the interplay of the factors that mobilize it” (*FI* 185). While “the Romantics” still essentially “saw the imagination as a faculty ... the subsequent substitution of the term *imaginary* for previous terminology shows clearly that it began to be viewed as a basic act of relating us to the world. As a result the imaginary finally advanced to the status of Ur-fantasy” (*FI* 185), and as such it is the source for the worldhood or the reality contained in, and disclosed through, the shape of a certain aesthetic world. The self as an

imaginative agent is now seen as Being-in-the-world; and the world itself becomes the stage whereon the negotiations of the real and reality and the emergence of the imaginary are to be played out. The imaginary is no longer sequestered backstage as a logical postulate or a disembodied influence; but now it may strut its moment upon the stage arrayed in the costume of the aesthetic, both received and directed by the imagination, as an actor in its own right.

Thomas Brown provides a detailed schematization of the “revaluation” which Iser assigns to the Romantic movement – and while not typically numbered among the Romantics, his theories “could be called frankly ‘romantic,’” even though it “emerged directly from thinkers like Hume, Knight, and Alison” (Engell 167), and thus apparently stemming from the British empirical tradition. In his 1820 Lectures published as *Treatise on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, Brown not only details the temporal and ontological aspects of the projective imagination, but also explicitly opens up the space of the imaginary as a sphere which speaks back to the imagination. In “CHAPTER VII” of “PART III. OF THE INTELLECTUAL STATES OF THE MIND,” Brown “consider[s] ... the phenomena of *imagination*.”⁷³ He posits that “Imagination ... may be considered in two different lights; as it takes place without [in the sense of both “beyond” and “lacking”] desire, – or, as it takes place with desire or intention” (Brown 1: 307). The latter is the manner in which “Imagination has been generally regarded as implying a *voluntary selection and combination of images*, for the productions of compounds different from those which nature exhibits” (Brown 1: 307). While these “compounds” are not to be found in “nature,” this should not be taken to imply that they are original creations. Here Brown is drawing on both Hobbes’s notion of “*compounded*” imagination (Hobbes 9) and Locke’s schematization of “*Real and Fantastical Ideas*.”⁷⁴ Hobbes contrasts the “*simple imagination*,” wherein one “imagin[es] the whole object, as it was [originally] presented to the senses,” as it were “all at once”; with the “*compounded*” imagination, which takes “parts” perceived “at several times” and combines them into an apparently new amalgamation, “as when from the sight of a man at one time, and of a horse at another, we conceive in our mind a Centaur” (Hobbes 9). For

⁷³ Thomas Brown, *Treatise on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, Being the Lectures of the Late Thomas Brown, M.D. Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1827) 1: 306.

⁷⁴ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford U Pr., 1979) 372.

Locke such ideas are “*fantastical*,” in that they are products of the fancy in the same sense which Coleridge employs the term, and thus “are made up of such Collections of simple *Ideas*, as were never really united, never were found together in any Substance; v.g. a rational Creature, consisting of a Horse’s Head, joined to a body of humane shape, or such as the *Centaurs* are described” (Locke 374). Thus for Locke (as for Hobbes) these “compounds” are merely combinations of previously existing elements. Brown similarly ascribes to the imagination “the power of combining” whatever “objects” we have previously perceived “in new and various assemblages, – of forming at our will, with a sort of delegated omnipotence, not a single universe merely, but a new and varied universe, with every succession of our thought” (Brown 1: 306). But as is the case for Hobbes and Locke, “The materials of which we form them ... exist in every mind” previous to our appropriation of them just “as the stones exist shapelessly in the quarry.” But Brown adds a distinctly aesthetic dimension to his discussion, for the final form that we bestow upon them depends on whether they are manipulated with merely “mechanic labour” or “the command of architectural genius” (Brown 306). In our terms, these “sublime functions of the imagination” (Brown 1: 306) are projective and articulating, and as such are analogous to Dasein’s worlding. They allow Dasein to project itself onto its possibilities by forming “pictures of the future ... in the successive hopes, and fears, and designs of life” (Brown 1: 306). They are also part of the collective power of humanity, a power which is essentially aesthetic, for while they are enacted by “The writer of romance,” she/he merely “does” what “we, too, are doing every hour” in “Our romances of real life,” wherein we spin out the “fictions” of our projected futures (Brown 1: 306).

Yet this voluntary imagination, “to whatever extent it may be true, is certainly false in part at least” (Brown 1: 307). When I have an idea of something “which I never saw” and which is “different from any thing in nature,” it “is, in strict language, not a mere *conception*, but an *imagination*” (Brown 1: 308). Here we should note that Brown is not concerned with a personal agent who conceives something or imagines something, but rather focuses on these notions as they provide the mode of existence for ideal objects (objects of thought) – hence his use of the substantive (so to speak) nouns “a ... *conception*” and “an *imagination*.” A “compound” notion, such as when we “conceive a golden mountain,” cannot be a result of a willful act, for we “cannot have selected the images of gold and a mountain with the intention of

forming a the compound of a golden mountain; since it is very evident, that if [we] willed that particular compound, [we] must have had the conception of a golden mountain previously to [our] conception of a golden mountain” (Brown 1: 308), which is logically impossible. But then we must ask: “how happens it that the conception of this object, so different from any thing we have ever seen, should arise in the mind?” (Brown 1: 308). Brown overcomes this dilemma by introducing his notion of “suggestion” (Brown 1: 308), a term he “prefers ... to association” (Engell 167), which previously had been more commonly employed. Our “complex conception[s]” are comprised of “various conceptions” in a state of “co-existence,” thereby “forming one complex feeling” (Brown 1: 309). But at the same time these “various conceptions” may splinter off from the whole, and “one part of this complexity may suggest one conception, while another part suggests a different conception” (Brown 1: 309). But like one under the influence of hypnotic suggestion, “all this happens, not in consequence of any selection of ours, but merely in conformity with the common laws of suggestion” (Brown 1: 309). These “analogous suggestions” (Brown 1: 309) hold us in thrall and sway us in whatever direction their train wends.⁷⁵ Here we can see how the imaginary, which provides a storehouse of a myriad of combinations of possible analogies which are the letters of “the common laws of suggestion,” speaks back oracularly to the mind through suggestion in the *aesthetics of hinting*.

In the *Spectator* “No. 417. SATURDAY, JUNE 28,” Addison first begins to outline the relation between the aesthetic and hinting. Hinting itself more fundamentally underlies memory and the forming of ideas through reflection, since “WE may observe, that any single circumstance of what we have formerly seen, often raises up” or evokes “a whole scene of imagery, and awakens numberless ideas that before slept

⁷⁵ Such “momentary groups of images ... constitute by far the greater number of our imaginations” (Brown 1: 309), and thus provide the basis for our everyday mental life. The temporality of our everyday Being is also determined by suggestion, for “their mind, in consequence of its own original susceptibilities of change, exists, of itself, successively, in those various states which constitute the feelings referred to fancy or imagination” which “presents to them spontaneous images” (Brown 1: 310). Brown here appears to be detailing the mechanics of what we would term an inauthentic imagination. Through his use of the plural “their mind,” and then his shift to the singular “its own” and “itself” later in the same sentence, he seems to be anticipating the dichotomy contained in Heidegger’s concept of authentic Dasein and his notion of the “they” [*das Man*] – this view of suggestion itself being a perversion of Heidegger’s notion of the *call*. This should not, however, be taken to indict the contributions of the hint and hinting to the aesthetic, even though at first glance they may appear to be no different from suggestion; for Heidegger himself recognizes their essential role not only in the aesthetic in general, but to projective *Insein* and the imagination and the imaginary in particular.

in the imagination” (4: 360). Like so many analogues of Proustian cookies, “a particular smell or colour is able to fill the mind, on a sudden, with the picture of the fields or gardens where we first met with it, and to bring up into view all the variety of images that once attended it” (Addison 4: 360). Yet this is not a mode of memory as a direct reproduction of a previous sensual stimulus, but rather is a re-creation of memory (as Shakespeare says) *with advantages*, since when “the fancy thus reflects on he scenes that have past in it formerly, those, which were at first pleasant to behold, appear more so on reflection, and that the memory heightens the delightfulness of the original” (Addison 4: 360). This “heighten[ing]” is effected through the influence of the imagination, which follows and outlines the “set of traces belonging to” any “set of ideas” (Addison 4: 360). Nor are these “traces” limited to a single line or direction, for at the same time they “run ... into several of [the traces] that lie about” in an associational nexus, and “by this means they” are enabled “to awaken other ideas of the same set, which immediately determine a new dispatch of spirits, that in the same manner open other neighboring traces, till at last the whole set of them is blown up” (Addison 4: 361) in manifold directions. In the sphere of the aesthetic, the ability to respond to these “traces” is necessary to the artist and permits the transference of the nexus of hints to the recipient. Thus “a nobler writer,” for example, “should be born with this faculty in full strength and vigour, so as to be able to receive lively ideas from outward objects ... and to range them together, upon occasion, in such figures and representations as are most likely to hit the fancy of the reader” (Addison 4: 361). Here we can see that the ability to respond to the hints evoked by “outward objects” is not solely the result of the conscious application of the faculty of the imagination, but at the same time demands a receptive openness which is “able to receive lively ideas” which insofar as they do not inhere in the objects themselves are also evidence of the traces of the imaginary.

When we hint at something, we by definition do not point at it directly; “hints” instead “are enigmatic” (*OWL* 26). As “the word is a hint,” it can only suggest a direction, a manner of Being-towards, and thus is “not a sign in the sense of mere signification” (*OWL* 27). Heidegger recognizes the essential relation between the aesthetic and the indeterminate (in an approximate sense) which underlies the aesthetics of hinting, citing “Heraclitus ... Fragment 93,” which “says: ‘The ruler whose prophecy occurs at

Delphi⁷⁶ *oute legei oute kryptei*, neither gathers nor hides, *alla sēmainei*, but gives hints” (*IM* 170). In other words, aesthetic communication does not indicate, but suggests or e-vokes, as any discourse which authentically engages an audience must do. Hints both actively summon us to an encounter with an aesthetic work and away from our present selves: “They beckon to us,” while at the same time “They beckon *away*. They beckon us *toward* that from which they unexpectedly bear themselves toward us” (*OWL* 26). In the notion of “hints,” there is implied an articulating and a direction of the recipient towards the work and at the same time the work “bear[s]” in a certain direction (or rather directions) toward the audience. The two are then interrelated as a “belonging together with ... ‘gesture’ or ‘bearing’” (*OWL* 26). If the “Departure from traditional mimesis,” which is the result of an ontologically based mimesis, “goes hand in hand with departure from the convention-governed relationship between signifier and signified by letting the signifier float,” or be suspended, “so that it may serve to produce hitherto unforeseeable significations, resulting ultimately in a fictionalization of established connections,” then “The signs have to be read differently,” since “They no longer denote given positions or substances; instead, they insinuate links, unfold directions, and adumbrate realizations in order to reveal what cannot be denoted” (*FI* 31). Language, when it is used in the aesthetics of hinting, “no longer” merely indicates something drawn from the sphere of the real by simply pointing at it; but rather it suggests connections by “unfolding directions” towards the artwork and into the imaginary, into the possible, in order to bring the imaginary into unconcealment in a definite concretization. The aesthetic word “is able to speak from itself”; and therefore, it “cannot be characterized by the content to which it points” (*OTW* 147). This view of aesthetic “speak[ing]” as hinting holds for language defined in an ontological-existential sense, and hence it is true not only in relation to literature, but is also true of aesthetic language in general, provided we extrapolate the meaning of aesthetic language to include the entire range of potential elements of expression. For this reason Heidegger concludes, “The same is true in the fine arts and for the same reasons,” for “One who sees only the objects presented in a painting obviously looks right past what makes it a work of art” (*OTW* 147) – which is to say, one must look past a work’s ostensible subject in order to access the aesthetic. For example, in the case of “‘object-less’ painters” (a term Gadamer uses to refer to various forms and degrees

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I.e. Apollo – god of poetry as well as medicine, the former being, in a sense, a branch of the latter.

of pictorial abstraction, and to which I would add painters such as Symbolists or the Surrealists, who do not find their subjects or their wealth of forms in nature),

It appears as hints of meaning, allusions, and possibilities of contact are still at play in our usual object-oriented seeing, but they do not attract attention to themselves, rather they turn our view to the new interconnected structures that make such combinations of colors into a picture, without it being an image. Goal-dominated practical life cannot offer something like that. (*OTW* 147)

Thus we can see that in the aesthetics of hinting “there are two sides to interpretation: first, a pointing in a certain direction that itself requires interpretation, but also at the same time a certain holding back on the part of what is to be shown this way” (*RB* 69) – a “holding back” which clears a space into which the recipient may enter and not only demands, but also invites, our investigation. The aesthetic work is simultaneously a revealing and concealing which demands of us that we enter into it in a certain way in order to uncover that which it has to reveal, but at the same time permits us considerable latitude in our manner of proceeding and dwelling.

But what is the role of the imaginary in “cases in which desire or intention of some sort, accompanies it during the whole, or the chief part of the process,” as apparently “is the frame of mind, in composition of every species, in prose or verse” (Brown 1: 310)? While previously we have spoken of the manner in which the authorial intention is eventually sublimated by the work itself, what influence does the imaginary have in the process of aesthetic creation? When we “first ... sit down to compose,” we “have a general notion of some subject which we are about to treat, with the desire of developing it” (Brown 1: 310) – along the lines of a “general notion,” or “leading conception” as Brown later terms it (1: 314), which Heidegger would say is a function of the fore-structures of the understanding. This “desire” is a form of “vivid feeling” (which are both specific attunements as an existentiell instantiation of a mood [*Stimmung*]), which “has a degree of permanence” that “tends to keep the accompanying conception of the subject ... also permanent before us” (Brown 1: 310). In the relative “permanence” through which our desire gropes its way into the imaginary, the fictive or aesthetic “subject” is also established in its own right, and thereby “the usual spontaneous suggestions take place” (Brown 1: 310). These “suggestions” have their source not

only in our attunement or fore-conceptions, but also are emanated by “the subject” itself, though to a lessening frequency and degree as the subject becomes progressively more defined, and hence less susceptible to modification. Each subject has a certain associational nexus determined by “the simple laws of suggestion” or hints which orbit around it in a “confused group” beyond any “control” of the artist (Brown 1: 314). Yet the artist’s projective imagination must come forth to greet the “confused group” of images which are presented to her/him with always “already some leading conception in [her or] his mind” (Brown 1: 314). Thereby the artist “perceives the relation which certain images of the group bear to this leading conception; and these images instantly becoming more lively, and therefore more permanent, the others gradually disappear, and leave those beautiful groups” which provide the form of the completed work, and which only the artist only “seems to have brought together by an act of volition” (Brown 1: 314). Thus we can see that even in “cases of imagination” in regards to aesthetic creation, “where there is an undoubted desire of producing some new and splendid result (Brown 1: 313), the “imagination is wrongly called ‘a peculiar intellectual power’” (Engell 168) exercising sole authority. The imagination is rather “a complex series of stages in the construction of a final product whose completed form is ... an anticipated shadow coming from out of the future” (Engell 168) – a shadow which is gradually concretized out of a range of modalities. “Anticipation” is a manner of Being-towards an object or situation which has not-yet arrived, and which delineates the thing, person, or event anticipated through expectation. We anticipate only in relation to a future wherein we do not know how something is going to be, playing out various scenarios in our minds, without determinedly fixing on any exact content. Instead we play out various scenarios suggested by that which is anticipated and are subsequently given contours by our own imaginative shapings. Yet since expectation itself is conditioned by that which is anticipated, by what we allow as possible or probable, our anticipation is inevitably channeled in certain directions determined by our assessment of the overall situation. The imagination has both an active form as a “leading conception” and a passive form, which as legislated by “the simple laws of suggestion,” is equivalent to our notion of the imaginary.

Since “the imaginary” may “emerge from ... different activities,” the “guiding concepts” of its “manifestations” may be categorized in terms of their “historical sequence” as “*Faculty*, *act*, and the

radical imaginary” (FI 185). Consequently, “The nature of the event will vary according to the source that sets it in motion: the subject (faculty),” which is the standpoint of “Philosophical idealism”; or “consciousness (act),” which is the perspective of “phenomenal psychology”; or “social institutionalization (radical imaginary),” which is the position of “social theory” (FI 185). These shifts form a “line of reconceptualization” which “testifies to the growing importance of the imaginary, which changes from a power to an act that annihilates what is, and eventually to a kind of *materia prima*” (FI 185). Yet I would add that the conception of the imaginary as “a kind of *materia prima*” underlies all these historical moments. While the emphasis on the means of “mobiliz[ing] it” (FI 185) may change, the notion of the imaginary as a warehouse of unactivated modalities continues unabated. The difference between the three comes down to which element of the aesthetic equation is assumed to be central in any given historical period. To adhere to one moment over another closes off the flow of the aesthetic equation, and thereby ostensibly reifies what can exist only as process – in other words, it substitutes a *poetics of presence* for a *poetics of presencing* – a presencing which is made possible both through the projective capabilities of the imagination and through an openness to the imaginary.

As a “*materia prima*” (FI 185), the imaginary is in one of its functions a logical postulate demanded by the imagination. Since the imaginary can only be made known through its instantiation in the shape of the fictive it remains in its totality beyond our grasp, for “to understand something in terms of something else involves grasping it only through its aspects and not as a totality” (FI 223). While we cannot know the ground or origin of the imaginary, we may still apprehend something of the totality promised by the imaginary, since “Present in the helplessness of comprehension [i.e. of the ground of the imaginary] is the experience that the imaginary is pure lifelessness that contains all life” (FI 244). The question then becomes how do we move from the “pure lifelessness” contained *in potentia* in the imaginary and bring it more fully to “life”?

Since “this life can never be completely, but only partially, realized under conditions imposed by something else” (FI 244), a mediator is demanded. Formally considered, this “something else” which performs an “impos[ition]” is the gestalt of the fictive. As the central point through which all the movements energized by the aesthetic equation must pass, “The text ... functions to bring into view the

interplay among the fictive, the real, and the imaginary” (FI 3). When Iser says that “Designating the imaginary as play entails making a cognitive statement, but this cannot be taken as an ontological foundation of the imaginary” (FI 222), he acknowledges the fact that the imaginary as an in-itself is inaccessible to us. But since the fictive as the manifestation of aspects of the imaginary is on one side a result of the activating consciousness of the author; and on the other side, it is the shape of a particular interpretation through which a recipient arrests the play of the text in an apprehension of meaning; the “play” which defines the imaginary ultimately “disappears in what it has brought forth” (FI 222), which includes not only the literary work itself as originally created, but also the reading engrafted by a recipient. While it is true that the imaginary as shapeless potentiality has no distinct ontology of its own, it does attain an ontological structure in both its aesthetic forms as a work and a reading as pro-ducts of the aesthetic *Insein* of author and reader.

The imaginary also functions as “a kind of *materia prima*” (FI 185) in that it provides the source and horizon for the dynamics of the interplay of the real and reality set into motion through the fictive (a special form of the aesthetic) and the imaginary. The literary text, in so far as it is an instantiation of the fictive, is thus the convergence of the real and the imaginary: “The fictive conditions the extent to which a given world (the real) is to be transcoded, a nongiven world (the imaginary) is to be conceived, and the reshuffled worlds are to be made accessible to the reader’s experience” (FI 4). Thus in the moment of reception, the fictive simultaneously reflects itself into the real even as it hearkens back to the imaginary. Earlier we spoke of the aesthetic as “an act of transgression” (FI 3) of the real, and it is precisely this transgressive “act of fictionalizing” conceived as “a crossing of boundaries” which “links it to the imaginary” (FI 3). Since “fictionalizing is a guided act” (FI 3), it is a manifestation of, and rooted in, authorial *Insein*, which as we saw earlier is in turn supplanted by the artwork itself. When it is instantiated as a specific work, fictionalizing “in turn endows the imaginary with an articulate gestalt – a gestalt that differs from the fantasies, projections, daydreams, and other reveries that ordinarily give the imaginary expression in our day-to-day experience,” since the former are in some degree directed – while the latter manifests the imaginary in a more “diffuse,” which is to say less controlled, intentional manner (FI 3). Here we can see the influence of the imaginary as it impinges on authorial imagination. The diffusion

which results from the encounter between the authorial imagination as it projects its own reality and the imaginary as it assumes a specific shape is what eventually causes authorial intention to be over-written, for even though “the fictionalizing ... provides the imaginary with a determinacy that it would not otherwise possess” (*FI* 3), the resultant diffuseness renders it beyond authorial control. At the same time, this projected reality becomes codified in the real as a distinct artwork, for in achieving a hyper-determinacy “it enables the imaginary to take on an essential quality of the real” (*FI* 3). Here we can see the exchanges between the real and reality in more expressly aesthetic terms: “extratextual reality [in our terminology “the real”] merges into the imaginary, and the imaginary merges into reality [equivalent for us to the real]” (*FI* 3).

Here we are consciously working against a plethora of postmodern theories, which in general contain within themselves an essentially (although oftentimes unrecognized, or at least unacknowledged – a lack of acknowledgment which in and of itself is “ideological”) structuralist starting-point, wherein the “imaginary” is often posited as synonymous with “ideology.” In their common desire to corral Being under some dominant template, and in their attempts to de-center or devalue Dasein by undercutting any notion of self-subsisting subjectivity, the imaginary is set up as an illusory residue surviving an outdated imagination. It is only as a “collective term” that “‘the imaginary’ survives to some extent the philosophical decline of the subjective term ‘the imagination,’” since the “former term increasingly carries the connotations of an impersonal entity. The ‘imaginary’ is seen as a mere ‘effect’ of a technologically transmitted sign system over which the subject has no control.”⁷⁷ In such theories, “the imaginary” is used in a pejorative sense as implying either that which is merely a subjective construction (both in the sense of being a product of an individual consciousness, as well as a relativistic standard), or otherwise exists as an imposed condition, for the most part in some brand of false-consciousness. In place of an orientation grounded in and directed towards the real, self-delusion or false-consciousness is seen as losing itself in, and sacrificing itself to, the imaginary. Jacques Lacan, for example, in his “critique of humanist psychology” (Kearney, *Wake* 261), works against “the humanist ideal of self-identity,” has “sought to expose it as an ‘imaginary’ contrivance” (Kearney, *Wake* 257). For Lacan, “the *imaginary* ... serves as a repository of the falsehoods of the ‘self’ at

⁷⁷ Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 251.

both a psychological and social level” (Kearney, *Wake* 259). Louis Althusser in his “critique of humanist ideology,” on the other hand, “equates the *imaginary* with the ‘false consciousness’ of the bourgeoisie. He defines ideology, accordingly, as the representation of the subject’s *imaginary* relationship to his or her *real* conditions of existence” (Kearney, *Wake* 261). Finally, in Roland Barthes

the imaginary is ... treated as mere myth, an epiphenomenon of concealed linguistic structures. Barthes’ aim is thus to transform ‘semiology’ (the science of signs) into a ‘semiclasism’ (a critique of signs) which will shatter the ideological *imaginaire* of Western bourgeois man, i.e. of a subject who still prides himself as the source of universal meaning. (Kearney, *Wake* 272)

Where the preceding theories fall short is in their persistent reductionism which polarizes the real and reality, and ends by placing all credence squarely and exclusively in the former. We do not deny that the imaginary, strictly speaking, is not real (we admit to certain idiosyncrasies and scruples, but we trust that full blown insanity is not one of them); however, this does not mean that the imaginary is without direct relevance and meaning for Dasein’s worldhood and existence. The consequences of such reductive positions for both Dasein and the aesthetic are dire; for if they are endorsed, they leave us nothing but a sequence of days plodded out under the auspices of the “they” [*das Man*], whatever “ideology” they may momentarily espouse – one to which they invariably demand we also consign ourselves.

In stifling the ontological dimension of human existence, they not only deny the totality of the primordial structure of human Being, they moreover prevent the recognition of the liberating potential of the imaginary in our pursuit of authentic Being. Authenticity is no longer even an issue. The only attunements available to us under such a framework are those which aim at the destruction of the imaginary; and therefore, an essential aspect of our selves – a destructive tendency which has significant repercussions for language in general and the aesthetic in particular. If as Barthes holds, “the primary goal of the semioclast is ... to destroy the fetishistic power of the imaginary so that its covert ideological strategies be laid bare” (Kearney, *Wake* 272-273), then “Sarcasm is ... the appropriate attitude for the demythologizer in our postmodern age” (Kearney, *Wake* 273). Sarcasm functions by saying the opposite of what is meant, in order to debase that which is addressed. Discourse no longer opens out a world, but

rather preemptively undermines the very foundations that make a world possible at all. But by denying world, we also thereby deny Dasein: “it is not sufficient to demystify the collective imaginary *out there*; one must also be prepared to demystify the demystifying subject himself” (Kearney, *Wake* 273). By deposing both the disclosing power of discourse and the speaking of Being, the enemies of the imaginary suppose themselves to have shown that “there is no transcendental sanctuary of truth either inside or outside man” (Kearney, *Wake* 273). Thus “Sarcasm” is ultimately “the recognition that there is no such thing as truth at all” (Kearney, *Wake* 273). Discourse is no longer a medium for the projection of Being, but is rather a sort of suicide by definition.

But where does this leave us, now that “we” supposedly “no longer *know* what truth is or what awaits us in the post-modern era when the myths of bourgeois humanism have been destroyed” (Kearney, *Wake* 273)? In such a decentered state, we sink back primarily to the spirit of negation, for this is all that is left to us: we know only what is not, for a “demythologizer can only affirm what truth is *not*” (Kearney, *Wake* 273). Such theories also concomitantly call into question the validity of the real which they initially set out to preserve against the encroachments of the imaginary, “For as the imaginary disappears, so too does the reality of the objective world” (Kearney, *Wake* 273). Dasein, at the same time, threatens to suffocate under the weight of the structures imposed on it, when “The social order develops forms of such power that the individual is hardly conscious at all any longer of living out his own decisions, even in the intimate sphere of his own personal existence” (*PH* 111). Yet in such a guise social structures are to a lesser or greater degree functionaries of the “they” [*das Man*], and hence are kept in force only through the encouragement and persistence of inauthentic modes of Being, primarily the inauthentic modes of discourse as idle talk and misdirected curiosity; and as such they may be opposed by Dasein’s turning back in the direction of its “there” in order to initiate a process of re-centering through “Hermeneutical reflection” (*PH* 92) carried out through the aesthetic event and the encounter with the imaginary.

As a means of transcending the real, the imaginary thus provides a storehouse of potentialities-for-Being. By permitting us a space wherein to project ourselves, the imaginary permits us to try on different, alternative ways of Being. In its issuing-forth as a modalizing, futural Being, Dasein is characterized by its boundless striving – a striving which is Dasein’s continual over-reaching of itself as it stretches itself

between past and future. Yet “the imaginary,” as a sphere beyond the real is not subject to contingency, in Iser’s view “has long been considered as a tangible manifestation of perfection” (*P* 275). This perspective on the imaginary seems to be smeared by the faint residue of the Platonic conception of forms, which places the ideal forms of objects in a sphere beyond our apprehension; but yet this view evidences a significant alteration, in that the “manifestation of perfection” embodied through “the imaginary” is described as “tangible.” The tangibility of the imaginary cannot be experienced or conceived as a direct, physical phenomenon due to the characteristics of the imaginary itself; but (as we saw above) it can take on a distinct shape in an aesthetic work. Thus “it was assumed that only art allowed man’s participation in [perfection]. The concept was virulent up to Nietzsche, who regarded art as an urge to transform our phenomenal world to the pitch of perfection” (*P* 275). For Iser, the problem with such a view is that “Such ideas radiate a knowledge as to what the imaginary is, but they mark it off in contradistinction to reality, whereas in fact it counters and compensates for reality, thus being conditioned by what it is supposed to transcend. The contrast that is integral to the definition completely ignores the dependence” (*P* 275). We are similarly concerned with the “transform[ation]” of “our phenomenal world”; but in keeping with Iser’s caveat, our perspective does not lose sight of “reality” (which in our terms is the real) and rather engages it, due to the fact that aesthetic reality “compensates” for the real by disclosing potentialities that may eventually be activated in the real. Yet Iser neglects to recognize that in this compensation not only the imaginary is necessarily set up “in contradistinction to reality” through positing a condition beyond it, but the real is also marked off “in contradistinction to” itself through its transformation.

The question now becomes, as Ricoeur asks: “Are we not ready to recognize in the power of imagination, no longer the faculty of deriving ‘images’ from our sensory experience, but the capacity for letting new worlds shape our understanding of ourselves?” (Ricoeur 181) – new worlds which are to emerge from the imaginary?

b. The Aesthetics of Authenticity

i. The Busy-ness of the World and Its Discontents: Everydayness and the “They”

“The whole connection between authentic and inauthentic existence, between the moment of vision and the absence of such a moment, is not something present at hand which transpires within man, but one which belongs to Dasein. We can only understand the *concepts* that open up this connection as long as they are not taken to signify characteristic features or properties of something present at hand, but are taken rather as *indications* that show how our understanding must first twist free from our ordinary conceptions of beings and properly transform itself into the Da-sein in us.” (FCM 296)

The aesthetic in general, and literature in particular, “lifts the reader out of the situation he was in prior to” (P 52) undergoing an aesthetic event. For example, in the case of “reading ... This temporary removal from everyday life is evident when, for instance, we are immersed in a book, someone enters the room, and we need a few moments to adapt ourselves to the new and actual situation” (P 52). We forget ourselves and our immediate surroundings, and in so doing, remove ourselves from our situation in the everyday and open ourselves to the possibility of transformation, in a manner similar to that we observed occurring in the playing of games. The “simultaneity of two mutually exclusive conditions,” that is of the real and reality, of the everyday and the imaginary, “achieved by literary fictionality – enables human beings to experience their inherent split” (FI 83). But since this process is carried out through our “issuing into” the “ephemeral images” of the aesthetic (either as creators or interpreters), “it prevents this experience of doubling from disappearing into the product of a bridged division. Consequently, the totality evoked remains a finite one” (FI 83), wherein our awareness of the split is to a lesser or greater degree preserved. Yet the condition that aesthetic “doubling” cannot produce in itself a “bridged division” does not necessarily imply that no way forward is to be found – in fact, the way forward involves a return which takes place only when Dasein enters resolutely into its own situation after undergoing the aesthetic experience and having heard the call of the aesthetic. At this point in our investigation, however, “As a

pattern of inner-worldly totality,” the awareness of this split “does not compensate for existing deficiencies” (*FI* 83-84) in itself alone, as one would be led to believe (for instance) under the model of psychoanalysis, “because it does not embody an ideal” which is inhabitable – “Instead, it presents the constitutive dividedness of human beings as the source of possible worlds within the world” (*FI* 84) – and herein lies the potentiality for the aesthetic to “compensate for existing deficiencies.” This “constitutive dividedness of human beings” is constitutive of Dasein in three senses: firstly, it is constitutive insofar as for Dasein “in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it” (*BT* 12), which is to say, it is divided against itself by taking issue with itself; and secondly (as an outgrowth of the first sense), it is constitutive for Dasein, insofar as it issues-forth through projecting, in that projection by definition requires a division between what a Dasein was or is and what it not-yet is; and thirdly, it is constitutive for Dasein insofar as it exists between the everyday world of the real and its own world of reality. Mary Devereaux calls our attention to the fact that “Gadamer adopts” Heidegger’s notion of “truth as *aletheia*, an uncovering of what was previously masked or hidden,” to derive a view “of art as discovery or disclosure. Art is mimetic not because it copies the world as it is but because it illuminates what the confusion of everyday life obscures”⁷⁸ – a definition of mimeticism which is in keeping with our ontological characterization. The artwork demands that its recipient cross the boundary between its everydayness and the world disclosed in the work, “for a work is in actual effect as a work only when we remove ourselves from our commonplace routine and move into what is disclosed by the work, so as to bring our own nature itself to take a stand in the truth of what is” (*PLT* 75). The aesthetic, while it ultimately brings Dasein into confrontation with itself and with its own potentiality for authenticity, must first instate a division between Dasein’s everyday Being and a new way of Being which must be adopted in order to enter into the aesthetic authentically. This new manner of Being, however, is not yet authentically Dasein’s own and at this point is only a provisional adopting of it. The artwork summons us out of our everydayness and into the open, which is pregnant with possibilities for one willing “to take a stand.” Now we must ask: precisely what is it that

⁷⁸ Mary Devereaux, “Can Art Save Us? A Meditation on Gadamer,” *Philosophy and Literature* 15 (1991): 65.

“the confusion of everyday life obscures” – a question and an attitude of questioning which will lead us eventually to be able to pose the question: how do we “take a stand” against, and in contradistinction to, Dasein’s average everydayness?

Dasein’s potentiality for either authenticity or inauthenticity “are both grounded in the fact that any Dasein whatever is characterized by mineness [*Jemeinigkeit*]” (BT 43), which also makes possible the state in which “Dasein is mine to be on one way or another” (BT 42). Since “Dasein has always made some sort of decision as to the way in which it is in each case mine [*je meines*]” (BT 42), it must cut itself off from other potentialities-for-Being. Dasein’s ability to “‘choose’ itself and win itself, as well as its potential to ‘lose itself and never win itself,’ is possible ‘only in so far as it is essentially something which can be *authentic* [*eigentlich*] – that is, something of its own [*eigen*]” (BT 42-43). To term Being “inauthentic” should not be taken to “signify any ‘less’ Being or any ‘lower’ degree of Being,” since “even in its fullest concretization Dasein can be characterized by inauthenticity – when busy, when excited, when interested, when ready for enjoyment” (BT 43). This should not be taken to mean that one Dasein has more Being than another, nor do we desire to institute herein a ranking of Being in any kind of hierarchical arrangement. Since Dasein exists primarily in the mode of everydayness, this also means that it exists primarily inauthentically, and hence a certain degree of inauthenticity is more or less unavoidable, regardless of the temporary extent of authenticity any one Dasein might attain. But on the other hand, this does not automatically mean that Dasein should simply sacrifice itself to the inauthentic, for Dasein remains *in potentia* able to grasp its ownmost potentialities-for-Being; but rather simply means that as absorbed in the world of its everyday concern, Dasein is proximally and for the most part inauthentic.

In the inauthentic mode of idle talk, Dasein is not able project itself onto its ownmost potentialities-for-Being through discourse, nor is it able to bring the world into unconcealment through language. Idle talk covers up the ontological dimension of language by reducing its function to merely addressing the present-at-hand. Yet this does not mean that everyday discourse cannot “preserve ... an understanding of the disclosed world and therewith, equiprimordially, an understanding of the Dasein-with of Others and of one’s own Being-in” (BT 168). “In language” when it is ontologically oriented “as a way things have been expressed or spoken out [*Ausgesprochenheit*], there is hidden a way in which the

understanding of Dasein has been interpreted,” and “This way of interpreting it is no more just present-at-hand than language is; on the contrary, its Being is itself of the character of Dasein” (BT 167). Such an “understanding” may be generally a human, or more specifically a cultural inheritance, which as such has “already been ‘deposited’ in the way things have been expressed” (BT 168). The “discourse which is expressed and which expresses itself” has the character of “communication” and is aimed at bringing the hearer to participate in disclosed Being towards what is talked about in the discourse” (BT 168). Through communicating we come to share the same world as a *co-mundus*. In this sense, “communication” does not refer to a shared world of mere things which we simply indicate through linguistic pointers, “but Being-with-one-another takes place in talking with one another and in concern with what is said-in-the-talk” (BT 168). Thus we can see that an ontological bearing towards the world is specifically preserved by “The Being-said, the *dictum*, the pronouncement [Ausspruch]” (BT 168). But “this discoursing” is second-hand, and thereby it

has lost its primary relationship-of-Being towards the entity talked about, or else it has never achieved such a relationship. It does not communicate in such a way as to let this entity be appropriated in a primordial manner, but communicates rather by following the route of *gossiping* and *passing the word along*. (BT 168)

Nor is this inauthentic mode of discourse limited to “talk” in the form of speaking, nor is it “confined to vocal gossip, but even spreads to what we write” (BT 168-169), and thus explicitly engulfs the Being of the writer, “where it takes the form of ‘scribbling’ [das ‘Geschreibe’],” which “feeds upon superficial reading [dem Angelesenen]” (BT 169). Nor is the reader any more immune, for in such a condition “The average understanding of the reader will *never be able* to decide what has been drawn from primordial sources with a struggle and how much it is just gossip” (BT 169). In practice, idle talk encourages inauthenticity; it holds out to us

the possibility of understanding everything without previously making it one’s own. If this were done, idle talk would founder; and it already guards against such a danger. Idle talk is something which anyone can rake up; it not only releases one from the task of genuinely understanding, but develops an

undifferentiated kind of intelligibility, for which nothing is closed off any longer. (BT 169)

Our Being-in-the-world as it is disclosed through idle-talk is limited to a second-hand reality which is essentially a form of linguistic false consciousness, since this second-hand consciousness overwrites our own. The second-hand consciousness furthermore locates its reality in the present-at-hand, a placement which is underscored by the image of “Idle talk” being “something which anyone can rake up” – in other words, as some-thing already present which can be manipulated with tools. The final result is that idle talk, unlike the authentic modes of discourse and language, “serves not so much to keep Being-in-the-world open for us in an articulated understanding, as rather to close it off, and cover up the entities within-the-world” (BT 169), and concludes by “perverting the act of disclosing [Erschliessen] into an act of closing off [Verschliessen]” (BT 169). As a result, “Dasein’s understanding” is “uprooted” and “Dasein keeps floating unattached [in einer Schwebel],” even though “it is always alongside the world, with Others, and towards itself” (BT 170). The state of being uprooted becomes “Dasein’s most everyday and most stubborn ‘Reality’”; and “while the particular Dasein drifts along towards an ever-increasing groundlessness as it floats, the uncanniness of this floating remains hidden from it” (BT 170) – an uncanniness which will may eventually and ultimately be productive for Dasein, but until Dasein’s *Unheimlichkeit* is confronted in the call, Dasein remains detached from its self, and hence sequestered from its ownmost world.

Curiosity is the constant companion of idle talk, for “*either* of these ways-to-be drags the *other* one with it” (BT 173). As an inauthentic, everyday mode of understanding, curiosity is the degeneration of the “sight” which is made possible by “the disclosedness of Being-in as Dasein’s ‘clearing’” (BT 170). When Dasein is in thrall to curiosity, it “tends away from what is most closely ready-to-hand, and into a far alien world” (BT 172), one beyond that world in which it has toiled. In this state, “Dasein lets itself be carried along [mitnehmen] solely by the looks of the world”; and “in this kind of Being, it concerns itself with becoming rid of itself as Being-in-the-world and rid of its Being alongside that which, in the closest everyday manner, is ready to hand” (BT 172). On the other hand, “When curiosity has become free ... it concerns itself with seeing, not in order to understand what is seen” ontologically in terms of its own *Insein*, “(that is, to come into a Being towards it) but *just*,” which is to say basically, “in order to see” (BT

172). Curiosity is the continually repeated act of Dasein's "abandoning itself to the world" (BT 172) of the real in its everydayness – even though such everydayness may appear to the curious to be something unusual. It "seeks restlessness and the excitement of continual novelty and changing encounters" (BT 172) and becomes lost in the world's hasty, thoughtless busyness. Here Dasein is solely "concerned with the constant possibility of *distraction*" – a "distraction by new possibilities" (BT 172) that do not involve any the authentic engagement of *Insein* – which is to say, it is the "possibility of *distract[ing]*" itself from the issue of its own Being and any awareness of its lostness in the "they." By "*not tarrying* in the environment" (BT 172), Dasein becomes little more than a kind of stereotypical tourist – uninvolved in any meaningful manner and encountering only the surface level of life through an indifferent gaze. As a result of its "*not tarrying*," in conjunction with its perpetually distracted condition, Dasein has what "we call the character of '*never dwelling anywhere* [*Aufenthaltslosigkeit*]" (BT 173). Since "Curiosity is everywhere and nowhere" (BT 173), Dasein no longer has its own "there"; and in this "new kind of Being of everyday Dasein," it is "constantly uprooting itself" (BT 173). In this manner, Dasein abandons itself to homelessness, but yet does not feel the infringement of unhomelikeness [*Unheimlichkeit*].

As a result of the prevalence of idle talk and ambiguity, "it soon becomes impossible to decide what is disclosed in a genuine understanding, and what is not" (BT 173). The failure to recognize a "genuine understanding" subsequently leads to the inauthentic, everyday mode of interpretation which we term "ambiguity [*Zweideutigkeit*]," and which eventually "extends not only to the world, but just as much to Being-with-one-another as such, and even to Dasein's Being towards itself" (BT 173). In fact, ambiguity supports both idle talk and curiosity, by "always tossing to curiosity that which it seeks," and by "giv[ing] idle talk the semblance of having everything decided in it" (BT 174). In undercutting interpretation, "ambiguity has already established itself in the understanding as a potentiality-for-Being, and in the way Dasein projects itself and presents itself with possibilities" (BT 173). Under the sway of ambiguity, Dasein becomes bifurcated, suspended between two or more potentialities-for-Being, unable to enact a decision, and hence unable to determinedly project itself in a distinct manner of Being towards any one of its possibilities. Ambiguity, which oftentimes is held up as a standard to which one who sees the myriad complications and nuances which so frequently accompany human situations and events, is in reality a

form of debilitation against which we must be on guard if we are not to lose our capacity for decision. This should not be taken to advocate that one should stick to a simplistic perspective, but should only be taken as a warning that if truth is largely a matter of our ontological orientation, by holding ourselves back in suspension, we perforce fall back into ignorance, if not error. In the end, we find that in the condition of ambiguity, “Dasein’s understanding in the ‘they’ is constantly *going wrong* [*versieht sich*] in its projects, as regards the genuine possibilities of Being” – a condition which means that “Dasein is always ambiguously ‘there’” (BT 174) – which is to say, it is “always” *nowhere*.

As “an absorption in Being-with-one-another,” not in authentic companionship, but in the self-concealing conglomeration of the “they,” “in so far as the latter is guided by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity,” Dasein resides in a state of “Fallenness” (BT 175) – which is to say that Dasein has fallen away from its “there.” Fallenness itself is contingent on Dasein’s thrownness, and thus also “reveal[s] a basic kind of Being which belongs to everydayness,” which “we call ... the ‘falling’ [*Verfallen*] of Dasein” (BT 175). While “The verb ‘verfallen’ is ... usually translate[d] ... simply as ‘fall’, it has the connotation of *deteriorating, collapsing, or falling down*” (BT 21 trans. note 2); Heidegger, however, insists that “This term does not express any negative evaluation, but is used to signify that Dasein is proximally and for the most part *alongside* the ‘world’ of its concern” (BT 175), as opposed to *in* “the ‘world’” of its care as *Insein*. The notion of fallenness helps to clarify “what we have called the ‘inauthenticity’ of Dasein” (BT 175-176) as “a quite distinctive kind of Being-in-the-world – the kind which is completely fascinated by the ‘world’” of the real, as well as “by the Dasein-with of Others in the ‘they’” (BT 176). Dasein’s ability for “Not-Being-its-self [Das Nicht-es-selbst-sein]” should not be construed in a negative sense, but rather “functions as a *positive* possibility of that entity, which in its essential concern, is absorbed in a world” (BT 176) as one of the ways Dasein can indeed be, however detrimental may be its result; nor is it negative in a strictly logical sense, for such a manner of Being does not distinguish any one Dasein from all other *Daseinen* in the undifferentiated solution which is the shifty medium and insubstantial substance of the “they.” We must also be careful not to read “fallenness” in a Biblical sense as a Edenic fall, or more generally as a fall from grace: “So neither must we take the fallenness of Dasein as a ‘fall’ from a purer and higher ‘primal status’.” Not only do we lack any experience of this ontically, but ontologically we lack any

possibilities or clues for Interpreting it” (BT 176). Nor is our fallenness an ontic state from which we can be redeemed by some corrective revolutionary upheaval, for “We would also misunderstand the ontological-existential structure of falling if we were to ascribe to it the sense of a bad and deplorable ontical property of which, perhaps, more advanced stages of human culture might be able to rid themselves” (BT 176).

Yet fallenness does in fact betray a distinctly negative aspect: by falling under the thrall of the world of the “they” and its ambiguous, idle dictates; Dasein perforce falls away from its “there,” which provides the site for its ownmost potentialities-for-Being and instead loses itself in the busy-ness of the world of the real. The inauthenticity of Being-in-the-world calls⁷⁹ to Dasein, beckoning it away from itself in “a constant temptation towards falling,” for “Being-in-the-world is in itself *tempting* [*versucherisch*]” (BT 177). The complacency of the attitude of the “they” idly promises to

guarantee to Dasein that all the possibilities of its Being will be secure, genuine, and full.

Through the self-certainty and decidedness of the ‘they’, it gets spread abroad increasingly that there is no need of authentic understanding or the state-of-mind that goes with it. The supposition of the ‘they’ that one is leading and sustaining a full and genuine ‘life’, brings Dasein a *tranquility*, for which everything is ‘in the best of order’ and all doors are open. Falling Being-in-the-world, which tempts itself, is at the same time *tranquilizing* [*beruhigend*].” (BT 177)

The erroneous “self-certainty” and mock “decidedness of the ‘they’” is “spread abroad” through the gossip of idle talk and has the result not only of effectively eliminating Dasein’s projecting, but also works to uproot it from Dasein’s primordial structure. The “*tranquility*” which Dasein believes itself to feel is precisely the result of this foreclosing of its authentic ontological dimension: Dasein precariously theorizes that if “everything is ‘in the best of order,’” what need is there for me to alter anything, and all the while it remains ignorant of the fact that it has shut itself off from its own world in its submersion in the world of the “they.” Thus “this tranquility in inauthentic Being does not seduce one into stagnation and inactivity,

⁷⁹ The call of inauthentic Being-in-the-world is the obverse of what Heidegger terms the *call of conscience* – the latter of which we will investigate in an aesthetic context in the following section: “The Imaginary as *Erfahrung*: The Call” (II.c.ii).

but” rather paradoxically “drives one into uninhibited ‘hustle’ [“Betriebs”] (BT 177-178). In losing itself, Dasein must at the same time forget itself; and in order to maintain the delusion of such supposed tranquility, it must continue to lose itself in the “hustle” and bustle of the busy-ness which the “they” discharges. The oblivion wherein Dasein conceals itself functions like a narcotic, and following the pattern of addiction, “The tempting tranquillization *aggravates* the falling” (BT 178). In this state, “Versatile curiosity,” which is to say a “curiosity” skilled in avoidance,

and restlessly ‘knowing it all’ masquerade[s] as a universal understanding of Dasein. But at bottom it remains indefinite *what* is really to be understood, and the question has not even been asked. Nor has it been understood that understanding itself is a potentiality-for-Being which must be made free in one’s *ownmost* Dasein alone. (BT 178)

In this way “it drifts along towards an alienation [Entfremdung] in which its ownmost potentiality-for-Being is hidden from it” (BT 178). Thus “Falling Being-in-the-world is not only tempting and tranquillizing; it is at the same time *alienating*” (BT 178). Dasein is alienated from itself, and this alienation drives it into a kind of Being which borders on the most exaggerated ‘self-dissection’” and “leads by its own movement, to Dasein’s getting *entangled* [verfängt] in itself” (BT 178). Taken together “temptation, tranquillizing, alienation and self-entangling (entanglement)” comprise the “‘movement’ of Dasein in its own Being,” which “we call its ‘*downward plunge*’ [Absturz],” wherein “Dasein plunges out of itself into itself, into the groundlessness and nullity of inauthentic everydayness” (BT 178), although this fact initially and for the most part remains hidden from it. At the same time, however, “in the movement of falling,” Dasein undergoes a condition of “*turbulence* [Wirbel],” which “makes manifest that the thrownness which can obtrude itself upon Dasein and its state-of-mind, has the character of throwing and movement. Thrownness is neither a ‘fact that is finished’ nor a Fact that is settled” (BT 179). Turbulence is akin to the anxiety [Angst] which defines Dasein’s mood as it initially finds itself in its thrownness and first makes Dasein uncomfortably aware of its status as Being-in-the-world – but the former at the same time raises anew the question of its “here” and its “there,” along with permitting a growing grasp of its projective capabilities and its temporality. This “‘*downward plunge*’ [Absturz]” is thus also a necessary stage towards Dasein’s becoming resolute in the moment of vision:

Accordingly, beings move into their steadfastness when the founders of the truth of being *go under*. Be-ing itself requires this. It needs those who go under; and wherever beings appear, it has already *en-owned* these founders who go under and allotted them to be-ing. That is the essential swaying of be-ing itself. We call it *enowning*. The riches of the turning relation of be-ing to Da-sein, which is enowned by be-ing, are immeasurable. The fullness of the enowning is incalculable. (*C Phil.* 6)

Here we are reading “steadfastness” from the later *Contributions to Philosophy: From Enowning* as analogous to “resoluteness” as it is used in *Sein und Zeit*, for both entail Dasein’s “turning” towards in its “there” decidedly as a “Da-sein,” as well as implying a state of mind characterized by unyielding self-determination. In this context “beings” should not be taken to refer to a mere collection of entities, for “‘beings’ is used as a word whose point of reference is ‘a being’s restoration in the other beginning,’ which is to say that ... ‘beings’ is not to be taken as a generalization of all ‘beings.’”⁸⁰ In this process of self-determination, Dasein enowns itself, and in so doing opens up a storehouse of potentialities-for-Being whose “riches ... are immeasurable” and whose “fullness ... is incalculable,” for as potentialities they are not yet quantifiable. Nor are they ever to be quantifiable, unless they are forcibly reduced to a Cartesian metaphysics based on “certainty,” or the profit and loss economy of a materialist metaphysics of presence. Such “steadfastness of be-ing carries its own measure within itself – if it still needs a measure at all” (*C Phil.* 9).

Dasein’s move towards existential authenticity and its enowning of itself begins with the turbulence which unsettles Dasein and begins to make it aware of its own *Unheimlichkeit* through fomenting discontent with the busy-ness of the world of the “they.” While in the context of an aesthetic phenomenology, the requirement for Dasein to undergo a dialectic movement away from an exclusive and ultimately debilitating orientation in the public they-world in order to disinter its “there,” Dasein’s relationship to the “they” nevertheless remains central to it proximally and for the most part, insofar as the end of the aesthetic returns to the real. Along these lines, Heidegger’s own view of the dialectics of

⁸⁰ Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, “Translator’s Foreword,” *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, by Martin Heidegger (Bloomington: Indian U Pr., 1999) xxiii.

authenticity and inauthenticity are not wholly unambiguous. Heidegger himself warns us against an excessively stringent stance against the “they” – stating, “In relation to these phenomena” of everydayness, “it may not be superfluous to remark that our own Interpretation is purely ontological in its aims, and is far removed from any moralizing critique of everyday Dasein, and from the aspirations of a ‘philosophy of culture’” (BT 167). Heidegger further cautions, “The expression ‘idle talk’ [“Gerede”] is not to be used here in a ‘disparaging’ signification. Terminologically, it signifies the kind of Being of everyday Dasein’s understanding and interpreting” (BT 167). Yet Gadamer notes a seeming ambivalence in Heidegger in regard to these matters: “At that time, however, his severe style of lecturing and the pointedness of his invective made it appear simply incredible when Heidegger described the world of the ‘They’ and ‘idle chatter’ with bitter acrimony and then added, ‘this is intended without any negative meaning.’” Gadamer holds, on the one hand, that “It is not difficult today, on the basis of Heidegger’s later work, to recognize that even *Being and Time* does not represent a philosophy of existence”; he maintains on the other hand, “Today it is clear that the inner and indissoluble connection of the authenticity and inauthenticity of Dasein, of unconcealedness and concealment, of truth and error, indicated the real dimension of the Heideggerian inquiry” (PH 141). The foundation of Heidegger’s discussion of these issues was established early in “Heidegger’s first systematic work [*Sein und Zeit*],” which Gadamer characterizes as a

passionate protest against the secured cultural world of the older generation and the leveling of all individual forms of life by industrial society, with its ever stronger uniformities and its techniques of communication and public relations that manipulated everything. Heidegger contrasted the concept of the authenticity of Dasein, which is aware of its finitude and resolutely accepts it, with the ‘They,’ ‘idle chatter,’ and ‘curiosity,’ as fallen and inauthentic forms of Dasein. (PH 214-215)

For these reasons, Gadamer posits that it was “Against his will” that Heidegger “became a kind of philosopher of existence” (PH 140) as both a response to his specific cultural moment, as well as to the recurring and expanding dehumanizing situations which affront us.

Yet Gadamer, at the same time, distinctly sees Heidegger decidedly as a “philosopher of existence” (PH 140), holding that “Heidegger’s transcendental analysis of everydayness did justice to the

experience of real life and to the inner decisions that are the part of the leading of each personal life” (*PH* 140) – “inner decisions” which (we would add) include those wherein an individual cuts her/himself off from the public-self in order to realize a “personal life.” We can further posit that even though Heidegger did not ostensibly intend “any negative meaning,” and even though the poles of Being as authentic and inauthentic are contained by an “inner and indissoluble connection,” there still remain two distinct paths we may choose between and pursue; and while pursuing the path of authenticity does not, and cannot, wholly remove us from everyday existence, since we cannot entirely escape from the world even by fleeing into an aesthetic dream-world; to be, on the other hand, entirely under the sway of inauthenticity may indeed preclude authenticity *in toto*. While everydayness is unavoidably the primary mode of Dasein (as Heidegger so often says in *Sein und Zeit*) *proximally and for the most part* – to never hear the *call*, and thus to never even approach becoming *resolute*, is to truncate existence and abortively close off its potentialities-for-Being. In fact, the possibility of existence itself appears to be largely founded on the authentic-inauthentic split. We might also ask here, if one does not recognize authentic Being, how can one detect the inauthentic? One must have an idea of home to recognize the fact that one is lost and have a notion of a proper path or dwelling place to realize one has wandered; and if one has never had a home, one cannot know homelessness. Only those who have emerged from fallenness can see that they had fallen in the first place – or as Iser more generally formulates it: “Insights into states of consciousness are only possible against the background of their cancellation” (*P* 182). Similarly, while “unconcealedness and concealment” (*PH* 141) are interlinked, it is only through an encounter with the unconcealed that we are enabled to know that there has been a concealing – otherwise we wander about in a dark room whose sole light-bulb has always been burned out.

The aesthetic dimension of Being is similarly concerned with permitting Dasein to expand the “modes of” Being (*P* 153) at its disposal through ex-isting – modes which are themselves forms of reality, and which are *authentic* insofar as they clearly run counter to the real, and hence are covered-up by everyday, fallen modes of Being. This split and the potentialities-for-Being it opens up was “clearly formulated for the first time” in the 18th Century in “Swiss poetics,” advanced (for example) in the works of “Bodmer and Breitinger,” through “the concept of the ‘wonderful’” (Cassirer 337). Since “The most

wonderful invention is not of course bound to a given reality,” it is regulated instead by the imaginary insofar as it is the sphere of “the laws of the possible,” and hence through the influence of the aesthetic “seeks to move the soul by the novel and the surprising” (Cassirer 337). While this opposition of the aesthetic to everyday Being is constitutive for our formulation of an ontological aesthetics, it becomes more and more strident and begins to suffer from a sort of hypertrophy as we move towards Modernism and Post-modernism, a condition betrayed by the fact that many artists come to find their motivation for creation and the justification for their creations themselves precisely as an overt challenging of public standards or mores sometimes simply for the sake of the challenging itself. “The mutual influence” evidenced in the interaction between an aesthetic-work and its recipient, or more specifically the “mutual influence” between a “literary work and human behavior,” which is central to aesthetic phenomenology, and is

at the heart of Literary Anthropology is at its most effective when the work releases modes of conduct which are not required or are suppressed by our everyday needs, but which – when they *are* released – clearly bring out the aesthetic function of the work: namely, to make present those elements of life which were lost or buried and to merge them with that which is already present, thus changing the actual makeup of the present. (*P* 153)

In its “releas[ing] modes of conduct,” the aesthetic is dependent on Dasein’s temporal structure as projecting, in that the making-present that transforms the present and is the objective of aesthetic disclosure is dependent on the future as a site in which we may situate ourselves in our potentialities-for-Being. That which has been “lost” or is “buried” in our everyday modes of existing in turn becomes the prospect upon which we stand in a *moment of vision*, while we all the while have not lost sight of that which we have transcended. Thus Iser defines a recipient’s “experience” as “aesthetic” when it is one in which “we can observe ourselves while performing an activity” (*P* 192). This self-observation allows us to consciously delineate and critique the series of attunements that we have brought to bear on existence. As an unearthing of suppressed “modes of conduct,” an authentic aesthetic event is by definition an *authentic* experience. The “chronic process of self-reflection” which can be “trigger[ed]” by the aesthetic may

“enable us to see through the attitudes offered to us, if not imposed on us, by our everyday world” (*P* 281). It is, furthermore, opposed to the pragmatic ends usually associated with “everyday life” and conceives of “the activity” of aesthetic experience as being “an end in itself” (*P* 192), as we saw previously in our analysis of aesthetic-play. Such a self-reflexive self-critique must be operative in both the artist and the audience. Artistic creation and aesthetic response each involve and demand a high-degree of self-consciousness, both in assessing a particular Dasein’s previous situations, as well as in its re-turning out of an aesthetic event. While “Through fiction and poetry, new possibilities of being-in-the-world are opened up within everyday reality” (Ricoeur 142), they must be brought back into the real as “new possibilities of being-in-the-world” of the real.

The sociology of the “they” which “constitute[s] what we know as ‘publicness’ [“die Öffentlichkeit”]” (*BT* 127) at the same time works continually to suppress the attempts of a Dasein to realize its ownmost potentialities, insofar as it “proximally controls every way in which the world and Dasein gets interpreted” (*BT* 127). These tendencies are most evident in the rampant structuralisms which currently abound in their inability to even think the concept of a Dasein apart from, and prior to, a preconceived aggregate of beings. In the domain of aesthetics, however, we are able to extract ourselves from our site specificity, including both our socially defined rank and our historical moment, through a transposition of our Being into another time and reality. In this way, “The authenticity of Dasein, which emerges in boundary situations” may be “distinguished from the inauthenticity of trivial, thoughtless life, from publicness, from the ‘They,’ from idle talk, from curiosity, and so on – from all ways of falling prey to society and its power to reduce things to their lowest common denominator. In short, the authenticity of Dasein emerged as human finitude” (*PH* 124-125). The aesthetic is only possible as such (i.e. as a domain for the projection of Being) when the reductive tendencies of the we-world which aims at “‘leveling down’ [*Einebnung*] of all possibilities of Being” (*BT* 127) are circumvented and overcome. In these cases, for example, “literature” conversely “becomes a panorama of what is possible, because it is not hedged in either by the limitations or by the considerations that determine the institutionalized organizations within which human life otherwise takes its course” (*FI* 297). The aesthetic, furthermore, runs counter to the social world even as it casts a backward glance towards it: “The ‘as if’ allows the materials selected and

combined into fictions to assume purposes not immanent within them. This doubling brings into observability processes of fiction-making that the pragmatic use of fictions in everyday life conceals.”⁸¹

The sociology of the “they” may also become codified in a specific “tradition” conceived inauthentically as a site of trans-historical conservation of certain endorsed ways of Being. Thus in turning against the “they” through the process of “remaking the real into an instrument of human purpose” by translating it in the terms of a daseinal reality, on a global level further indicates our ability “to break with tradition, to criticize and dissolve it”; and thereby discloses “something far more basic in our relationship with being” (*TM* xxxvii). Thus “Understanding,” on both individual and cultural levels, certainly does not mean merely appropriating customary opinions or acknowledging what tradition has sanctified” (*TM* xxxvii) under the provenance of the dominant or traditional “they.” Here Gadamer’s use of “Understanding” draws on Heidegger’s “concept of understanding as the universal determinateness of Dasein,” which “means by this the very projectiveness of understanding – i.e., the futurity of Dasein” (*TM* xxxvii). Here we can see the potentiality for an aesthetic tradition to set itself up in opposition to a rigidly conservation tradition – the former being the domain of reality which seeks to remake the latter’s world of the real through the potentiating of new projections. The aesthetic tradition should thus be viewed as the site of a radical conservatism (as opposed to the radical progressivism we previously critiqued) – a site wherein we can read and encounter the *Geschichte*⁸² of the unfolding of authentic Being both as it has-been and is still to be.

In order to recoup the possibility of Being-authentic, we must enter the path of the question – we must go out to encounter language in the clearing of the open. Now “the reflective use of language cannot be guided by the common, usual understanding of meanings,” which are dominated by the idle talk of the “they”; rather, “it must be guided by the hidden riches that language holds in store for us, so that these

⁸¹ Paul B. Armstrong, “The Politics of Play: The Social Implications of Iser’s Aesthetic Theory,” *New Literary History* 31: 1 (2000): 214.

⁸² Here we are stressing “the difference” Heidegger conceives “between *Geschichte* as what is enowned by being and *Historie* as the discipline of historiography” (Emad and Maly xxiii). “*Geschichte*” is thus related to the process of a Dasein’s own *Bildung*, the temporality of which is grounded in Dasein’s temporalizing of itself. “*Historie*,” on the other hand, deals with what happens in the world of the real, and hence its temporality is determined according to, and constrained by, clock-time. Thus in an existential-ontological context, “History [*Geschichte*]” is primary and “emerges only in the immediate skip of what is ‘historical’ [*das Historische*]” (*C Phil.* 8).

riches may summon us for the saying of language” (*OWL* 91) – a “saying” which bespeaks the projective capacities of Dasein. Questioning orients us towards the future as a site of coming into Being, as well as enjoining our potentialities-for-Being, insofar as

In the driving onset of questioning, there is affirmation of what is not yet accomplished, and there is widening of the questioning into what is still not yet weighed out and needs to be considered. What reigns here is going beyond ourselves into what raises us above ourselves. (*C Phil.* 8)

We both drive on through questioning, while we are driven on by questioning “beyond” and “above ourselves.” The question is able to expand its scope to accommodate the expanding horizons of our selves and our worlds. In questioning, we transcend the limitations of the “they” at the same time – who commonly, through “the power of opinion,” work to “suppress ... questions” (*TM* 366). Such questioning at the same time opens up a breach in our experience, and a rift is opened up when “we are shocked by things that do not accord with our expectations,” questions arise to address the rift. In this way, “questioning ... is more a passion than an action” (*TM* 366); we do not simply ask a question, but “A question presses itself on us” (*TM* 366). If a question is responded to successfully, it returns us to ourselves and forces us to not only re-evaluate the complacency of the “they” which is constrained and comforted by their opinions, but also compels us to reassess ourselves and to rearticulate our world along different horizons – that is, responding as a *res-ponere*. Through following the path of the question, Dasein comes to ever more recognize its estrangement in and from the world of the everyday and its attendant homelessness. In turning to face its *Unheimlichkeit*, Dasein at the same time sets itself on the path of the quest towards returning to its “there” – and “on this ‘way’ ... the same question of the ‘meaning of be-ing’ is always asked, and *only* this question” (*C Phil.* 58); and “therefore the locations of questioning are constantly different” (*C to Phil* 58-59). Thus we can see that “the *way* itself becomes more and more essential, not as ‘personal development,’ but as the exertion of man – understood totally nonbiographically – to bring be-ing itself within a being to its truth” (*C Phil.* 59). But at this stage Dasein’s “there” is not distinctly conceived, nor has Dasein necessarily even recognized that it has a “there” in the first place.

In “the experience of art,” we discover a site through which Dasein can return to its there and realize its own projective capacities, for through the aesthetic Dasein’s “horizons are highlighted” (*PH* 102) and brought explicitly before it. Dubos, in his “*Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting*” (Cassirer 302), was “the first to establish introspection as the specific principle of aesthetics” (Cassirer 303). From this perspective, “Aesthetics” is seen not as a “mirror” which provides an identical counterpart to the objective world of the real, but rather becomes a medium of ontological reflection “in which both artist and spectator find themselves reflected” (Cassirer 303-304). Shaftesbury attributes a similar capacity to literature, for while it is the case that “every one” of us “is ... convinced of the reality of a better self ... the misfortune is, we are seldom taught to comprehend this self by placing it in a distinct view from its representative or counterfeit” (1: 183). The aesthetic allows us to apprehend and obtain “a distinct view” of our “better self” by permitting us to encounter our present self as if it were another being – ironically, through a mode of re-presenting which is not strictly genuine, but which is nevertheless distinct from the limitations of the “they,” insofar as Shaftesbury defines the “representative” as an echo of “the ordinary tenor” and as a condition which “is adapted to the very meanest capacities” (1: 183). Here literature, and by implication the aesthetic, overlap “the known province of philosophy,” which is to teach us ourselves” (Shaftesbury 1: 184). These aesthetically disclosed, and philosophically determined, horizons extend beyond the cloying, muddy sunlight of everydayness, for the artwork “expresses something in such a way that what is said is like a discovery, a disclosure of something previously concealed” (*PH* 101) – which is to say, something we find along the way of the question. The turbulence [*Wirbel*] and alienation [*Entfremdung*] Dasein feels in its fallen state wherein it experiences the feeling of unhomelikeness [*Unheimlichkeit*] (which Macquarrie and Robinson also translate as “uncanniness”) introduces a separation from the world and initiates the quest: “In apartness, the stranger [i.e. one who has become estranged] measures off the parting from mankind hitherto. He is under way on a path” (*OWL* 186). By departing from the complacency of the “they” through enjoining the quest, we find that “Everything familiar is eclipsed” (*PH* 101). On the path into the imaginary which opens up in the domain of the aesthetic, we are left alone and travel only with ourselves towards our ownmost potentialities: “To understand what the work of art says to us is therefore a self-encounter,” and thus it is “an encounter with the authentic” (*PH* 101).

But art does not lay open merely a single path towards authentic existence, for if that were the case, then the idea of authenticity itself would logically crumble; since if there were indeed only a single path it would be by definition inauthentic. Rather, “in the thinking of be-ing everything steers towards what is unique” (*C Phil.* 59), and since “The language of art is constituted precisely by the fact that it speaks to the self-understanding of every person,” and since “the language of art means the excess of meaning that is present in the work itself” (*PH* 102), each work therefore presents *in potentia* an overabundance of uniquely evolvable possibilities.

Now we must ask: how does the work of art speak specifically to each individual Dasein? What do we mean by “the call” under the aegis of the aesthetic? Is it a beckoning, or a summons? What gives voice to the call and from where does it come? How do we *hear* the call? Do we simply follow its dictates, or are we also able to actively respond to it? Is the path into the imaginary one we take up in full knowledge of where we are going, or do we only recognize the path once we have traversed it? What is the character of aesthetic experience, and how is it an experience which we both have and which we undergo?

ii. The Aesthetic As *Erfahrung*: The Call and the Moment of Vision

“In *Being and Time*, and even more in Heidegger’s lectures, something occurred that Jaspers had called thinking that makes an appeal [*das appellierende Denken*] – a summons of existence to itself, to the choice of authenticity and the withdrawal from fallenness into the ‘They,’ curiosity, and idle chatter. In the ‘resolution ready to live in anxiety’ in ‘running ahead toward death,’ Da-sein is placed before itself and has left behind it all the forms of concealment of social intercourse, the cultural complacency of bourgeois life, the bustle of journalism and party politics.” (*PH* 139-140)

As a preparation for our investigation of the role of the call in relation to the aesthetic, we must first address the issue of how we authentically listen to the call – which is to say, how is it heard? But before we can characterize Dasein’s authentic hearing of the call, by contrast we initially have to more precisely detail the manner in which listening takes place in an average, everyday setting. As long as Dasein remains “absorbed in the ‘they,’” it allows the scope of its potentialities-for-Being to “be presented to it by the way in which the ‘they’ has publicly interpreted things” (*BT* 270). Yet this “presenting” is itself “made possible existentially through the fact that Dasein, as a Being-with that understands, can *listen* to Others” (*BT* 270-271). Thus by “Losing itself in the publicness and the idle talk of the ‘they’, it *fails to hear* [*überört*] its own Self in listening to the they-self,” and instead of hearing, it “*listens away* to the ‘they’” (*BT* 271). But “This listening-away must get broken off” by “the possibility of another kind of hearing which ... must be given by Dasein itself” (*BT* 271) – that is, if such a hearing is eventually to become truly authentic. Yet in order to hear itself, Dasein at the same time “must first *find* itself,” and “In order to *find* itself at all, it must be ‘shown’ to itself in its possible authenticity” (*BT* 268). While “In terms of its possibility,” that is as a pure possibility, or as the primordial condition of possibility as Being-possible, “Dasein *is* already a potentiality-for-Being-its-Self,” nevertheless “it needs to have this potentiality attested” (*BT* 268). This *attestation* which is performed by the *call of conscience* subsequently “arouses another kind of hearing, which in relationship to the hearing that is lost, has a character in every

way opposite” (*BT* 271). No longer are we “fascinated with the ‘hubub’ of the manifold ambiguity which idle talk possesses in its everyday ‘newness’” (*BT* 271), but instead each Dasein is re-centered in a potential understanding of itself. Yet this is not to say that such an understanding is either enacted or complete, for “The ‘voice’” of the call “is taken rather as a giving-to-understand” – insofar as therein “lies the momentum of a push – of an abrupt arousal” (*BT* 271) of Dasein back to its self.

In responding to the question, Dasein comes to recognize its own alienation and estrangement from everydayness and the averageness of the “they”; and by entering onto the path of the question Dasein is on the way back to its “there” and the enownment of its Being. But “the authentic attitude of thinking is not a putting of questions” (*OWL* 71) exclusively in the sense of either asking a direct question by putting it into words, or as putting something into question. While questioning does place the modes of everyday Being in question as inherently questionable, it is far from being primarily destructive as an attempt to show that someone or something doesn’t have (as we often say) “all the answers.” Questioning at the same time questions the Dasein which questions, and thus questioning itself is reflected back into the questioner as a mode of attunement which makes possible the clearing of the open – but this clearing is not only actively undertaken, for at the same time it demands that we stand back and withhold our questions, not by merely keeping our mouths shut, but in respectful reticence. In this way, questioning becomes “a listening to the grant, the promise of what is to be put into question” (*OWL* 71). In opening ourselves to questioning, and thus to the question itself, it is “presupposed when we let something be said to us ... that we do not know everything already and that what we think we know is capable of becoming questionable” (*RB* 106). Questioning presupposes a lack of knowledge, as well as an uncertainty, which not only shade our Being-towards-the-world, but also color Being-towards-its-self:

Notice what occurs by the question. It arises as a mark of finitude, of the negativity of not knowing. But more important, the mark of the question itself is that it opens up the being of the questioned and doing so is the holding open of possibilities. Questioning is not a positing, but a probing of possibilities that come out of and are taken up by the *Sache*. For Gadamer the point is not so much that questions get answered, that possibilities are actualized – this of course occurs in interpretation in the very

disappearance of interpretation – but of being able to remain within the open against the inevitable closure of a question. (Risser 122-123)

The “question” forces us to confront our own “finitude,” the limitations of our Being and the extent of our knowing. But at the same time, it “opens up” new ways of Being towards “the questioned.” Thus “Questioning is not a positing” which wishes to codify certainties, but is rather a form of investigation as “a probing of possibilities” which are Dasein’s own. At this stage, whether or not these “possibilities are actualized’ is not pressing; what is important for us at this point is the ability of the question to allow us “to remain within the open” by repeatedly clearing a space for the open. But if questioning is also “a listening to the grant” (*OWL* 71), wherein “something” is “said to us” (*RB* 106), and if questioning in its dual orientation requires us “to follow the call of the question” (Schmidt, “Uncovering” 80), then how do we properly “listen” to the call? Who is addressed by the call, who is it that does the calling, and to what does it call the one who is addressed?

Our conception of the call of the aesthetic in the framework of an aesthetic phenomenology functions in a manner analogous to that displayed in the *call of conscience* – for the aesthetic also calls us back to ourselves out of a state of lostness in the “they,” while simultaneously calling us out beyond ourselves on the sides of both the artist and the recipient. The artist is most obviously called by the aesthetic through experiencing (even if it is only as a vague intimation or simply a dimly perceived desire) the impulse to create. Oftentimes, the act of creation is seen as a calling of the artwork or the imaginary that is directed towards the artist in the form of an appeal such as we saw is the case with the traditional concept of inspiration. But at the same time, this call comes from the artist her/himself, since any given artwork as a specific gestalt of the imaginary is only enjoined through the artist’s imaginative projection, and hence only appears to come unbidden and fully formed (as some Athena from Zeus’s brow) from some shadowy “beyond.” The aesthetic itself is furthermore a form of conscience conceived in the sense of a knowing-with (i.e. as a *con-scientia*) comprised by the three terms of the aesthetic equation: the artist, the artwork, and the audience – all of which speak with simultaneously shared and disparate voices. Gadamer similarly sees the aesthetic as a call – a call which summons those who are able to hear, for “it is characteristic of art that what is represented ... calls upon us to dwell upon it and give our assent in an act

of recognition ... And this means learning how to listen to what art has to say” (RB 36). In approaching an aesthetic-work, we as an audience must listen to the voice of the work itself, which is at the same time an echo (however receding) of the voice of the artist, in order to truly hear it. We also speak back to the work when we “give our assent in an act of recognition, wherein we not only recognize “what is represented” on its own terms, but also re-cognize it in our own terms. We must “dwell” or “tarry” (terms Gadamer most certainly borrows in full awareness of their source from Heidegger) within, and in the environs of, a work of art, for “Only in this way can we acquire a sense of what the work holds in store for us and allow it to enhance our feeling for life” (RB 70) – or more precisely, our feeling for existence. In this way, “in each person who responds to the poetic word, that word is fulfilled in a unique intuitive fashion that cannot be communicated to others” (RB 70) because it first and foremost speaks to Dasein’s ownmost Being. This relative incommunicability may become problematic for the artist, and thus the work itself frequently becomes a sort of compromise between the incommunicability of the artist’s vision of a projected work and what finally is more or less accomplished in a so-called “finished” work. Nevertheless the call of the aesthetic, regardless of whether it calls to the artist or audience, speaks to each individual Dasein just as does the call of conscience, summoning it back to the enownment of its ownmost potentiality-for-Being.

In hearing the call of the aesthetic, Dasein is forced to encounter another language, another mode of expression, than it has been accustomed to. Aesthetic discourse, and more specifically poetic language, emerge out of, and are heard against, the background reverberations of everyday speech:

The meaning-constitution [*Sinnkonstitution*] characterizing poetic language takes place, however, not in the cosmos [*nicht im leeren Raum*]; but rather always in front of the backdrop of those thought-horizons, of those experiences-of-reality [*Wirklichkeitserfahrung*] or “worlds,” which the recipient holds ready as interpretant. (Anderegg 164)

The call of the aesthetic, while it ostensibly uses the same words as everyday speech, nevertheless speaks in a new language which removes us from our everyday context. It is precisely “Because poetic language cannot be understood in relation to what has been held ready [*Paratgehaltenen*], it is experienced as *opposition*” (Anderegg 164). In hearing the call, we join this “*opposition*” that “compels the recipient

towards the modification of her/his thought-horizon, of her/his world” (Anderegg 164). For Anderegg (as we saw previously is the case for Heidegger), the call similarly requires that we are prepared and ready to hear it, for “only when the recipient is ready for such modification, does poetic language make its meaning known” (164). By enjoining this “*opposition*,” we at the same time experience a “moment of modification, of *alienation* [Verfremdung],” which “is inherent” both in the call and “in the process-of-symbolization” whereby the call is expressed, as well as “in the transcendence of conventionalized horizons” (Anderegg 164) of everyday language, and which thereby also serves to thematize the boundaries which define and condition the worlds of the real and reality, and hence also the dimensions of our ownmost “there.”

Now we must ask: how does the character of the call affect our conception of an aesthetic experience? We will consider the nature of aesthetic experience in two primary ways: firstly, as an experience in accordance with the sense of the German word “*Erlebnis*,” which while it is denotatively defined as “experience,”⁸³ in its connection with the verb “*erleben*,” it implies a conception of experience wherein one enters into it knowingly as an experience which one “has” or “enjoys”⁸⁴ in the sense of directly and personally possessing it; secondly, we will conversely investigate “experience” in the sense of the German word “*Erfahrung*,”⁸⁵ which through its etymological relation to the verb “*erfahren*” indicates an experience which one “suffer[s]” or “undergo[es]”⁸⁶ through an imposition *ab extra*, and hence one which we to a lesser or greater degree enjoin without explicitly willing to do so. Although one may at first knowingly approach an object, person, or happening which provides the latter form of experience, the true breadth and conditions of it are initially veiled, and it is only after it has been enjoined that its actual dimensions are revealed.

Heidegger conceives of “*Erlebnis*,” which his translators render as “lived-experience” (*C Phil.* 77), in a pejorative sense as a mere derivative of Dasein’s entanglements in the present-at-hand – a devaluing which is accentuated by his placing it in “scare quotes.” For Heidegger, *Erlebnis* is the form of everyday, average experience – which is to say, the kind of experiences we have in our lostness in the

⁸³ “*Erlebnis*,” *Collins German Dictionary*, 1991 ed.

⁸⁴ “*Erleben*,” *Collins German Dictionary*, 1991 ed.

⁸⁵ “*Erfahrung*,” *Collins German Dictionary*, 1991 ed.

⁸⁶ “*Erfahren*,” *Collins German Dictionary*, 1991 ed.

“they.” The devotees of such experiences commonly wish to lose themselves further and further in inauthentic modes of existence, and hence they are always chasing after (in terms which are directly applicable to the contemporary, thrill-seeking culture and its mania for ever more unconventional forms of what is generally termed the “extreme”) “a larger, more unprecedented, more screaming ‘lived-experience’” (*C Phil.* 77). Jim Vernon posits (in the context of Heidegger’s *Beiträge*) that this form of experience is the result of “machination” and the “yearning” that “arises specifically as a lack of satisfaction with human experience *as it is lived within machination*.”⁸⁷ “Machination,” in its overt relation to technicity, is an inauthentic mode of Being, and for this reason Vernon describes the “possible lived-experiences” which its “creat[es]” in terms of the “they” (without himself ever making the parallel explicit), for such experiences are of such a type that they “could be had by anyone and everyone” (114). Vernon’s description further parallels such experiences with the fallen mode of curiosity (again without personally making the connection explicit), insofar as they function “By exploiting the possibilities for novel *individual* experiences made possible by *universal* objectivity,” in order to “relieve the boredom caused by the essential predictability of technological objects” (114). Like curiosity, such experiences are worried only about novelty, and each isolated experience is soon worn out, and in the vicious circle of curiosity, “As a result, we yearn again for new lived-experiences that break the newly-produced tedium” (Vernon 114) *ad infinitum* and *ad absurdum*. In the end, “*Erleben*” is ultimately self-estranging, since it “results from a worldview that has forgotten its experiential (i.e., *erfahren*) origins” (Vernon 115).

“*Erfahrung*,” on the other hand,” is conceived in contradistinction to *Erlebnis* as an “innermost experience” (*C Phil.* 80) and as such is relevant to Dasein’s Being-authentic as laying claim to its ownmost self through becoming resolute and attaining the moment of vision. Initially, “*Erfahrung*” is “the inaugural experience in the development of our worldview,” and as such it “must be the most basic and uninterpreted of all possible experiences” (Vernon 110). Yet at the same time we must bear in mind “the dominant connotation of *erfahren*, i.e., to find out or learn” (Vernon 110). *Erfahrung* carries with it a creative, transformative power; since in the “Abandonment of Being” (*C Phil.* 79), we find that “the

⁸⁷ Vernon, Jim. “*Erfahren* and *Erleben*: Metaphysical Experience and its Overcoming in Heidegger’s *Beiträge*,” *Symposium – Canadian Society for Hermeneutics and Postmodern Thought* 12.1 (1994) 114.

necessity of the *crossing*” must be “taken up into the innermost experience [*Erfahrung*] by whoever is now still a creator” (*C Phil.* 80). Here we also hear echoes of Dasein’s turbulence prior to its being called out of fallenness and the “they’s” inauthenticity, and its turning back towards the situation of its ownmost self, insofar as the “creator” in this context “must *have* fully enacted” a “retreat,” and more fundamentally has to have already “encountered that distress,” before “the *crossing*” can ever be authentically “taken up” (*C Phil.* 80). In this way, “In Heidegger’s terms, “*erfahren*” gives way to *er-fahren*,” a shift which “indicates that our passive estranging experience develops necessarily into an active, curious one in which our encounters both enable us, and compel us, to respond out of interest and wonder by approaching the entities that push against us” (Vernon 110). Here we can see parallels to Dasein’s encounter with the aesthetic, wherein (as we have seen and will further see soon) the undergoing of an authentic aesthetic experience demands that the recipient gives voice to an active and engaged *responsa*.

In the history of aesthetics, the concept of *Erlebniskunst* is tied to a Romantic “criteria” which evaluates art in terms of the “genuineness of the experience or the intensity of expression,” as a replacement criteria for “the ingenious manipulation of fixed forms and modes of statement” associated with “the classical period up to the baroque” (*TM* 71), as well as with 18th Century Neoclassicism which draws a significant portion of its inspiration and a number of its tenets from the long classical period – a very long period, if we see it as originating in Plato and Aristotle and continuing into “the baroque” 17th century and the roughly revivalist tendencies of the 18th century. This replacement becomes evident in “the devaluation of rhetoric in the nineteenth century” which appears as a result of the ascendancy of “the doctrine that genius creates unconsciously” (*TM* 72) – in other words, “rhetoric” as a formal, codified mode comes to be replaced by a concept of expression as a mode which forms itself according to its own rules. In the latter, Dasein worlds its aesthetic structures according to its own inner spirit, it does not move into an already furnished apartment and merely rearrange the fixtures according to a predetermined guideline. As a consequence of this view, however, art as *Erlebnis* furthermore opens up a chasm between “art” and “nature,” which instead of complementing and supplementing one another, become a pair of “contrast[s] as appearance and reality” (*TM* 83). We saw this split underlying the view of the aesthetic when it is predicated on a metaphysics of presence, wherein what is commonly termed “reality” (i.e. “reality” in the

sense of “the real”) defined as the domain of the actual. In this framework, the aesthetic becomes a faint shadow of the “real world” as we saw in regards to both the common conception of mimesis and ideological critiques. Inheriting the Kantian division between “appearance” and the *Ding an sich*, where the former is not only the demesne of “art,” but is the more generally the terminal boundary of perception, Romanticism flips the terms 180 degrees. Now “appearance” becomes “reality”; and “art,” as the result of the expression of an individual genius, subsequently trumps nature. Concomitantly, the “Traditional ... purpose of ‘art,’ which includes all conscious transformation of nature for human use,” as is the case with artisans or craftsmen, as functioning “to supplement and fill the gaps left open by nature”; as well as “the fine arts,” which are characterized as “a perfecting of reality,” rather than the generation of mere “appearances that mask, veil or transfigure it” (TM 82), is undermined by the persistent split between nature and art.

On the side of the recipient, aesthetic experience as *Erlebnis* is similarly bound to the notion of genius; and therefore, we find an underlying presupposition of completeness and self-sufficiency which itself is dependent on seeing the experience of reception as a conscious, and more specifically self-conscious (in the philosophical sense of being conscious of one’s self) act “determined through autobiographical or biographical reflection, its meaning remains fused with the whole movement of life and constantly accompanies it” (TM 67). The aesthetic as *Erlebnis*, in other words, is dominated by the psychology of subjectivity. When one approaches either aesthetic creation or reception through the mode of *Erlebnis*, the artwork itself is subsumed under one’s personal experiences – primarily in regards to one’s past experiences seen basically as a collection of things that have occurred, and which are subsequently ordered “through autobiographical or biographical reflection.” As for the experience one immediately has during the events of aesthetic reception, while it apparently only attains importance when it becomes “fused with the whole movement of life and constantly accompanies it,” we should not be misled into thinking the aesthetic experience as *Erlebnis* in this way necessarily becomes authentically integrated as either a motive force or new manner of Being. Through its fixation on what has gone before in the conventional sense of “reflection,” *Erlebnis* dallies exclusively with elements of its own past, and hence does not peer into the future. Nor can one who is fixated on such reflection turn towards the future, since one is only able to

reflect on that which has already passed. As Gadamer cautions in a footnote, the absorption in the aesthetic in the mode of *Erlebnis* merely means that one “does not consciously realize the inadequacy of starting from subjectivity” (TM 67).

Due to its subjective orientation, aesthetic experience as *Erlebnis* also results in the opening up of an unbridgeable division between the worlds of the real and reality and at first exclusively locates itself in the latter: “the work of art ... is a world for itself, so also what is experienced aesthetically is, as an *Erlebnis*, removed from all connections with actuality” (TM 70). Here Gadamer is obviously dealing with “world” in terms of Heidegger’s “worldhood,” or Dasein’s own world; and hence with reality as “a world for itself,” and not the real pictured as the sphere of “actuality.” The aesthetic, however, (as we have seen) cannot be “removed from all connection from reality,” as is the case with Iser’s concept of the fictive (which itself is analogous to our idea of an aesthetic-world), for it is founded and depends on an as-if structure which casts a continuous backward glance towards the real even while looking beyond and repeatedly transgressing it. This split appears to be overcome on the side of the audience: while “The work of art would seem almost by definition to be an aesthetic experience,” whose “power ... suddenly tears the person experiencing it out to the context of his life,” it at the same time purportedly brings the recipient “back to the whole of [her/]his existence” (TM 70). This return, however, is impossible, since the recipient merely listens away to the experiences of the artist, without ever really hearing it in the same manner demanded by an authentic response to the call of the aesthetic. Gadamer himself hints at the insufficiency of *Erlebniskunst* to characterize the breadth of the audience’s aesthetic experience by employing an extensive undercutting linguistic sequence comprised of a subjunctive, a calling of an appearance into doubt, and a qualifier: “The work of art *would seem almost* [emphasis mine] by definition to be an aesthetic experience” (TM 70). But as long as the significance of the aesthetic remains dependent on the intentionality of experience, it remains mired in the one-sidedness of subjectivity; and therefore, the “ambiguity” which underlies “*Erlebniskunst* (art based on experience)” (TM 70) is not entirely overcome. For this reason, *Erlebniskunst* retains its original meaning as an art centered in a creative genius, which “comes *from* experience and is an expression of experience”; while at the same time being realized in its “derived sense” as an “art that is intended *to be* aesthetically experienced” (TM 70) by a recipient.

We should be careful not to overvalue such an outmoded conception of genius of either creation or reception, both of which are founded solely upon experience as *Erlebnis*, and hence defined by radical subjectivity; nor must we advocate for the assigning of a central position to either the real or reality, art or nature, which is based on an exclusionary, either-or standard of evaluation. A change in our view of the continuity of artistic experience and the nature of the aesthetic itself will come about only when the limitations of *Erlebniskunst* are recognized – which is to say,

Only when it is no longer self-evident that a work of art consists in the transformations of experiences – and when it is no longer self-evident that this transformation is based on the experience of an inspired genius which, with the assuredness of a somnambulist, creates the work of art, which then becomes an experience for the person who is exposed to it ... Slowly we realize that this period is only an episode in the total history of art and literature. (TM 71)

Inevitably “an aesthetics of Erlebnis” leads to absolute discontinuity – i.e. the disintegration of the unity of the aesthetic object into a multiplicity of experiences ... Basing aesthetics on experience leads to an absolute series of points, which annihilates the unity of the work of art, the identity of the artist with himself, and the identity of the person understanding or enjoying the work of art” (TM 95). This “discontinuity” which dissolves each element of the aesthetic equation is primarily due to the discounting of the central, constitutive place of the artwork in the aesthetic-equation in favor of a lopsided concentration on the two other factors – such as the personal experiences and “psychological” peculiarities of either artists or recipients. Along the same lines of an opposition to the subjectively grounded Romantic aesthetics of genius, “Gadamer rejects the notion of a pure seer. Self-interpretation requires something or someone ‘other.’ It is this ‘otherness’ that art provides” (Devereaux 67) – an otherness which is represented at various moments by all three elements of the aesthetic equation, but which is primarily contained in the artwork itself as the place of intersection and trans-formation. The otherness of the work of art is equally necessary for acts of “Self-interpretation” on behalf of both the artist and recipient, for projection by definition demands something beyond us – something unknown to us. In this way, we move beyond aesthetic experience as *Erlebnis* towards a new vision of understanding, wherein “To understand is

not to project oneself into the text but to expose oneself to it; it is to receive a self enlarged by the appropriation of the proposed worlds which interpretation unfolds. In sum, it is the matter of the text which gives the reader his dimension of subjectivity” (Ricoeur 94). This form of “subjectivity,” due to its reference to a range of proposed or alternate worlds, is no longer solely in-itself, but now (in Hegel’s terms) it is in-and-for-itself – which is to say (in Heidegger’s terms) it is grounded both in its own reality as well as in the real.

In order to counter the excessive subjectivization of the aesthetic, our investigation must move away from the conception of the aesthetic experience exclusively as one of *Erlebnis* and further include the factors of the ontology of the artwork itself and the imaginary in constituting an aesthetic event – in short, now “our concern is to view the experience of art in such a way that it is understood as experience (*Erfahrung*)” (TM 99).

In *Spectator No. 411*, Addison details a conception of aesthetic experience along the lines of *Erfahrung*. For Addison, aesthetic experience is not exclusively a matter of conscious, willful deportment, rather “it is but opening the eye, and the scene enters. The colours paint themselves on the fancy, with very little attention of thought or application of the mind of the beholder” (4: 338). Addison stresses our openness and the receptivity verging on unconsciousness demanded by the aesthetic event. Nor is this passive openness merely a matter of passive perception such as detailed in contemporary Empirical philosophies, for it is also in this way that “we are struck, we know not how, with the symmetry of any thing we see, and immediately assent to the beauty of an object, without inquiring into the particular causes and occasions of it” (Addison 4: 338). While here we find an obvious forerunner to Kant’s aesthetics of disinterestedness and his view of the compelling nature of aesthetic judgment; at the same time herein we also encounter the disclosure of the affective dimension of the aesthetic, since “we are struck” with not only the formal qualities of a work, but also with its overall effect. In his use of the image of being “struck,” Addison further metaphorically conveys both a sense of violence and surprise which shakes *Dasein* and to some degree discombobulates and displaces it from its previous situation. In this way, the aesthetic may “raise a secret ferment in the mind of the reader,” and is thereby enabled “to work with violence, upon his passions” (Addison 4: 365).

Gadamer locates the corrective for the overbalance of the view of aesthetic experience as *Erlebnis* in “the phenomenological criticism of nineteenth-century psychology and epistemology,” an analysis of which will allow us “an appropriate understanding of aesthetic being. This critique has shown the erroneousness of all attempts to conceive of the mode of being of the aesthetic in terms of the experience of reality, and as a modification of it” (TM 83). Phenomenological criticism initiates a “return to aesthetic experience,” not as *Erlebnis*, but as “*Erfahrung*” – the term Gadamer uses in the original German text (TM 83). The aesthetic is no longer considered “in terms of [the] relationship” between appearance and reality as is the case in a traditional view of mimesis, nor is there any sense of “disappointment” (TM 84) occasioned when art does not match its model. Conversely, we advocate a view of the aesthetic wherein “All such ideas as imitation, appearance, irreality, illusion, magic, dream” no longer “assume that art is related to something different from itself” (TM 83). Opposed to this view, which is predicated on the original-copy dichotomy underlying the traditional conception of mimesis stemming from “the domination of the scientific model of epistemology” (TM 84), is “the phenomenological return to aesthetic experience (*Erfahrung*)” (TM 83), which conceives of the artwork as possessing “real being” (TM 83) in and of itself, and thus as having its own distinct ontological structure and reality of its own. Phenomenology thereby “teaches us that the latter does not think in terms of this relationship but, rather, regards what it experiences as genuine truth” (TM 83-84).

The structure of aesthetic experience as *Erfahrung* as an undergoing of an encounter with the imaginary does not mean that the recipient does not at the same time enter willingly into the event. In *The Progress of Poesy: A Pindaric Ode* (1757), Thomas Gray notes the centrality of our assent in the playing out of the aesthetic event and indicates some of the rudiments of the proper attitude for aesthetic reception. The imaginary is personified in the figure of the “Muse” (56), who is paralleled to a ruling “Sovereign” (13); but the Muse is a ruler who holds sway only over “the willing soul” (13) of the recipient who has consciously given her/himself up to the influence of the imaginary. While the artist’s means of expression, be it through “the voice” or “the dance,” are said to “obey” (25) the Muse, and hence insofar as they are “Temper’d to [her] warbled lay” (26) are determined through the influence of the imaginary; the imaginary at the same time is a source of power, virtue (which following the Latin *virtus* is itself a form of power

befitting our status as human [*vir*]), and liberty: “Her track, where’er the Goddess roves, / Glory pursue, and generous Shame, / Th’ unconquerable Mind, and Freedom’s holy flame” (63-65). Yet while these boons would seem to be scattered in “the Goddess[’s]” wake, those who seek “Glory” must for their part “pursue,” in the sense of “track[ing],” the path of “the Goddess” as though she herself were the quarry of a hunt. Our quest for “Glory,” however, cannot be the mere pursuit of overweening self-aggrandizement but must be tempered by a “generous Shame,” which while it is conscious of its own limitations, also bears an attitude of humble openness.

Martin Seel in his analysis of “the state of being determined [*Bestimmtsein*] that lies at the heart of human determining [*Bestimmendsein*]”⁸⁸ comes to the same conclusions as Gray. While Seel does not explicitly mention it, *Bestimmtsein* also exhibits a temporal structure, which has the character of ecstatic temporality. He posits that in these “passive components of determination” we find “Three dimensions can be differentiated, ones in which any determination of the self involves at once an element of being determined” (87) – elements which each have both passive and active, as well as temporal, components. “The first” dimension “is being determined *ex ante*: We are always already determined by past events, and by, among other things, ourselves,” as well as through “The combination of genetic disposition, historical and cultural context, familial and social origin, economic and political circumstances, and an individual’s own experiences and past actions, place [us] in a diversely and, in many cases, irreversibly predetermined situation” (Seel 87). As an *ex ante* determination, such things are temporally prior, and hence are elements in Dasein’s having-been. “The second element is being determined *ex post*” (Seel 88), and hence is temporally oriented toward the future as the domain of determining:

This determinability pertains not only to existential commitments, but also, at one and the same time, to *that* to which we commit ourselves when we determine what we will in our life. Whenever we do this, we exert an influence on how we are going to let ourselves be determined in the future ... In whichever way we allow ourselves to be determined by

⁸⁸ Martin Seel, “Letting Oneself Be Determined,” trans. Adrian Daub and Nikolas Kompridis, *Philosophical Romanticism*, ed. Nikolas Kompridis (New York: Routledge, 2006) 81.

these choices, in each case we attune or orient ourselves towards situations in which we will be determined in an unforeseeable way ... (Seel 88)

While entering into the aesthetic and opening ourselves to the imaginary is initially an act of volition wherein “we commit ourselves,” and through our choices in the course of the aesthetic event, “we” continue to “exert an influence on how we are going to let ourselves be determined in the future”; the extent of our personal, direct “influence” is nevertheless limited. Since by enjoining the aesthetic event, we are entering the borderlands of the unknown region of the imaginary, “in which we will be determined in an unforeseeable way.” Yet at the same time, we repeatedly “attune and orient ourselves,” and re-attune and reorient ourselves, “towards situations” as the experience of the artwork unfolds. In this re-attuning and reorienting, however, we are not continually surprised and overwhelmed by the experience of the artwork. We progressively develop a topography of the work through our interpretive schematizations and come to stake our own claim in the world of the work. In this way, we develop expectations and hypotheses wherein we posit possible futures for the work, and thus at the same time for ourselves, and through which we take part in the determination “*ex post*.” The final “element” in the aesthetic event as we conceive it is akin to what Seel terms “being determined *in actu*” (88). This dimension of being-determined demands from us a “developed receptivity,” lacking which “No act of self-determination and certainly no self-determined praxis can be felicitous” (Seel 88). In other words, we must be open to the possible by holding ourselves back in front of the open. Such a form of “receptivity,” in that it is “developed,” is a progressive attunement which Dasein itself cultivates and for which it places itself in readiness. As a “being determined *in actu*” (which is to say, in the actuality of the world of the real), its determination takes place in the temporality of the present. Herein we can see that *Erfahrung* is predicated on ecstatic temporality, since it not only is comprised of three both distinct and contiguous temporal and temporalizing dimensions, but furthermore it conceives of the present as the coming-towards of a future, in that it is precisely the “*ex post*” which is ultimately realized “*in actu*.” This should not be taken to mean that Dasein is wholly determined either by the “*ex ante*” or the “*ex post*,” for we still possess a “freedom,” which positively framed, “is primarily a freedom to affirm or endorse the direction of one’s own drive” (Seel 91); and negatively formulated, a freedom wherein we “all are also allowed to resist being determined by others”

(Seel 95). Ultimately, in either case, “The governing outcomes of our life happen – in the double sense of the phrase – *with our consent*” (Seel 91).

We have characterized the “voice” of the call of the aesthetic “as a giving-to-understand” – for in it “lies the momentum of a push – of an abrupt arousal” (BT 271), wherein Dasein is called back to its “there.” But Dasein’s return to itself is at the same time a potentiating of its projective capacities – capacities which (as we have seen) are not dependent solely on the imagination, but must further be realized out of the imaginary, just as the call seems to come from beyond the one who is being summoned. When aesthetic experience is conceived as *Erfahrung*, we must not only undergo the experience, but must also submit ourselves to the aesthetic:

To undergo an experience with something – be it a thing, a person, or a god – means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us.

When we talk of “undergoing” an experience, we mean specifically that the experience is not of our own making; to undergo here means that we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us and submit to it. It is something that comes about, comes to pass, happens.

To undergo an experience with language, then, means to let ourselves be properly concerned by the claim of language by entering into and submitting to it. (OWL 57)

In this way, an “experience” (OWL 73), at least temporarily, “transforms us into itself” (OWL 74). The aesthetic work calls to us; it summons us out of our average everydayness and challenges our former modes of Being. Gadamer sees this process as characterizing “the hermeneutic character of speech” in general as a dialogic process in which we “place our own aspirations and knowledge into a broader and richer horizon through dialogue with the other” (RB 106). Such a brand of experience is something forced, something imposed and impressed, upon us by the otherness of the artwork, and we cannot pick and choose what we wish to experience and what we would rather forego. The artwork itself structures such experience, and thus “it is not an object that stands over against a subject for itself. The work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it. The ‘subject’ of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it

but the work itself" (TM 102). Thus, "all playing is a being-played ... the game masters the players" (TM 106). The quality of the aesthetic as a call to the recipient who is able to authentically hear underlies "the Greek verb *hermeneuein*," for it "is that exposition which brings tidings because it can listen to a message" (OWL 29). As the opposite of idle talk, and as unconcerned with mere curiosity, the experience of the aesthetic is here revealed in its character as a burden – something we must both actively bear and passively bear up under. Such experiences overturn the world as we have known it (to a lesser or greater degree) and make authentic experience possible; and therefore, "experience in this sense inevitably involves many disappointments of one's expectations and only thus is experience acquired ... Thus the historical nature of man essentially implies a fundamental negativity that emerges in the relation between experience and insight" (TM 356). For Gadamer, "Insight ... always involves an escape from something that has deceived us and held us captive." It is literally *in-sight* in that it "always involves an element of self-knowledge" (TM 356) – in other words, "insight" is a seeing into ourselves and taking stock of our situation, as well as our shortcomings and limitations.

Our aesthetic "experience" as *Erfahrung* "is a process" which, in taking a hold of us and tearing us out of the context and continuum of our lives as a result of the call of the aesthetic, "is essentially negative" (TM 353). This process becomes visible in "Language ... when we use the word 'experience' in two different senses: the experiences that conform to our expectation and confirm it," which is to say experience in the sense of *Erlebnis*; "and the new experiences that occur to us. This latter – 'experience' in the genuine sense," or experience as *Erfahrung*, "is always negative" (TM 353). In relation to *Erfahrung*, negativity sheds its normally pejorative sense, and as a distinctly philosophical negativity "has a curiously productive meaning" (TM 353) as a *determinate negation*. In this way, we do not merely "gain better knowledge" of that which is experienced, but also "what we thought we knew before" (TM 353) is affected and presumably altered. "The negation by which it achieves this is a determinate negation" in that through the negation of one term it simultaneously determines a positive, and "We call this kind of experience *dialectical*" (TM 353). In the dialectics of aesthetic *Erfahrung*, to be "experienced" is to be someone who has "become" experienced "not only through experience" conceived as a sequence of more or less isolated experiences supplanting previous experiences, but also to be one who is "open to new experiences" (TM

355) – an openness which is directed and open towards the future as positive projection. This also means that “the experienced person proves to be ... someone who is radically undogmatic,” one who is not bound to any single manner or narrow view of Being, and as such “is particularly well equipped to have new experiences and learn from them” (*TM* 355). In the end, “The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfillment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself” (*TM* 355). Thus this openness to experience ultimately involves the interplay of aesthetic *Erlebnis* as a consciously maintained openness as a Being-towards a given experience (which at the same time is a holding oneself back), and the *Erfahrung* which such restraint and reticence makes possible.

In order for the dialectics of aesthetic *Erfahrung* to come full circle, it must eventually merge with the recipient’s existence as it plays out in actually lived existence – in other words, the recipient must respond to the call of the aesthetic, and the *Erfahrung* itself must become a constitutive element in the recipient’s *Erlebnis*. By “taking the reader away from actuality ... the text does constitute its reader, because it gives him certain instructions that he has to fulfill” (*P* 52), and it is precisely in “fulfill[ing]” these “instructions” that the possibility of a return to lived experience is potentiated. Iser sees “the double figure of the reader-in-the-text” as being caused by “the split” which “comes about whenever we” sacrifice our selves as commonly articulated in *Erlebnis*; and we instead “perform the role assigned to us by placing ourselves at the disposal of someone else’s thoughts, thereby relegating our own beliefs, norms, and values to the background” (*P* 63). At the same time, “Whenever the split occurs,” *Erlebnis* persists as constitutive for aesthetic experience, even if its constitutive role remains for the most part in the background. *Erlebnis* is in fact constitutive to a lesser or greater degree of the recipient’s *Insein*, which selects and structures “the chain of images produced in the continual process of ideation,” images which are “colored and permeated by highly individual associations” (*P* 52) derived from the recipient’s own lived experiences. Here we can see the same chiasmatic movement we witnessed in the structure of the game:

The innovations of a text arise principally from the recoding of selected literary allusions as well as social norms and values; the effectiveness of this recoding depends on the degree to which the reader’s own codes and conventions are pushed into the background against which a new experience can be gained. At the same time, the reader’s code

guides the selections that make the text / world relation or the organization of extratextual structures concrete for him ... Thus the text and reader act upon one another in a self-regulating process. (P 229)

The aesthetic work transgresses the boundaries of both the everyday world and the recipient's personal experience, but both persist in the background: the former through the as-if structure of the aesthetic, and the latter through the recipient's *Insein* which schematizes "the text / world" to some degree along familiar lines, and thus also provides the conduit for the eventual return to lived, concrete existence.

While the interplay between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* "results in a 'contrapuntally structured personality' in reading," and "the resultant tension *calls for resolution* [emphases mine]" (P 64), we are not yet prepared to give a full ontological characterization of resolution as it emerges through an aesthetic event. We do know that "The resolution ... cannot come about simply by restoring habitual orientation to the self which had temporarily been relegated to the background" (P 64), for if this were indeed the case, no going beyond average everydayness would ever transpire through aesthetic experience, or for that matter in any other way. For Dasein to become authentic, "Playing the role involves incorporating the new experience" (P 64) into its own existence. The aesthetic equation moves towards completion (though a completion which is necessarily provisional – a condition due to the futural, projecting orientation of Dasein, as well as the fluid, evolutionary nature of the aesthetic itself), when "the reader is affected by the very role he has been given to play, and his being affected ... mobilizes the spontaneity of the self" (P 64) as projective and self-modalizing, and thereby "a layer of the reader's personality is brought to light which had hitherto remained hidden in the shadows" (P 64). Dasein finally comes back to the possibility of finding itself and recognizes the rift between itself and the world of the everyday, and therein gains a line of sight towards its home in its ownmost "there."

When Dasein has truly heard the call by being called back towards its "there," it becomes *resolute* [*entschlossen*], and concomitantly "*resoluteness* [*Entschlossenheit*] is our name for authentic existence" (BPP 287). In regards to the aesthetic, becoming resolute means that Dasein re-turns towards its "there" through the intermediary of the aesthetic event. Being "resolute" in general implies Dasein's having "decided with regard to matters of doubt or opinion" on behalf of itself; hence it becomes "firm" in itself,

in that it is not only no longer subject to the sway of the whims of the “they”; but also implies on the side of the aesthetic that it no longer wanders through the indeterminacies which it encounters and confronts in an aesthetic experience, but has now evolved and decided on a schematic reading. Thus, in relation not only to its own existence, but also to its aesthetic experience, resoluteness implies Dasein’s being “determined” – both in the sense of being determined as a definite way of Being-towards the aesthetic, as well as “constant” in its pursuit of its own goals – and even if previously its ends have been frustrated, it has persevered and shown itself to be determined in its “firmness of purpose.” In this way, Dasein also becomes “positive,” in that it is able to posit definite interpretive *schematae*, and furthermore it is enabled to direct its projective capacities towards its ownmost modalities of Being.⁸⁹ Thus “Resoluteness” is not only a resolving of an artwork into a reading, but is at the same time “a distinctive mode of Dasein’s disclosedness” (BT 297) – a fact which is stressed by (as Macquarrie and Robinson note) “The etymological connection between ‘Entschlossenheit’ (‘resoluteness’) and ‘Erschlossenheit’ (‘disclosedness’)” (BT 297 n.1). As a Being that has become resolute, Dasein emerges into the “Truth” which is nothing other than “a determination (a warranty or responsibility) of the Dasein, that is, a free and freely seized possibility of its existence” (BPP 320) as its ownmost possibility. We must present the caveat, however, that resoluteness is not an absolute or terminal state, which is never more to be subjected to any encroachments or subsequent alterations: Dasein as Being-in-the-world is always “already in irresoluteness [Unentschlossenheit], and soon, perhaps, will be in it again” (BT 299). Yet while “The irresoluteness of the ‘they’ remains dominant notwithstanding ... it cannot impugn resolute existence” (BT 299), for resolute existence will always again assert itself. Once our horizons have gone beyond the average, everyday understanding of Being, the transgression is never forgotten, nor can we retreat back under the previous limits once they have been transcended – we can never again lower the painted veil. In the case of aesthetics, the boundless, infinite quality of aesthetic play similarly confronts us with an effectively numberless series of indeterminacies, and hence with ever new possibilities of evolving meaning through resolutely schematizing a work in light of the emerging, expanding horizons of our own reading. For this reason, as early as “Bouhours’ treatise *The Art of Thinking in Works of the Intellect* (La

⁸⁹ “Resolute,” *Oxford English Dictionary*. New Ed.

manière de bien penser dans le ouvrages de l'esprit 1697)" (Cassirer 299), we find the notion that "The value and charm of aesthetic appreciation do not lie in precision and distinctness but in the wealth of associations which such appreciation comprises" (Cassirer 300). In becoming resolute, our freedom is realized not only as a freedom *from* the constraints of an average, everyday understanding – but also (and more importantly) as a freedom *for* "seiz[ing]" on the "possibilit[ies]" of Dasein's "existence" (BPP 320).

Yet before we can more completely describe the dynamics of the moment of vision, we must first clarify the conception of temporality [*Zeitlichkeit*] that grounds it. By bringing Dasein "before itself" (FCM 165) and orienting it towards its potentialities-for-Being, the moment of vision is dependent on Dasein's three temporal aspects: first, it brings Dasein before itself not only as it presently inhabits its "there"; second, it includes its pastness as its ways of having-been; third, it is aligned towards the future as the en-visioning of distinct potentialities-for-Being. Up until this point, we have been implicitly acknowledging and drawing on Dasein's ontological temporality. Previously we have described Dasein as "futural," a condition which is rooted in Dasein's character as a projecting Being. When we said that as a Being capable of ontological understanding "Dasein is always 'beyond itself' ["über sich hinaus"]," at the same time Dasein's temporality as futural, and hence as a "*Being-ahead-of-itself*" (BT 192), was already implicit in the foregoing conception. Yet "the term 'futural'" should not be taken to indicate that "we ... have in view a 'now' which has *not yet* become 'actual' and which some time will be for the first time," instead

We have in view the coming [Kunft] in which Dasein, in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, comes towards itself. Anticipation makes Dasein *authentically* futural, and in such a way that the anticipation itself is possible only in so far as Dasein, as *being*, is always coming towards itself – that is to say, in so far as it is futural in its being in general. (BT 325)

In the notion of "anticipation," we mean to emphasize Dasein's "Being towards" its "possibility" as an "*anticipation' of this possibility*" (BT 262), and not as the realization (in the sense of making real) of any given possibility *per se* in the scope of the present. In "anticipation" we are concerned with, and oriented towards, the futural as a "coming towards" our selves.

The temporality of pastness as a having-been at the same time assists in Dasein's claiming itself out of thrownness and also helps to potentiate its projective capacities, since resolute "taking over thrownness signifies *being* Dasein authentically as it already was" – or in other words, in its relation to its pastness as it perdures into the present:

Taking over thrownness ... is possible only in such a way that the futural Dasein can *be* its ownmost 'as-it-already-was' – that is to say, its 'been' [sein 'Gewesen']. Only in so far as Dasein *is* as an 'I-am-as-having-been', can Dasein come towards itself futurally in such a way that it comes *back*. As authentically futural, Dasein *is* authentically as '*having been*'. Anticipation of one's uttermost and ownmost possibility is coming back understandingly to one's ownmost 'been'. (BT 326)

Thus we can see that the projective capacities of Dasein and the possibility of its self-confrontation are simultaneously rooted in its past, for "only so far as it is futural can Dasein *be* authentically as having been." We can only "come ... *back*" to what has-been – which is to say, what is already, and as such is completely prepared for a return.

Yet while the future nevertheless remains ultimately determinative for Dasein, since "The character of 'having been' arises, in a certain way, from the future" (BT 326); from this viewpoint, we can also see the character of the present more specifically as a "making present" (BT 326) – a "making" which even though it is a coming-towards out of the future, is at the same time contextualized within, and oriented towards, a factual world. Since "Anticipatory resoluteness discloses the current situation of the 'there' in such a way that existence, in taking action, is circumspectively concerned with what is factually ready-to-hand environmentally," and hence Dasein as "Resolute" is "Being-alongside what is ready-to-hand in the Situation – that is to say, taking action in such a way as to let one encounter what *has presence* environmentally – is possible only by making such an entity present" (BT 326). It is "Only as the *Present* [*Gegenwart*] in the sense of making present" (which is to say as a continuous making present out of the future) that "resoluteness" can "let ... itself be encountered undisguisedly by that which it seizes upon in taking action" (BT 326).

Through an ontologically understood, authentic temporalizing of temporality, the ordinary, everyday conception of temporality, which is dominated by the linearity of clock-time and sees the future as arising out of the present and the present as arising out of the past, is reversed:

The character of ‘having been’ arises from the future, and in such a way that the future which ‘has been’ (or better, which ‘is in the process of having been’) releases from itself the Present. The phenomenon has the unity of a future which makes presenting the process of having been; we designate it as ‘*temporality*’. (BT 326)

Dasein can only really be present in its “there” through its projecting itself into the future, and that future in turn “releases from itself the Present”; however, in this way “presenting” becomes “the process of having been,” and releases pastness. “Temporality” thus exists only as the unified interchange of the three temporal processes, or “temporal moments” which mutually ground one another in reference to a resolute Dasein.

Now we are in a position to more completely characterize the relation between authentic temporality and the moment of vision. The “Present,” which is disclosed through anticipatory resoluteness “is not only brought back from distraction with the objects of one’s closest concern” in its dealings with the everyday, but also “gets held in the future and in having been,” is thereby “held in authentic temporality and which thus is *authentic* itself, we call the ‘*moment of vision*’” (BT 338). As bringing Dasein before itself in the fullness of its temporality, the moment of vision “must be understood in the active sense as an ecstasis,” which is “the resolute rapture with which Dasein is carried away to whatever possibilities and circumstances are encountered in the Situation as possible objects of concern” (BT 338). For our purposes, “The term ‘ecstatic’ has nothing to do with ecstatic states of mind and the like,” (BPP 267), for “Ecstases are not simply raptures in which one gets carried away” (BT 365), as one finds (for example) in descriptions of extreme happiness, intense sexual experiences, or certain apocalyptic prophecies and religious states; but rather is in keeping with “The common Greek expression *ekstatikon*,” which “means stepping-outside-oneself,” and thus “It is affiliated with the term ‘existence’” (BPP 267).⁹⁰ Dasein takes on

⁹⁰ It is in this sense that “ecstasy” is used in certain religious contexts – as (for example) in the ecstasy of *Santa Teresa di Avila*.

“this ecstatic character” by which it will “interpret existence, which, viewed ontologically, is the original unity of being-outside self that comes-toward-self, comes-back-to-self and enpresents” (BPP 267). Here we can see that “In its ecstatic character, temporality is the constitution of the Dasein’s being” (BPP 267). Furthermore, “temporality is, intrinsically, original self-projection simply as such” (BPP 307) and is constitutive “of the Dasein’s being” only “Because the ecstatic-horizonal unity of temporality is intrinsically self-projection pure and simple, because as ecstatic it makes possible all projecting upon ... and represents, together with the horizon belonging to the ecstasis, the condition of an upon-which, an out-toward-which” (BPP 307-308), and thus “there belongs to each ecstasies a ‘whither’ to which one gets carried away” (BT 365). In this way, Dasein enters into the “Truth” conceived ontologically as “a determination (a warranty or responsibility) of the Dasein, that is, a free and freely seized possibility of its existence” (BPP 320). This means that “the ontological constitution of the world” as a reality is “grounded in temporality” (BT 365). At the same time, since “*The existential-temporal condition for the possibility of the world lies in the fact that temporality, as an ecstatical unity, has something like a horizon,*” and since “The horizons of temporality as a whole determines that *whereupon* [woraufhin] factically existing entities are essentially disclosed” (BT 365), the real is also disclosed within the horizon of the moment of vision. The moment of vision, therefore, in its relation to temporality, looks both towards Dasein’s reality and towards its trans-valued position in the real.

What happens, however, when the ecstases of temporality break down and Dasein cannot enter into the moment of vision? While “Each ‘ecstasis’ of time – future, past, present – has its own horizon” (Hofstadter xxv), when one is closed-off there is a concomitant disruption in the other two due to their interdependence. If “being is projected upon the horizon of the Dasein’s temporality”; and if “In order for Dasein to exist as temporalizing time ... it has to have the horizon upon which to project future, past and present and their unity” (Hofstadter xxv), any disturbance in any one of the three aspects of temporality will cause a breakdown in Dasein’s Being as ex-ist-ing. In fact, since “Being can be given only as projected upon this fundamental horizon, the transcendental horizon, Temporality” (Hofstadter xxv), we might even say that in such instances Dasein has no Being (understood as the Being of a fully temporal and temporalizing Being) of its own. Hence in moments of ontological crisis when its issue remains in doubt or

indefinitely suspended, Dasein remains to a lesser or greater degree irresolute in that it remains floating in some middle-state, wherein it has neither completely won, nor wholly lost, itself. In this suspended condition, the decisive moment is often either temporarily or indefinitely deferred; and therefore, Dasein is unable to “choose itself” and its “hero” (BT 385). Missing is the moment of attaining a direction home, and what remains is only a pervasive sense of uncanniness [*Unheimlichkeit*], wherein Dasein has already departed from the “they,” but is still prevented from entering wholly into its “there.” Exiled from its ownmost self, Dasein thereby remains hovering in an indefinitely extended “not-yet.” Even in cases where Dasein has purportedly returned to its own “there,” it may nevertheless remain enmeshed in a “not-yet” as a locus wherein Dasein endures merely as a postponed becoming in its irresolute Being-towards-the-end. For this reason, a curious state of suspension persists in the face of a foreclosed future, which is not yet, or perhaps may never be, a “*coming towards*” (H 325) which meets a projection. As a result, temporality becomes inauthentic and finds itself lost in the present as a sequence of fleeting, ever receding, ungraspable “nows.” It no longer temporalizes the present out of the future, but instead “It makes present for the sake of the Present,” and in this way it binds itself to an empty present (analogously to the condition we saw as resulting from the inauthentic mode of curiosity) and “entangles itself in itself” (BT 347). In its preoccupation with the present, Dasein also foregoes its existential freedom, for in such a state “Dasein gets dragged along in its thrownness ... The Present which makes up the existential meaning of ‘getting taken along’, never arrives at any ecstatic horizon of its own accord, unless it gets brought back from its lostness by a resolution ...” (BT 348) – i.e. unless Dasein stands up and resolutely claims and asserts itself. Inauthentic temporality similarly presents us from enjoining the aesthetic due to its status as sequestered in the present, for in its “distracted not-tarrying” (which is characteristic of the inauthentic modes of existence of idle talk, curiosity, ambiguity, and the general busy-ness which the authentically aesthetic explicitly opposes), Dasein more urgently “becomes *never-dwelling-anywhere*” (BT 347), and hence any authentic encounter with Being in general, or the aesthetic in particular, is foreclosed, insofar as encountering itself is specifically predicated on just such tarrying and dwelling. In fact, this aspect of “the Present” prevents the emergence of both the creative and receptive moments of the aesthetic equation insofar as they are primarily oriented by and towards the future, since it “is the counter-phenomenon at the opposite extreme

from the *moment of vision*” (BT 347).⁹¹ This also entails the foreclosure of the imaginary, and hence the imagination, lacking any suitable object, may oftentimes turn back on itself. The resultant and potentially pathological condition leaves only an empty (if not abysmal) present and a future that promises only a continuation of nothingness or a repetition of anguished indecision, and which alternates between frenzy and torpor, while the past becomes nothing more than a location of loss.

Our inability to directly confront our thrownness – i.e. the non-cartographic and unknowable aspects of our whence, what for, and whither – leaves us with the unsettling feeling of being ungrounded and world-less, and thus forestalls our ability to project ourselves in relation to a situation. Here lurks the possibility that even once one has become resolute the awareness of “*being* the thrown basis of a nullity” (BT 325) may indeed continue to obtrude. While as resolute, Dasein is no longer (in Iser’s terms) “decentered” (FI 297) in that it has re-centered itself by returning to its “there,” when confronted with its null basis it may be just as incapable of authentically projecting itself as when it wandered in lostness. Now, however, Dasein is lost not in the “they,” but in itself. Dasein’s awareness of its null basis may not only obtrude, but may also be explicitly taken up in an exploration wherein the null basis itself becomes the focus of the investigation. In aesthetic “representation” ontologically conceived in the form of some “phantasmic figuration,” we find “a means of staging ... the decentered position of human beings, who are but do not ‘have’ themselves” (FI 296). The aesthetic here turns away from disclosing possible modalities for Being, and instead becomes an “exploration of the space between” Dasein’s “‘being’ and ‘having’” (FI 296) itself.⁹² This loss of self-possession is accompanied by a proportional disruption in Dasein’s

⁹¹ Yet this is not to say that the moment of vision, once it is realized, entirely over-writes inauthentic temporality, for (just as we saw with the call) while “In the moment of vision, indeed, ... existence can even gain the mastery over the ‘everyday’”; it is “often just ‘for that moment,’” and “it can never extinguish it” (BT 371). What is important is that we become enabled to recognize the constraints of an orientation fixated on the inauthentic present, while still continuing to inhabit it proximally and for the most part. The aesthetic then, once we have truly heard its call, is not only a way out of the temporality of everydayness, but is furthermore an ever-present reminder hovering both just below and beyond the threshold of awareness which vouchsafes that we shall never again fall wholly out of ourselves – although we may indeed slip a little from time to time.

⁹² While Iser posits that there persists an “insurmountable distance between ‘being’ and ‘having’ oneself” (FI 296), the fact that the aesthetic in general, and “literature” in particular, are able to provide “a setting in which that very space launches into multifarious patternings” (FI 296) points to the possibility that an understanding of this gap, and consequently a crossing of this gap, is indeed possible, even if such “‘having’ oneself” is only a transient condition. In light of Heidegger’s conception of Dasein as Being-

temporalizing of its temporality. The nullity of the present becomes solely a void which swallows the future's attempts at making-present; while for its part the past is no longer a having-been which stretches into the present as part of temporal and ontological continuity, but rather becomes either an extension of the emptiness of the present which reaches back into the past in a panorama of monotonous sameness, or else the past is viewed as the scene of expired fulfillments which are no longer inaccessible. In the latter instance, the past may come to be viewed as an instantiation of some sort of a "golden age" which is no more and in all likelihood can never be again. Here we also find the source for the various attempts to realize visions of artificial paradises through the aesthetic, especially when it is conceived in strict contradistinction from the real. Only in such cases the site of perfection is no longer located in the past, but rather is projected into the future – a future which is, however, always (to borrow a phrase from Langston Hughes) *a dream deferred* (a dream which may go out with a bang or whimper away), since the demand for total and continuous realization which alone will provide sufficient compensation is impossible to sustain. In confronting its own null basis, Being not only confronts the rift between the earth and world, the real and reality, but also simultaneously confronts the abyss within itself – or (to paraphrase C.G. Jung) *when we look into the abyss, the abyss also looks into us*. Even for resolute Dasein, the possibility for becoming lost again (although not necessarily in the same way) remains a very real danger, for in the manifold maze which we traverse in our existence there are many ways to stray from the path – or in other words, even when one has entered onto an authentic path, one may still fall through the cracks.

ahead-of-itself, we may further posit that such "having" is possible only in regards to Dasein's having-been and to desire such "having" in the present is structurally impossible. The desire for this "having" and the supposed dichotomy "between 'being' and 'having'" is assuredly an atavism of the metaphysics of presence, which casts Dasein as a mere presence-at-hand, and hence as something which may be held fast as an unvarying thing.

c. The Undiscovered Country and the Mortal Bourne: There Be Monsters ...

“... From the shore
They view’d the vast immensurable abyss.”
Milton: *Paradise Lost* (7: 210-211)

“Existence ... always already means to step beyond or, better, having stepped beyond.” (*BPP* 300)

Whereas in regards to the moment of vision, we saw the aesthetic as allowing us to envision and stage our potentialities-for-Being, which theoretically could be acted out in the sphere of the real; the aesthetic in reaching out into the “beyond” furthermore allows us to stage and play out the *inaccessible*. The “duality” which we posited as being achieved through an aesthetically enacted ecstasis, and which “arises out of our decentered position” (*FI* 81), now reveals its negative aspect insofar as it also brings out the split between the accessible and the inaccessible. The playing-out and staging of the inaccessible can be accessed or realized in “two ways”: first, art can “stage the desire itself” through “providing an image of having the unattainable”; and second, desire can be staged in order to “raise the question of the origin and nature of that desire – though the question, of course, is unanswerable” (*P* 247). Iser locates our drive towards such staging in Dasein’s primordial structure, in that “Evidently ... we are not prepared to accept the limits of cognition, and so we need images to mirror forth the unknowable” (*P* 282-283). But in “mirror[ing] forth the unknowable” we not only create a mere image of the unknowable, we also see our own face contained within it – if not potentially overwritten by it.

In the first manner of staging the “unanswerable” or “the unknowable” through “providing an image of having the unattainable” (*P* 247), such “staging gives rise to the simulacra of the inaccessible” (*FI* 299) – but only as a simulacra, and thus for Dasein there is a consciously recognized split between the real and reality, which while it does allow for boundary crossings, they are at the same time only simulated, and hence more or less safe. At the same time, the aesthetic, or “fictionality”

In its boundary-crossing capacity ... is first and foremost an extension of humankind which, like all operations of consciousness, is nothing but a pointer toward something other than itself. Basically it is void of any content and hence cries out to be filled.

Into this structured void the imaginary potential flows, because what is unavailable both to cognition and perception can be given presence only by way of ideation. (*P* 283)

The “void” which underlies “fictionality” or the aesthetic is merely a “structured” space wherein Dasein (either as artist or recipient) may project itself beyond its self. But this projection only occurs as an “ideation” which does not achieve the status of an actual presencing in the real, and hence it too is simply another form of simulacra. This is not to say that aesthetic projection conducted only as simulacra is wholly without value. Being-towards the aesthetic insofar as it remains ideational, precisely because it preserves the distance between the real and a given aesthetic reality, is no less potentially effective for Dasein by setting the stage for its eventual return to the real. In fact, ideation itself is a healthy form of aesthetic encounter, for when the borderlines are believed to have actually merged, it is a certain sign of mental derangement – and the greater the degree of convergence, the greater the degree of derangement.

The second manner of staging desire is more problematic. When we “raise the question of the origin and nature of that desire” we find ourselves before a “question” which “is unanswerable” (*P* 247). Iser puts forth the notion that “The need for staging does not arise solely out of the decentered position of the human being” (*FI* 297) simply as a form of simulated, merely psychological compensation for some perceived lack or absence, or otherwise as a means of circumventing some specific psychological obstacle or hang-up which refuses to remain in the past and instead continues to cast a pall upon the present. Yet even resolute Dasein may continue to be “decentered” in a more primordial way:

Just as inaccessible to us are the cardinal points of our existence – the beginning and the end – although their inaccessibility is not something that literature has to discover. They have always been present as sources of disquiet – not least because their very certainty defies experience. Since ungraspable certainties, especially of so fundamental a nature, are evidently unbearable, we ceaselessly try to make them as tangible as possible. (*FI* 297)

The aesthetic as a way of accessing the inaccessible is not only a way of disclosing the imaginary through the imagination, but also as a means to confront our thrownness, as well as to grasp the continuity of

existence as an individual Dasein. This aspect of aesthetic experience is much more than mere simulation, and becomes a way of making these inaccessible components of our existence as “tangible” as the real. Since the “inaccessibility” of these “cardinal points” is already real as “present sources of disquiet,” the aesthetic must be a heightening of the real – a way of making the real more real by presencing aspects of Dasein’s affective and reflective states in a concrete form. While for Heidegger “anticipatory resoluteness” primarily “understands Dasein in its own essential Being-guilty” and “*being* the thrown basis of nullity” (BT 325), and as such is defined in accordance with Dasein’s fundamental attunement as Being-towards-death; and while we, on the other hand, up until this point primarily have been concerned with Dasein’s Being-towards its potentialities; we now find ourselves confronted with the unknowable aspects of our own existence – unknowable aspects which are themselves constitutive for the imaginary.

When Dasein acknowledges the rift and apparent emptiness within itself, it may become prey to the autonomous aspects of the imaginary, which surge forth to fill the widening vacuum in Dasein itself. Now we must ask: to what degree is it possible for the imaginary to be in command of the process of “ideation” (P 283), or series of projections, through which it is at the same time realized? In the section entitled “Advice to an Author” from *Characteristics*, Shaftesbury shows himself to be aware of the deleterious effects of the excesses of the imaginary. In Shaftesbury’s view, our “fancies” are potentially autonomous agents, and thus must be kept “under some kind of discipline and management”; for as he says, “Either I work upon my fancies, or they on me” (1: 208). The faculty of the imagination and the domain of the imaginary are in a state of continual war, for “If” we “give quarter, they will not. There can be no truce, no suspension of arms between us. The one or the other must be superior and have the command” (1: 208). In the event of our retreat, and “if the fancies are left to themselves, the government must of course be theirs” (1: 208). Heidegger sees this obverse side of projection as the basis for Dasein to become “*seized by terror*” (FCM 366), since projection simultaneously demands Dasein’s opening up of itself, an opening which may not only be an entrance for positive, but also negative, contents (or discontents). The “unfathomableness and depth” of the aesthetic, and the conception of the “very nature the work of art” as “a conflict between world and earth, emergence and hiddenness” (PH 226), which leads us beyond the everyday world and into the grounding domain of Being and the imaginary, may also drag us into a vaguely

defined territory of shadows and newly emergent, unfamiliar, and hence threatening, forms. Since “the imagination of the poet always carries him beyond truth and nature” (Stewart 365), this movement may further be seen as the transgression of both truth and nature⁹³; and thus a form of criminal transgression – and sometimes truth, nature, and subsequently Being itself, are eviscerated.

In the last of his papers on the *Pleasures of the Imagination* (*Spectator* No. 421. “THURSDAY, JULY 3” 1712), Addison offers a brief treatment of the duality underlying the imagination and the imaginary (4: 374). While we may discover in the aesthetic “pleasures that gratify the fancy,” there are conversely “contrary objects, which are apt to fill” the imagination “with distaste and terror; for the imagination is as liable to pain as pleasure” (4: 376). When one’s “imagination” becomes “troubled,” such as in the case “of a distracted person,” the “whole soul” becomes “disordered and confused” – a sight in comparison to which “Babylon in ruins is not so melancholy a spectacle” (4: 377). Such imaginative disorders come to infect the entirety of Dasein and leave it in fragmented ruins. Since Addison finds this quality of the imagination “so disagreeable a subject,” he moves to cut off his discussion as quickly as possible, and thus “by way of conclusion” offers only one more consideration. Yet this final consideration is not a mere perfunctory leave taking or hasty running away from something he finds distasteful, but Addison rather turns to face the monstrous aspects of the imaginary. Insofar as the source of these disorders is outside the one affected, be it certain aspects of the environment as “contrary objects, which are apt to fill” the passively receptive imagination, or “an almighty being” (4: 377) who is external to the imagination itself, their source cannot be in the imagination itself, and thus must reveal the influence of the imaginary. In the case of the latter source, whose own capacity to convey “happiness or misery” to the “imagination” has “an infinite advantage” over the afflicted, this “almighty being” can only be read as motivated by malice. While Bishop Hurd opines in a footnote that this characterization of “an almighty being” will commonly “be thought a singularity,” he nevertheless does not pursue any further discussion of the nature of this “singularity” and oddly does not find it strange “that the politest writer of his age should conclude the politest of all his works, with a religious reflection” (4: 377, n. a). Yet however unorthodox

⁹³ The obvious paradigm for such transgressions in the Western tradition is that of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

this “reflection” may be, it is indeed decidedly “religious,” insofar as it refers specifically to “an almighty being” who is beyond any merely mortal being, since Addison explicitly distinguishes this particular example from his previous discussion of “the influence that one” presumably finite “*man* [emphasis mine] has over the fancy of another” (4: 377). While such a “man” may “convey ... a variety of imagery” into the mind of another with considerable “ease,” we must in turn wonder “how great a power” to take over the imagination of another is potentially “lodged in him, who” as “an almighty being,” necessarily “knows all the ways of affecting the imagination, who can infuse what ideas he pleases, and fill those ideas with terror or delight to what degree he thinks fit” (4: 377). Here the “single faculty” of imagination is not just the active power applied by “an almighty being,” but is at the same time the portal “through” which the “almighty being” is enable to “so exquisitely ravish or torture the soul” to such a degree “as might suffice to make up the whole heaven or hell of any finite being” (4: 377). As the source of all affective “ideas” which can be received by the imagination, “an almighty being” – especially in light of Addison’s curious use not of the definite, but rather indefinite article – can be read as an analogue of the imaginary itself which lies at the foundation not only of all artificial paradises, but is conversely the sole conveyance into seasons in hell.

Dugald Stewart also speaks of such aberrations resulting transgressions as “*Inconveniences resulting from an ill-regulated imagination*” (Stewart 357) – “*an ill-regulat[ion]*” whose source similarly resides in the territory of the imaginary. These “*Inconveniences*” at first glance appear to be due to failings on the part of the imaginative individual, but are rather the result of “*an ill-regulat[ion]*” imposed *ab extra*. While “It was undoubtedly the intention of nature, that, the objects of *perception* should produce stronger impressions on the mind than its own operations,” Stewart maintains that “it is possible,” in certain special cases, when the practitioner is trained “by long habits of solitary reflection, to reverse this order of things, and to weaken the attention to sensible objects to so great a degree, as to leave the conduct almost wholly under the influence of the imagination” (Stewart 357). To be under “the influence of the imagination” means that Dasein is subjected in a passive position, and thus is more or less under the sway of the imaginary. This danger is increased when Dasein turn away from the everyday world and projects itself into an aesthetic world or dwells ever more completely in its ownmost world. Here we can see the obverse,

negative side of the liberation disclosed in moments of vision. Eventually when we are “Removed to a distance from society, and from the pursuits of life,” and subsequently “when we have long been accustomed to converse with our own thoughts ... without exposing us to the inconveniences resulting from the bustle of the world,” which we have associated with the inauthentic busy-ness of the they, “we are apt to contract an unnatural predilection for meditation and to lose all interest in external occurrences” (Stewart 357). Stewart tropes this gradual process of increasing withdrawal in the language of disease, whose pathology leads to a condition in which “the most extravagant dreams of imagination acquire as powerful an influence in exciting all its passions, as if they were realities” (Stewart 357). In the increasing dominance of the imaginary, the “as if” which is characteristic with the aesthetic in general, and Iser’s notion of the fictive in particular, is overwritten, and the imaginary hypertrophies to the point that it wholly covers up the real.

Such disordered states of Being, however, may also evidence a productive capacity, and hence can themselves become constitutive for resoluteness. One such “disordered state of mind” is that of “melancholy,” which as being “chiefly incident to men of uncommon sensibility and genius” (Stewart 358) is by definition beyond the average and everyday. While “It has often been remarked, that there is a connection between genius and melancholy” (Stewart 358), the actual relation between the two remains covert. On closer examination, we find that

there is one sense of the word melancholy, in which the remark is undoubtedly true; a sense in which it may be difficult to define, but in which it implies nothing either gloomy or malevolent ... for as the disposition now alluded to has a tendency to retard the current of thought, and to collect the attention of the mind, it is particularly favorable to the discovery of those profound conclusions which result from an accurate examination of the less obvious relations amongst our ideas. (Stewart 358)

The productive form of melancholy is explicitly contradistinguished from the common meaning of the term wherein it “implies” something both “gloomy” and “malevolent.” As a “disposition” melancholy is a form of attunement which aids in determining Dasein’s projections by “collect[ing] the attention of the mind,” and thereby permits Dasein to tarry or dwell both with its world and its self, in order to further the flow of

“the current of thought.” In fact, melancholy is a form of *Insein* as “an accurate examination” directed not only towards Dasein itself as it is carried out in the domain of “ideas,” but also reaches out towards the imaginary as the realm from which emerge some of “the less obvious relations amongst our ideas.”

In both its transformation of the real and everyday, as well as when it is directed back against Dasein itself, the aesthetic exhibits “the character of *doing violence* [*Gewaltsamkeit*]” (BT 311). The relationship between the aesthetic and violence has its roots in Dasein’s primordial structure; and therefore, “is especially distinctive of the ontology of Dasein” (BT 311) as a projecting Being. Violence is endemic to Dasein’s bringing the world into unconcealment insofar as in this process it tears entities out of concealment: “Dasein’s *kind of Being* thus *demand*s that any ontological Interpretation which sets itself the goal of exhibiting the phenomena in their primordially, *should capture the Being of this entity, in spite of this entity’s own tendency to cover things up*” (BT 311). Similarly, the phenomenological method as an “Existential analysis” which seek to disclose Being also “constantly has the character of *doing violence* [*Gewaltsamkeit*], whether to the claims of everyday interpretation, or to its complacency and its tranquilized obviousness” (BT 311), both in its going against, and cutting itself off from, average everydayness and the “they.” In Dasein’s deciding against the “they,” “violence” is the “decision” of “apprehension” in that it is opposed to everydayness (IM 168). In his use of “decision,” Heidegger emphasizes the idea of cutting, which is shown in its Latinate etymological links to (for example) “incision” and “concision.” By taking us out of “the familiar realms” by cutting our ties to them and transporting us into the “*extra-ordinary*” (IM 12), philosophy not only does violence to that which huddles in concealment, nor does it stop at violating the (however false) standards of the “they,” but it furthermore does violence to Dasein itself. In the conflict of worlds, in the clash between the real and reality, Dasein becomes an outcast and a wanderer, no longer part of the everyday world, and not yet having completely returned to its ownmost dwelling place.

Along with the “breaking of bonds” and the approach towards authenticity, there is not only a gathering of power, but also concomitantly “loss” (IM 172) – a loss which is recognized as estrangement or alienation. In fact, the pursuit of one’s ownmost-potentialities-for-Being, or our ventures into the imaginary, by definition imply a certain degree of “strangeness” and alienation. Any “true beginning” is

“attend[ed]” by “strangeness, darkness, insecurity” (*IM* 39), for in such a beginning “Man embarks on the groundless deep, forsaking the solid land” (*IM* 153). This loss is first of all the loss of security in the “they,” either the comfort of ignorant complacency, or the security in numbers and supposed “certainty” associated with group-think – a condition which authentic Being can never entirely forget, or wholly escape, if only because it is all around. Even as one learns to speak authentically, she/he remains aware that “language, speech, is at the same time idle talk, a concealment rather than disclosure of being, dispersion, disorder and mischief <Unfug> rather than a gathering into structure and order” (*IM* 172-173). The cacophony of inauthentic speech continues to surround Dasein and the “they” still mill around aimlessly without purpose, and thus without a goal. Dasein cannot escape the world of the “they” and of the non-human – but neither can it be called wholly back into its fold:

What is thus nearest is so near that every unavoidable pursuit of machination and of lived-experience must have already passed it [what is nearest] by and thus can also never immediately be called back to it. Enowning remains the most estranging. (*C Phil.* 20)

Thus even in the midst of its newly found authentic understanding, Dasein finds itself suspended between the strange and the familiar – looking forward into the former, and glancing back into the latter which it can never wholly get away from or overcome save at the expense of a devouring madness. In the second place, a situation which itself is conditional on the initial estrangement from the world of the “they,” this insecurity and strangeness results from the changes which Dasein itself undergoes. As we emerge out of thrownness and fallenness and into our envisioned potentialities-for-Being, a split between the Being which we had been and the Being which we are becoming creates a rift within Dasein itself.

Strangeness similarly permeates the interpretive situation of the recipient. At first this condition results from “The lack of immediate understandability of texts” (*PH* 24-25) – but this “is really only a special case of what is to be met in all human orientation to the world as the *atopon* (the strange), that which does not ‘fit’ into the ordinary order of our expectation based on experience” (*PH* 25), and which is fundamental not only to Dasein’s discovering the world as thrown Being, but is also essential to its projection as Being-towards the potential; or in the specific case of aesthetic reception as Being-towards the imaginary. By enjoining the aesthetic, we commit ourselves to an alien path – the alien path which is not

only traced in the artwork itself, but which also bears traces of the alien Being of the artist who structured the fundamental landmarks of the aesthetic structure itself – and thereby alienate ourselves: “When mortals follow after ‘something strange,’ that is to say, after the stranger who is called to go under, they themselves enter strangeness, they themselves become strangers and solitary” (*OWL* 171-172). Aesthetic reception, however, as “Hermeneutics” summons “our attention to this phenomenon” (*PH* 25), and thereby makes possible an analytical awareness of this same strangeness, and thus still allows us to hold ourselves back through an analytically instated aesthetic distance. Aesthetic distance is the awareness of the split between the real and aesthetic reality wherein Dasein is able to reach across the boundary, even as it continues to remain firmly positioned on the side of the real.

The notion of “loss” which we have seen as accompanying Dasein’s becoming authentic is simultaneously and paradoxically a loss of Dasein’s self, and hence Dasein may yet be subjected to the overpowering and forced into a situation of perpetual *Unheimlichkeit*. For this reason, “*deinon*,” in accordance with Heidegger’s clarification of the term, furthermore characterizes Dasein “as ‘strange’ <unheimlich> in that it is subject to “the uncanny <das Un-/heimliche>, as that which casts us out of the ‘homely’” (*IM* 150). Here “the ‘homely,’” in light of the fact that Heidegger has enclosed it in “scare quotes,” is not the home which Dasein seeks in order to return to its “there,” wherein it will dwell and pursue its ownmost potentialities-for-Being, but is rather “homely” in the sense of the humble or unexceptional – which is to say, it is average everydayness. Neither is this “strange[ness]” [*Unheimlichkeit*] simply the uncanny, unhomelikeness [*Unheimlichkeit*], which we witnessed in regards to Dasein’s habitation in the context of its lostness in the “they,” nor is this “strange[ness]” [*Unheimlichkeit*] the same as the turbulence [*Wirbel*] out of which Dasein is summoned by the call of the aesthetic, in order that it may begin to move towards resoluteness. Since in becoming resolute, Dasein “surpasses the limit of the familiar <das Heimische>” (*IM* 151), another form of the uncanny continues to confront Dasein even after it has become authentic – a form of the uncanny which is unique to authentic-Being insofar as it is this form of “the uncanny <das Un-/heimliche> ... which casts us out of the ‘homely’” (*IM* 150). This strangeness or the uncanny [*Unheimlichkeit*] does not come to Dasein out of the future as the site of the imaginary conceived positively as the source of as yet unrealized potentialities-for-Being; but rather tears

Dasein out of its previous understanding and also appears as an empty chaos which inexorably demands to be given shape challenges the Dasein which it confronts. To encounter empty possibilities – empty in that they have not yet been given definite content – simultaneously presses upon Dasein an awareness of its own present apparent lack of content. Dasein has become free, but now it must decide for what it has become free. Freedom now becomes a burden as Dasein is gradually apprehended by a feeling of dread in assessing its future prospects. Now Dasein takes on the burden of decision, all the while becoming more and more aware that to decide in a certain direction is inevitably to close off other directions. The daring which Dasein exemplified in its becoming resolute may now falter under the pressing weight of its own responsibilities and doubts about its own capabilities.

In Dasein's alienation, the strangeness comes to occupy Dasein itself, and herein lurks the possibility for it to be overpowered, as the violence which it used to wield in the cause of emancipation is turned back on itself. Previously, we located the site of strangeness somewhere outside of Dasein: in the strangeness of the call, in the space of the newly disclosed "there," or in the as yet shapeless form of the future as the site of the potential. Now we can see that these sites are all in Dasein itself: in the call, Dasein summons itself; the "there" to which it re-turns in the call is the ownmost space of Dasein's Being as a Dasein; and the future which opens in the wake of re-turning is the domain of Dasein's ownmost potentialities-for-Being, and that which in fact determines it as a Da-sein. Here Dasein may become its own protagonist and take possession of its freedom, it may choose and win itself, and revel in power and awareness of its own transcending. But here Dasein may conversely assume the role of its own antagonist and become overwhelmed by its freedom, and hence eventually falter, and may even go so far as to lose itself again. It may also hold itself back in its "there," cowering in the consciousness of its own finitude, and thereby close off the future and empty the present in a form of living death which results from the effective suspension of Dasein's temporality. "All violence" of creative, which is to say projecting, Dasein "shatters against *one* thing ... death" – and "With the naming of *this* strange and powerful thing, the poetic project of being and human essence sets its own limit upon itself" (*IM* 158). Thus, we see that Dasein's finitude, which becomes absolute in death, inevitably lurks in front of every horizon.

The aesthetic itself, however, may form a bulwark against such inertia and debilitating incursions by diverting our attention from our own limitations; while simultaneously providing Dasein a place from which to launch further excursions beyond itself. The aesthetic, on the one hand, is related to “*technē*” which

provides the basic trait of *deinon*, the violent; for violence <Gewalt-tätigkeit> is the use of power <Gewalt-brauchen> against the overpowering <Über-wältigende>: through knowledge it wrests being from concealment into the manifestness of the essent. (IM 160)

But Being, on the other hand, “can never master the overpowering” through the aesthetic or any other means, and instead becomes subjugated to it as it is “tossed back and forth between structure and the structureless, order and mischief <Fug and Un-fug>” (IM 161). The dialectics of “structure and the structureless, order and mischief” are a function of Dasein’s modalities of Being, and hence include the sphere of the moral traditionally conceived as the dichotomy “between the evil and the noble” (IM 161). The overpowering itself thus exists within us, and in our struggle with ourselves “Every violent curbing of the powerful,” however, does not automatically result in triumph, for it may end in “either victory or defeat” (IM 161). Yet regardless of whether we win or lose, the struggle to reclaim ourselves continues unabated, for “Both, each in its different way, fling [us] out of home, and thus, each in its different way, unfold the dangerousness of achieved or lost being” (IM 161). For this reason, as well as due to her/his condition as an exile, “the violent one knows no kindness and conciliation <Güte und Begütigung> (in the usual sense); [she/]he cannot be mollified or appeased by” the accolades of the “they,” such as is conferred through “success or prestige” (IM 163). “In all” the machinations of the world “the violent, creative man sees only the semblance of fulfillment, and this he despises” (IM 163). “In willing the unprecedented,” the Dasein that has become authentic owns and bears its alienation and “casts aside all help” (IM 163). Thus we can see that Dasein as “Being-there” is constituted precisely by violence through the “unremitting affliction from defeat and renewed attempts at violence against being” (IM 176) – which means paradoxically, that “an act of violence *against* the overpowering” is “at the same time only and always *for* it” (IM 178). In all situations, “the overpowering” nevertheless persists.

But this does not mean that the overpowering is unavoidably crushing, for it also contains a productive aspect. While Heidegger “showed that the Greek concept of [un]concealment (*aletheia*), only represented one side of man’s fundamental experience of the world,” we can now see that “Alongside and inseparable from this unconcealing, there also stands the shrouding and concealing that belongs to our human finitude” (*RB* 34). “This philosophical insight,” which is attendant upon the recognition of our own finitude, “sets the limit to any idealism claiming a total recovery of meaning” (*RB* 34), in that Dasein can never assume any absolute standpoint, nor can it ever become the absolute itself or wholly merge with it. In the sphere of aesthetics, however, this insight “implies that there is more to a work of art than meaning that is only experienced in an indeterminate way” (*RB* 34), since it is precisely the “indeterminate” as a form of concealment which makes our enjoining of the aesthetic and the unfolding of aesthetic meaning possible. This insight thus further implies that we must not have to remain delineated and trapped by our finitude, for our finitude is precisely what makes it possible for us to genuinely undergo an aesthetic experience insofar as “The peculiar nature of our experience with art lies in the impact by which it overwhelms us” (*RB* 34). While the recipient possesses a degree of “aesthetic freedom,” wherein she/he is distinct from the artwork itself, there is an underlying “profound sense of community that dissolves all distance” separating the two. For example, in Aristotle’s notion of *catharsis*, whether it be comedic “liberating laughter” or “the traumatic experience” of pity and fear aroused by “the tragic,” there is “an act of identification, a deep and disturbing encounter with ourselves,” which “overcomes us” (*RB* 121). In this way, being overwhelmed not only potentially places us in the position of being subjected to the horrors of the imaginary or staring blankly into the abyss which gapes from our own null basis, nor does it restrict us to losing ourselves in laughter, or take us out of ourselves in a superficially sympathetic response; but such an experience may also provide a release for Dasein through which it may unbind itself from its former ways of Being, and thus it may ultimately prove to be productive for Being. We must remember “only where there is the perilousness of being seized by terror do we find the bliss of astonishment” (*FCM* 366). In undergoing an aesthetic experience, we place ourselves into the balance by daring to risk our selves, and in opening ourselves to such peril, we also open ourselves to the revelation of “the bliss of astonishment”

which overcomes us in wonder and blessing.⁹⁴ Here “we might add,” along with Addison, that the aesthetic and “the pleasures of the fancy are more conducive to health, than those of the understanding” insofar as they “have a kindly influence on the body as well as the mind, and not only serve to clear and brighten” being and “the imagination ... to disperse grief and melancholy, and to set the animal spirits in pleasing and agreeable motions” (4: 339). For while “In every expression of art, something is revealed, is known, is recognized,” and in spite of the apparently negative fact that “There is always a disturbing quality to this recognition, an amazement amounting almost to horror, that such things can befall human beings”; there is simultaneously “an amazement” that in spite of all these shocks and ills “human beings can achieve such things” (*RB* 153). What we have to recognize is that the struggle to own our own existence in the face of the everyday, the overpowering, and the burden of our responsibilities does not admit “closure” as if existence itself has the patterned and delimited structure of a work of art. What the struggle does permit us to realize – a struggle in which the aesthetic can play a constitutive and co-operatively determining role – is that regardless of our finitude, our horizons still lie before and beyond us and in this struggle of confronting our selves and unearthing our world, we can and must build ourselves a home.

⁹⁴ This paradigm recalls the many transformative adventures which are such a central part of the Western, aesthetic tradition, which includes (for example) Boethius’s *Consolations of Philosophy* and Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*, as well as more “modern” works, such as William Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, or T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*. These transformative adventures are also found where science and the aesthetic cross paths as in the case of alchemy – an intersection elucidated in detail in several of the works of C.G. Jung.

III. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)

a. Ontological Surveys: The Dilemma of Attunement

Doctor Samuel Johnson opens “*The Adventurer No. 128*,” written for “*Saturday, 26 January 1754*” with “a question” (*J Works* 2: 476) – a question which on first glance appears innocent enough, but which on closer examination raises a number of essentially ontological issues which are central to both a number of the main currents of his writings, as well as to the primary concerns of aesthetic phenomenology. Johnson’s question is first and foremost a moral question, which is to say it addresses the moral issue of *how to live* – and not merely how to live, but moreover how to exist, and thus the question also deals with the ontological issue of attunements. Following Heidegger’s usage, “attunement” refers to both a Being’s “state-of-mind” [*Stimmung*] and its issuing forth grounded in a “Being-attuned” [*Gestimmtheit*] as a basic direction of Being-towards its self and its world. Johnson seeks to determine in what manner “the multitudes who are exempted from the necessity of working either for themselves or others, find business to fill up the vacuities of life” by asking “in what then are they employed?” (*J Works* 2: 476). Here “the multitudes,” as being “exempted from the necessity of working either for themselves or others,” does not include exclusively those who have raised themselves above the immediate need of proving means for fulfilling their material wants; but rather theoretically includes each and every one of us, since all of us have moments (however brief) wherein we step back from our dealings with the everyday at-hand and the with-world and their endless rounds of busy-ness and are instead permitted simply to be. Johnson next addresses the issue of attunements automatically called forth by such a question, by adding that “This is certainly a question, which a distant prospect of the world will not enable us to answer,” since “We find all ranks and ages mingled together in a tumultuous confusion” (*J Works* 2: 476) – a “tumultuous confusion” which is comprised of the undifferentiated masses of the “they.” The world in its generality is more or less inaccessible to a Being that strives towards authenticity insofar as this world is itself the sphere of inauthenticity, and hence “what they have to pursue [sic] or avoid, a more minute observation must inform us” (*J Works* 2: 477). Here we see one of the hallmarks of Johnson’s characteristic approach, which is fundamentally akin to the phenomenological. While his ostensible method may be seen as being

basically in keeping with the standard practices of the principal currents of eighteenth-century British philosophy, most notably as exemplified in the works of Hobbes, Locke, and Hume, and could thus presumably be broadly termed “empirical,” Johnson can hardly be labeled as endorsing a strictly “scientific” approach. In his attempts at untangling the “tumultuous confusion” of the world, Johnson implicitly rejects any broadly termed “structuralist” paradigms, for he turns away from the route of general surveys as is the common practice in “cultural studies” and the social sciences and their bracketing of individuals into various externally defined collectives; nor does he propose aligning them under some variable heading as subjects for an experiment. Johnson rather holds himself back and allows for any phenomenon under investigation to show itself, and then proceeds to elucidate a series of observations which in turn provide illumination for various articulated structural characteristics, while at the same time serving to continually uncover further questions – which is to say he proceeds not by deductive reasoning, but rather through inductive reasoning and reflective judgments.

In the majority of his writings, Johnson never loses sight of the centrality of Dasein’s specific facticity as a Being which is unavoidably situated in the world of the real, as well in the world of its own reality – as a Dasein which *is* illuminated through its Being as an issuing-forth, consistently seeing the myriad attempts to overcome this condition as so many forms of at best self-delusion and at worst insanity, and just as consistently urging us to confront our own personal situations without recourse to any fabricated diversions or excuses. Johnson, in other words, is concerned with the moral dimension of Being (in the sense we have defined it) as addressing the question of *how to live* – or, more in keeping with the language of Heideggerian phenomenology, the question of how one *exists*. John L. Mahoney notes that, for example, particularly “in Johnson’s criticism of literature” we find

his consistent search for a fidelity to what he calls truth and to what he sees as its moral implications. Students of Johnson, especially in this century, each in his or her own way, have been quick to call attention to this quest. Johnson’s law is that of “experienced reality,” according to Jean Hagstrum, the test of the real actions and feelings of men and women. W.J. Bate argues: “Certainly Johnson provides a refreshing protest on behalf of the familiar and direct human interest ... Leopold Damrosch ... describes Johnson as

applying to poetry “the same standards that he applies to writing in general and to life itself ...”⁹⁵

This insight into Johnson’s interest in the “moral dimension” of “criticism” (Mahoney, “True” 185), while it is definitely operative in Johnson’s more overtly aesthetic writings, is no less prevalent in Johnson’s writings as whole. Throughout all aspects of Johnson’s body of work surfaces the concern with “experienced reality,” “the real actions and feelings of men and women,” and “the familiar.” This focus on Dasein’s facticity permeates Johnson’s style and manner of presentation, particularly in his periodical essays, for therein “the treatment itself is always practical in its grasp of particular fact”⁹⁶ and grounded in “the actual process of concrete example” and “what is familiar to us” (*ASJ* 233).

Johnson rarely elucidates either his specifically aesthetic, or more generally moral ideas, isolated from the question of existence and in the abstract, but either leads up to them through a series of reflective judgments which grow out of the firm ground of lived experience, or otherwise uses specific events or situations as *exempla* to illustrate a particular conception. Here we can see “that at the core of almost all Johnson’s abstractions is the Lockean concrete” (Mahoney, “True” 188). Mahoney continues by tracing the critical genealogy of the Locke-Johnson connection: beginning with “Jean Hagstrum,” who “declar[ed] that ‘virtually everything that Samuel Johnson said about the mind indicates firm adherence to the principle that most human knowledge arises from the objective, inescapable, coercive experience,’” attributing this focus to the fact “that ‘Johnson had learned well the lessons of Locke.’” Next Mahoney cites “William Youngren” who “contends that ‘if we are to understand Johnson on general nature ... we must understand that a loosely held (and no doubt usually unformulated) version of Lockean empiricism, with its easy assimilation of the intellectual to the sensory’” – a stipulation which “goes a long way towards helping us understand ‘why Johnson and his contemporaries can so easily shuttle back and forth in a way that can seem so puzzling to us, from praise of generality to praise of particularity or even to praise of both’” (“True” 188-189). This apparent contradiction is readily overcome provided we keep in view the fact that

⁹⁵ John L. Mahoney, “The True Story: Poetic Law and License in Johnson’s Criticism,” *1650-1850: Ideas, Inquiries, and Aesthetics in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Kevin Cope (New York: AMS Pr., 2001): 185.

⁹⁶ Walter Jackson Bate, *The Achievement of Samuel Johnson* (New York: Oxford U Pr., 1961) 31; hereafter *ASJ*.

Dasein's experiential content is grounded in its Being-in-the-world. "Generality" and "particularity" are not oppositional, but rather inter-defining, insofar as Being-in-the-world is (as we have seen) always already thrown-Being, as well as projecting Being. We must be watchful at the same time not to equate Dasein's experience exclusively with the Lockean primacy of "the sensory," nor should we see "the intellectual" in exclusively Lockean terms merely as a reflex of "the sensory." For this reason, "Roger Shackleton. ... grants that" while "Johnson carried into the second half of the century the outlook, the ideas, and the sympathies of the earliest representatives of the Enlightenment," nevertheless for Johnson "to have aligned himself, in the public view or in the light of his own conscience, with the *philosophes* of 1770, atheists and materialists as they were, would for him have been unthinkable" (Mahoney, "True" 186). Like Coleridge in the following century in his largely religiously motivated reaction against materially grounded pantheisms beginning with Spinoza and David Hartley's associationism, Johnson similarly scruples to preserve a dimension of human existence which, insofar as it is primarily characterized by the power of free-will, exists not only distinct from, but also ultimately presides over the bare materiality of being. Thus it is precisely free will which determines us as decidedly moral Beings – and hence as projecting Beings.

The "moral dimension[s]" of both existence and "criticism" requires from us not only receptivity (which itself is predominantly passive), but also demands that we actively intellectually or spiritually reflect on our experiences from a position beyond the confines of direct sensory experience, a position which is most overtly taken up in religious worship or prayer, as well as in aesthetic experience as we have defined it under the auspices of an aesthetic phenomenology. Reflection, at the same time, further prepares us for subsequent projections. Facticity for Johnson, in other words, is also measured and assessed against the possible – and in particular against our potentialities-for-Being. In the end, "Man can only form a just estimate of his own actions, by making his power the test of his performance, by comparing what he does with what he can do" (*J Works* 2: 480). In evaluating our actions, we must judge, if we are to judge authentically and without obfuscating evasions, by viewing our actions not exclusively in regards to our current state, but furthermore by considering them in light of our potentialities-for-Being – potentialities which must, nevertheless, be reflected back into facticity, and hence must at the same time be actually possible. For this reason, in regards to the moral dimension of the aesthetic, "Damrosch reminds us of

Johnson's warning that readers should be 'deeply suspicious of any criticism that ignores our response'" (Mahoney, "True" 186). This "response," as we have formulated it, involves the reflection of the aesthetic event back into the recipient's lived existence in the domain of the real as a *res-pon-sa*.

Johnson's recognition of Dasein's facticity also allows him to acknowledge the limitations imposed upon existence by the conditions of the world of the real into which we have been thrown, and thus one "faithfully performs the task of life, within whatever limits his labours may be confined" (*J Works* 2: 480). In view of the fact that "We can conceive so much more than we can accomplish," we must consider our potentialities-for-Being and our capacity for projection in relation to our situation in the real, otherwise "whoever tries his own actions by his imagination may appear despicable in his own eyes" (*J Works* 2: 480). "Imagination" here reveals an aspect of its treacherous side in that it not only allows us to envision as yet unrealized potentialities-for-Being, but it may also draw us away from our ethical responsibilities in our immediate, factual sphere of concern. For example, "He that neglects the care of his family, while his benevolence expands itself in scheming the happiness of imaginary kingdoms, might with equal reason sit on a throne dreaming of universal empire, and the diffusion of blessings all over the globe" (*J Works* 2: 480). We must move away "From conceptions ... of what we might have been, and from wishes to be what we are not" – which if we are honest with ourselves we see that all are "conceptions we know to be foolish" – and instead "we must necessarily descend to the consideration of what we are" (*J Works* 2: 481) and dwell in full recognition of the limitations, which at the same time qualify the openness, of our situation.

For Johnson the recognition of the inherent limits of our situation, however, does not similarly entail that we are wholly limited and constrained by the facticity of the real. We overcome our limitedness, "if we bear continually in mind, our relation to the Father of Being, by whom we are placed in the world" and thereby at the same time acknowledge "the part we are to bear in the general system of life" (*J Works* 2: 481). Even though Johnson conceives of God (at least in part) along ontological lines as "the Father of Being," this conception is still bound to the Western, onto-theological tradition wherein God is posited as the Being of beings. It is important to remember for our purposes not the fact that Johnson still advocates on behalf of a "metaphysical" ontology that Heidegger traces back to Plato, which further underlies the

Western philosophical tradition up to and including Nietzsche, and which forms the basis of the *guiding question of metaphysics*; but rather to recall that Johnson conceives of even religious experience as encountering the primordial source of our Being, which as having been “placed in the world” is described in terms equally applicable to Heidegger’s notion of thrownness [*Geworfenheit*], and hence it may also be considered as dealing with the source and issue of ontological attunement. An attunement which, furthermore, is related to our imaginative capacities in that for Johnson the religious provides the *ne plus ultra* for estimating what we indeed “can do” (*J Works* 2: 480), both as a constitutive element of our character, as well as providing the ultimate horizon upon which we may project ourselves. As inhabiting the undefined space beyond the limits of our reach and as approaching the borderlands of the human, the religious also becomes for Johnson the domain of the imaginary, not only as the region of the possible, but also as the sphere of the unknown – an unknown which is simultaneously both comforting and threatening and at times forces the imagination to turn back on itself. Herein we can also see Johnson’s view of Being as (at least in its earthly existence) radically finite – a finitude which becomes consciously grasped when we are faced with (or outfaced by) the unknown, and which forces us to confront the thrown basis of our own Being.

When we enjoin the questions posed above, the only thing that is clear at the outset is that “When we analyze the crowd into individuals, it soon appears that the passions and imaginations of men will not easily suffer them to be idle” (*J Works* 2: 477). Here we will also find the starting-point for our investigations of Johnson, which is in fact the same starting-point which initiated our investigations in “The Aesthetics of *Insein*” – in other words, in Being’s need to project itself. Johnson’s question of how to live is essentially concerned with Being as *Insein* – which is to say, it is a question which addresses our attunements and projections.

Human beings must act, they must go outside and beyond themselves, they must project themselves into and onto the world, even if in doing so they are heedless of the ultimate value of any particular undertaking, no matter how crude a form such projections may take, and thus “we see things coveted merely because they are rare, and pursued because they are fugitive” (*J Works* 2: 477). Such pursuits as these are more inauthentic evasion than diligent search after an authentic way to be, as either a

way of concealing oneself among the “they” in that “people who have the same inclination generally flock together,” and thereby in the society of the “they” “every trifler is kept in countenance by the sight of others as unprofitably active as himself” (*J Works* 2: 477). Whether the significance of this “sight” is more or less consciously apprehended is of no decisive importance. Or else such fallacious pursuits provide a further means of self-evasion, for when one’s “mind” is “intensely engaged,” which in these particular cases means to be intensely distracted, then one “is secured from weariness of” one’s self (*J Works* 2: 477). This “weariness” which Johnson himself felt too keenly finds its complement in the notions of *ennui* and *Weltschmerz* which are too often and dubiously considered to be “Romantic” dis-eases, or else are seen as byproducts of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century “modern” and “post-modern” periods, and further shows Johnson’s “Romantic” and “existentialist” tendencies. The evasions attendant on “the laborious cultivation of petty pleasures,” are nevertheless “a more happy and more virtuous disposition, than that universal contempt and haughty negligence, which is sometimes associated with powerful faculties, but is often assumed by indolence when it disowns its name, and aspires to the appellation of greatness of mind” (*J Works* 2: 477). This differential is due to the simple fact that the former class of evasions are humbler and limited to the practitioner her/himself, whereas the latter categories betray an affectation which conceals a secret self-contempt or half-consciously detected feelings of insufficiency, which in turn are compensated for by assuming a posture of mock superiority.

The manner in which we are accustomed to be attuned when not under the influence of any form of coercion or delusion forms the basis of what is broadly termed Dasein’s “character.” For Johnson, “character” is not only a mark of individuality, but is also in some way related to the distinct articulation of Being’s primordial, ontological structure, in that every one of us possesses a “particular character” as an individual distinct from our “species, and impresses on [us] a manner and temper peculiar” to each one of us,” and “it is always [our] business to cultivate and preserve” this character (*J Works* 5: 177). That general disposition of Being which we call “character” must be the un-coerced articulation of the ontological attunement of a particular Dasein (but whether or not as such it is simultaneously a mark of authenticity is another question) can be shown in the contrasting light of Johnson’s critique of Pope’s “favorite theory of the ‘Ruling Passion’” (*J Lives* 3: 173) in the *Life of Pope*. Pope propounds this theory, for example, in “his

poem *Characters of Men*,” which was “written with close attention to the operations of the mind and modifications of life” (*Lives* 3: 173). If we understand “the operations of the mind” to indicate a specific disposition of Being in the sense that attunements are determined through a Dasein’s mood conceived as a state of mind, and if we read “modifications of life” as dealing with not only the moral question of how to live, but also with how one may alter one’s previous manners of existing, then we are justified in seeing here a concern with the determination of the projection of Being. The “Ruling Passion” for Pope

means an original direction of desire to some particular object, an innate affection which gives all action a determinate and invariable tendency, and operates upon the whole system of life either openly or more secretly by the intervention of some accidental or subordinate propension. (*J Lives* 3: 173-174)

As “an original direction of desire,” the “ruling Passion,” insofar as it is “antecedent to reason and observation,” and due to the fact that it “must have an object independent of human contrivance,” and since “there can be no natural desire of artificial good” (*J Lives* 3: 174), is a form of ontological attunement; which, moreover, as “giv[ing] all action a determinate and invariable tendency” can be cast as a fundamental attunement, insofar as it plays a constitutive role in the working out of specific projections. Yet, Johnson stipulates, “Of any passion thus innate and irresistible the existence may reasonably be doubted” (*J Lives* 3: 174). Here Johnson returns to his conception of “character” as a continually modalizing attunement, for which purpose Pope’s notion of a “ruling Passion” is insufficient, since “Human characters are by no means constant” (*J Lives* 3: 174). For this reason, “In the *Life of Pope* Johnson goes at once to the heart of the moral problem” when “he perceives the belief in a ‘fixed’ character implies a dangerous determinism.”⁹⁷ Thus Johnson concludes: “This doctrine is in itself pernicious as well as false; its tendency is to produce the belief in a kind of moral predestination or overruling principle which cannot be resisted” (*J Lives* 3: 174). In becoming its self, Dasein is “directed not by an ascendant planet or predominating humour,” but rather is formed to a lesser or greater degree by certain aspects of its having-

⁹⁷ Paul Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism: Ethics and Imagery from Swift to Burke* (Oxford: Oxford U Pr., 1969) 99.

been, such as “the first book which [it] read, some early conversation which [it] heard, or some accident which excited ardour and emulation” (*J Lives* 3: 174).

Johnson’s use of “accident” furthermore adds another dimension to his view of Being as *Insein*. As an existential Being, and more specifically as a thrown Being, Dasein in its issuing-forth is to a certain degree under the sway of the “accident[s]” which have befallen it. Accidents are likewise elemental in the changes of attunement which Dasein more properly undergoes than enacts, and as such are products of *Erfahrung* rather than *Erlebnis*. In “*The Rambler No. 196. Saturday, 1 February 1752*” (*J Works* 5: 57), Johnson writes:

Whoever reviews the state of his own mind from the dawn of manhood to its decline, and considers what he pursued or dreaded, slighted or esteemed at different periods of his age, will have no reason to imagine such changes of sentiment peculiar to any station or character. Every man, however careless and inattentive, has conviction forced upon him; the lectures of time obtrude themselves upon the most unwilling or dissipated auditor; and, by comparing our past with our present thoughts, we perceive that we have changed our minds, though perhaps we cannot discover when the alteration happened, or by what causes it was produced. (*J Works* 5: 258)

Johnson, however, ultimately insists on Dasein’s ontological freedom; and therefore, even though such “change[s]” are “forced upon” us, we still hold the resultant “conviction” consciously as our own. In the *Life of Cowley*, Johnson considers “accidents” in their relation to the aesthetics of “Genius,” speculating that there “are ... accidents, which sometimes remembered, and sometimes perhaps forgotten,” which work to “produce that particular designation of mind and propensity for some certain science or employments, which is commonly called genius” (*J Lives* 1: 2). “The true Genius” is a combination of innate capacity and accidental attributes as possessing “a mind of large general powers,” which “are accidentally determined to some particular direction” (*J Lives* 1: 2). While a given accident causes genius to head in “some particular direction,” it is the “large general powers” which are necessary in order to allow it not only to pursue a certain direction of Being-towards as aesthetic projection, but furthermore permit it to conceive and enact the dimensions of the projections themselves.

Johnson's conception of Dasein as a projecting Being leads him (as it similarly leads Heidegger) to consider the temporality which defines specifically human Being, and hence at the same time both its finitude as well as its orientation towards the imaginary. The "quality of looking forward into futurity" which defines projective Being is similarly for Johnson also a part of its primordial structure, and as such it "seems the unavoidable condition of a being, whose motions are gradual, and whose life is progressive" (*J Works* 3: 10). While we are able to enact "continual advances" beyond our "first stage of existence," due to the fact that our "powers are limited," which is to say finite, we are perforce "perpetually varying the horizon of [our] prospects" (*J Works* 3: 10). For Johnson, human Being is always a work in progress which is continually supplementing itself, and thus "The natural flights of the human mind are not from pleasure to pleasure," which is bound to the present and its specific occurrence; "but from hope to hope" (*J Works* 3: 10), and hence oriented towards the future as the sphere of what has not-yet come to pass. It is precisely "the changes" (*J Works* 3: 34) between projected divergent states of being which "keep the mind in action; we desire, we pursue, we obtain, we are satiated; we desire something else, and begin a new pursuit" (*J Works* 3: 34-35). The obverse, negative side of "the pleasure of projecting" is revealed when projecting becomes an end in itself, and thereby "many content themselves with a succession of visionary schemes, and wear out their allotted time in the calm amusement of contriving what they never attempt or hope to execute" (*J Works* 5: 310). Akin to these are "Others, not able to feast their imagination with pure ideas," who "advance somewhat nearer to the grossness of action"; but who spend all their time "collect[ing] what is requisite to their design," and embarking on "a thousand researches and consultations, are snatched away by death, as they stand *in procinctu* waiting for a proper opportunity to begin" (*J Works* 5: 311). Johnson thus recognizes the need for Dasein to be engaged in its own existence by enacting its existential possibilities *existentielly* in the sphere of the real. As a fundamental attunement, a "state of mind" is able to become an authentic attunement concerned with Dasein's ownmost existence only insofar as it "is discovered" – which is to say, it is dis-covered or comes into unconcealment – only "by the outward actions" (*J Works* 14: 307). While "In futurity events and chances are yet floating at large" (*J Works* 3: 45), it is, through the actual enacting of a de-cision drawn from a range of possibilities, through the

enactment of choice by siding with a certain possibility, that Dasein may become what it will be – which is to say, what it *is* when existentially understood.

Yet at the same time, while the present is the moment of decision, the present itself is the continuance of a having-been. Johnson directly addresses this issue in “*The Rambler No. 68. Saturday, 10 November 1750*” (*J Works* 3: 358). Since “every man is to cull his own condition” from out of a “general heap” of

small incidents and petty occurrences; wishes for objects not remote, and griefs for disappointments of no fatal consequence; of insect vexations which sting us and fly away, impertinencies which buzz a while about us, and are unheard no more; of meteorous pleasures which dance before us and are dissipated; of compliments which glide off the soul like other musick; and are all forgotten by him that gave them and him that received them. (*J Works* 3: 359)

All these seemingly transient “small incidents and petty occurrences” through their cumulative force comprise our having-been, and hence play into our present condition. Yet this “general heap” is not ultimately determinative of Being, for they provide merely the storehouse of ways of Being-towards the past from which one may “cull” one’s “own condition” by deemphasizing or winnowing out certain aspects and retaining and focusing on others as building blocks. These various aspects are possibilities from which we reap or mine our actuality – and thus each one of us is engaged in the active construction, or at least assembly, of our own “condition.” Johnson continues:

as the chemists tell us, that all bodies are resolvable into the same elements, and that the boundless variety arises from different proportions of very few ingredients; so a few pains and a few pleasures are all the materials of human life, and of these proportions are partly allotted by providence, and partly left to the arrangement of reason and of choice. (*J Works* 3: 359-360).

These possibilities are always already confined by the general lineaments of what Johnson would call human nature, and what we would call our “element[al],” primordial, Daseinal structure. But this is not to say that this limit is in any way constricting or suffocating, for there is a “boundless variety” which may

“arise from the different proportions of very few ingredients” as a dialectic of theme and variation which as “boundless” is virtually infinite. The impulses and results of our modalizations of Being, broadly considered, are “a few pains, and a few pleasures,” which in various “proportions” comprise “all the material of human life” (*J Works* 3: 359). Yet these proportions are not entirely under our command, for they “are partly allotted by providence, and partly left to the arrangement of reason and choice” (*J Works* 3: 359-360), and it is the former which, for Johnson, most generally considered determines our thrown-Being as Being-in-the-world.

Here Johnson also shows how he is primarily concerned with Dasein’s everyday modes of Being specifically as Being-in-the-world, for it is in this mode that we pass the majority of our existence (in Heidegger’s words, *proximally and for the most part*), and in this condition

even those who seem wholly busied in publick affairs, and elevated above low cares, or trivial pleasures, pass the chief part of their time in familiar and domestic scenes; from these they came into publick life, to these they are every hour recalled by passions not to be suppressed; in these they have the reward of their toils, and to these they at last retire.

(*J Works* 3: 360)

For Johnson, Dasein’s everyday modes of Being as they are evidenced in “domestic scenes” are explicitly contrasted with “publick life,” and thus the everyday should not be monolithically conceived as the stomping-grounds of the “they,” but is further differentiated. While in the “publick life,” there is the appearance of “elevat[ion]” above the average mean; the sphere of the “domestic” is the fundamental and non-illusory domain of our existence –and hence it must also be the sphere wherein authentic existence must finally play out. In fact, Johnson splits Dasein’s everydayness into inauthentic and authentic dimensions, which are respectively the spheres of the public and domestic. Being is “recalled” from, or called out of, the public sphere wherein it is dominated by the unfamiliarity of the “they” in a manner similar to that we witnessed in it being called out of its fallenness. On the other hand, Johnson concludes that “The most authentic witnesses of any man’s character are those who know him in his own family, and see him without any restraint, or rule of conduct” imposed from outside by fate or circumstance, “but such as he voluntarily prescribes to himself” (*J Works* 3: 361). Here we can see Johnson reintroducing a

voluntary component again as a hedgerow against any misinterpretations which might see him as advocating for the suffocating influence of an over-riding determinism and as an indication of each Being's own inescapable moral responsibility.

The dilemma of attunement, which is a moral dilemma as addressing the question of *how to live*, and more specifically as how to live in the sphere of the everyday and real, is by definition concerned with specific ways of Being-towards. Thus the dilemma of attunement must be confronted and taken up in Being's specific ways of issuing-forth. As we have detailed, Dasein in its very structure and situation addresses itself to its world – both the world of the real into which it finds itself as thrown, as well as its ownmost world of reality – through modalities of Being-towards tempered by an attunement. Walter Jackson Bate, who approaches this issue from a more or less conventional psychological perspective, sees such projective actions as part of the process of “Human development,” which “involves ... the use of primary human capacities” (*ASJ* 140). In our terms, “human development” is equivalent to Dasein's process of reaching out towards its ownmost-potentialities-for-Being – a process which is by no means shared by every Being and first demands that one hears the call of conscience and its subsequent becoming resolute. These essentially ontological “capacities” are themselves guided by a “pleasures or appetites” which “have within them a *potential* yearning” (*ASJ* 140), or in other words a “yearning” toward the “*potential*,” which in order to be fully realized must eventually “work toward reality” (*ASJ* 140) – or in our terminology and schemata, they must cross over back into the real. The reflection of an ontological reality back into the real, be it a personal or aesthetic (or some combination of the two) reality, is necessary as a final movement if Being is not to remain indefinitely suspended in a state of irresolute resolution. In such a state, Being not only falls prey to an apparently insurmountable, generalized anxiety, but continues to meander in self entangling circles in an ontological never-never-land, for “we do not remain happy for long if we know that what we imagine or desire is only an illusion, and that it can have no possible counterpart at all in reality” (*ASJ* 140). The danger here is a counter movement wherein Being, “in order to reassure” itself that it is “not dwelling solely in illusion ... will wrench reality to fit the imaginative pattern they have in mind” (Bate, *Achievement* 140). We may conclude that, “In a very real sense, therefore, human feelings” – provided the term is expanded to include Being's affective dimension of attunement as mood –

“at least potentially, work outward toward reality, hoping to re-inforce and secure themselves by the ‘stability of truth’” (*ASJ* 140) as a truth of Being. The “*stability of truth*,” as Johnson writes in his *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765), is further relevant to the aesthetic. An aesthetic reality must not only reflect the real world to some degree – although not for Johnson in a mere one to one correspondence, since Johnson himself repeatedly repudiates a slavish mimeticism as a mere re-presentation, preferring “just representations of general nature” (*J Works* 7: 61) to myopic, toadying attention to minute matters – the aesthetic must also be reflected back *into* the world of the real. For while “The irregular combinations of fanciful invention may delight a-while, by that novelty of which the common satiety of life sends us all in quest,” nevertheless “the pleasures of sudden wonder *are soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth*” (*J Works* 7: 61-62).

But how and where is the “stability of truth” to be negotiated, either in the real world or in the aesthetic? For that matter, what do we mean by, and how does Johnson himself conceive of, “truth”? Here we should recall Mahoney’s clarification that “what [Johnson] calls truth” is consistently linked to “what he sees as its moral implications” (“True” 185). Thus we may refine the notion of “the stability of truth” as indicating the stability of Dasein’s own truth as it is consolidated and increasingly disclosed through its existing. Along these lines, Morris Golden finds “In summoning up his fictional world,” that “Johnson shapes not dramatic interaction or contextual solidarity, but the individual representative mind groping for happiness in its particular environment”⁹⁸ – a happiness which requires from Dasein the enactment of a decision. Golden continues: “For Johnson the centrally human activity is choice, the expression of the mind’s psychological and moral energies. All of his characters, therefore, are fixed as anticipating choice, choosing, or exemplifying the consequences of choice” (65). As a projecting Being whose Being is furthermore at “issue” (*BT* 12), Dasein is both free for, and burdened with, “choice.” Choice is not only the central human activity, but as an active attuning and modalizing which characterized human Being as human, it is “the *centrally* [italics mine] human activity.” Through choice Being expresses and

⁹⁸ Morris Golden, “Johnson’s Characters: The Stubborn Choice,” *Mid-Hudson Language Studies* 1 (1978) 64.

consolidates not merely its “psychological and moral energies,” but furthermore its ontological situation and articulation.

Dasein’s “anticipating choice, choosing, or exemplifying the consequences of choice,” while operative throughout Johnson’s body of work (and for that matter, throughout the aesthetic in general, provided it is ontologically regarded), is especially evident in *London: A Poem in Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal* (1738), *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749), and “On the Death of Dr. Robert Levet” (1782). In each of these poems, Johnson directly addresses the dilemma of attunement in Being’s issuing-forth by analytically and aesthetically confronting the issues within its projections themselves, as well as the tensions between its projecting, its own reality, and the conditions of the real.

i. Aesthetic Appropriation and *London: A Poem in Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal* (1738)

Johnson's *London* may at first glance seem to be a curious place to begin an existentiell-aesthetic investigation which conceives of an artwork as enacting for a recipient a form of what Heidegger terms the call, since as a result of its historical distance and now obscure references, it seems to come from a world apparently entirely different and wholly removed from our own. In his article "'London' and the Fundamental Problem of Hermeneutics,"⁹⁹ Joel Weinsheimer addresses the distance between the poem and its potential, contemporary recipients, when he cites "the Yale edition of the poems of Samuel Johnson," wherein "the editors remark that 'for a modern reader who can recreate the situation in which ['London'] was written, it may still be exciting enough. But to one with less imaginative capacity or historical knowledge, its appeal lies in'" (Weinsheimer, "London" 303) its more obvious formal aspects, such as "'Johnson's skilful handling of the couplet'" (qtd. in Weinsheimer, "London" 304). In regards to the former proposed way of access to the poem through "recreat[ing]" the specific historical "situation," Weinsheimer notes that

To assist us in re-creating the milieu of 1738, the editors supply the usual notes identifying various historical personages and events which are no longer in the domain of common knowledge. In this respect they follow Johnson's lead. "London" is manifestly an occasional poem; and its occasion ... like all occasions, passed. (Weinsheimer, "London" 304)

Nor does it take an intervening period of centuries to render the details of an occasion more or less obscure, for the specifics of this particular occasion "passed so quickly that Johnson himself felt called upon in the fifth edition (1750) to annotate" several of the historical particulars underlying the poem (Weinsheimer, "London" 304). If, as "the Yale editors suggest," we are left with "two avenues of resuscitation: the reader may either restore the background by means of historical imagination or, failing that, admire Johnson's couplet art," then "both options require a sacrifice on our part" as readers and interpreters, "and that

⁹⁹ Joel Weinsheimer, "'London' and the Fundamental problem of Hermeneutics," *Critical Inquiry* 9 (1982) 303.

sacrifice is our occasion, our need” (Weinsheimer, “London” 304). But then we must ask ourselves, even if “the poem’s” historical “context could be exhumed and ... we could participate once again in all the range” of the events and situation which is presents, “Why would we want to,” since these conditions are “now defunct” (Weinsheimer, “London” 304). The same reservations also apply to the formalist reading, for here we must ask ourselves “Why are we interested in the aesthetic knowledge of couplets that have been drained of all substance” (Weinsheimer, “London” 304). In the end, we inevitably find that “The pure content of the poem is too concrete, its pure form too abstract, to answer our occasions” (Weinsheimer, “London” 304). Here we are rejecting the polarity of what T.S. Eliot refers to as “the two extremes of *incantation* and *meaning*,” and instead are approaching “an intermediate position between the poetry of sound and the poetry of sense” held by “poetry which represents an attempt to extend the confines of human consciousness and to report of things unknown, to express the inexpressible”¹⁰⁰ – “an intermediate position” which is grounded in the issue of ontological attunement and looks towards the imaginary. Since “What is manifest in ‘London,’ as in every occasional poem, is the urgency of the occasion, the burden of the present and the future,” in order “To explain why the poem is interpreted at all ... we need to take account of the occasion: to develop the idea of occasional interpretation as well as that of occasional poetry” (Weinsheimer, “London” 305). As confronting “the burden of the present and the future,” this development is aligned along the lines of temporality. The poem itself incorporates the past as a having-been, which when it is contextualized along with a future as a coming-towards in regards to exigencies of a recipient’s occasion, also is released into the present, and hence is no longer simply a cultural artifact, but rather is now authentically historical as part of the *historicity* of an individual Dasein’s own unfolding *Geschichte*.

Our task, then, is to authentically appropriate the poem and bring it into the orbit of our own occasion, or rather our own “occasions” (as Weinsheimer himself stipulates above) – a task wherein we

¹⁰⁰ T.S. Eliot, “Johnson as Critic and Poet,” *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: The Noonday Pr., 1970) 193. We have stipulated that we are presently only “approaching” such a view of poetry in particular, or the aesthetic in general, for it would be something of a stretch to view Johnson as a kind of arch-Romantic seeking “to report of things unknown,” or “to express the inexpressible” in view of his prevalent concern with Dasein’s facticity and the moral issue of how to live in the world of the real. This is not to say, however, that Johnson is without imagination, nor is it to imply that he never deals with the inexpressible, but only that both are predominantly subjugated to more concrete existential concerns.

must not lose sight of the fact that each one of our needs and occasions is dependent on its own evolving ontological situation. “Appropriation” in this context is, therefore, twofold: not only do we simply claim the text for ourselves, but we must also uncover the elements of the text which are appropriate to our specific situation. Yet by addressing the poem to our own occasion through appropriation, we at the same time have to address ourselves to history and the aesthetic tradition. For this reason, we find invariably that

Every occasional poem (and is there any poem not occasional, that cannot be dated, and is therefore not dated?) needs to be altered if it needs to be preserved. And if we do not preserve old poems, if we can get along without them, and if the present situation is always sufficient to its own understanding, there can be no occasion for literary interpretation. But if it is precisely our present moral, social, or political situation whose understanding necessitates the interpretation of tradition, then every interpretation of literature is, and should be, no less occasional than the literature it interprets.

(Weinsheimer, “London” 306)

In the “preserv[ation]” of previous aesthetic ways of Being, we bring a mode of having-been into a “present situation” in order to fill in or shore up its insufficiencies in regards to our own dawning moment of vision. This “preserv[ation]” is not solely applicable to Being in the domain of its own reality, but is also relevant to “our present moral social, or political situation” in regards to our dealings in the world of the real. Our encounter with the past at the same time permits us to fill in the insufficiencies of “the present situation” and “its own understanding.” Even as we turn towards the past as it exists in the aesthetic tradition and assess the alternate ways of Being with which we are presented, we are concomitantly ontologically driven by our own temporal structure to confront “in the urgency of the occasion,” not only “the burden of the present,” but also that of “the future” (Weinsheimer, “London” 305).

What is required from us is what Weinsheimer terms “Application” – a process which “is fundamental because it is an answer to the question, What is literature for?” (Weinsheimer, “London” 306) – a question which we, along with Iser, have been anxious to confront. Here Weinsheimer explicitly follows the lead of Gadamer (and implicitly, as we have previously seen, the lead of Iser), conceiving of the processes of interpretation as a unified endeavor, for “in Gadamer’s words, ‘... the suggested distinction

between cognitive, normative and reproductive interpretation has no fundamental validity, but all three constitute one phenomenon” (Weinsheimer, “London” 307). For this reason, Gadamer “suggests, the task of criticism is to *do* the applying and *be* the application – as well as being the construal and performance of the work” (Weinsheimer, “London” 307). In this endeavor, “London” itself provides a model for us, since it “is both poem and interpretation” in that it is “an imitation of Juvenal’s third satire” (Weinsheimer, “London” 305), and thus “as an explicit imitation ... It demonstrates the imitability¹⁰¹ of Juvenal and, being an imitation, claims imitability for itself” (Weinsheimer, “London” 313). By showing how the appropriation of Juvenal is possible, Johnson makes his own work available to us – Johnson’s appropriation of Juvenal, in other words, provides a model for our appropriation of Johnson. Weinsheimer calls our attention to Johnson’s own self-conscious method of appropriation, for “In requesting that passages from Juvenal’s satire ‘be subjoined at the bottom of the page,’ Johnson remarked that ‘part of the beauty of [his own] performance (if any beauty be allowed it) consist[s] in adapting Juvenal’s sentiments to modern facts and persons’ (*Poems*, p.46)” (Weinsheimer, “London” 306). Our task, then, is further clarified: in developing a schematic interpretation, we will attempt to apply Johnson’s application to our own situation.

At the opening of the poem, we are introduced to “injur’d Thales” (*J Works* 6: 47).¹⁰² While “Hawkins asserted that Thales represents Richard Savage ... Boswell denied this (*Life*, I.125 n.), as did the rev. John Hussey (1751-99).” Hussey, who was “a friend of Johnson’s later years ... wrote in a copy of Boswell’s *Life* belonging to the late D. Nichol Smith,” that “Johnson told me that London was written *many years* before he was acquainted with Savage and that it was even *published before* he knew him,” adding the claim that “Johnson also said that by Thales he did not mean any particular person” (*J Works* 6: 47 n. 2). Upon the basis of this testimony we may conclude that Thales is an example of what Golden refers to above as an “individual representative mind” – or by reading “mind” as synecdochally indicating the totality of a human Being, Thales is a representative instantiation of Dasein in general. This representative quality, however, does not imply that Johnson’s characters are merely hollow abstractions, without any

¹⁰¹ “Imitability” appears to be Weinsheimer’s own coinage (but one which is very much in the spirit of Heidegger and Gadamer), which in spite of its apparent Germanic-philosophic ponderousness succinctly expresses the notion of “that which has the quality of being able to be imitated.”

¹⁰² All future references to specific poems are from this edition and henceforth will be designated only by the line number/s in a parenthetical citation.

modicum of distinctness or individuality of their own; but instead it is only to say that whatever distinctness or individuality they may possess is not determined by accidental particulars of fortune or idiosyncratic quirks of character, but rather is the result of particular attunements which any given Being may, or conversely may not, theoretically assume. Here we spy the hermeneutic bridge which permits connection between all three elements of the aesthetic equation, and which in fact makes the equation itself possible. Here it should also be apparent that by “equation” we do not mean “identity” as absolute identity in the sense of unchanging sameness, a static self identity; but rather intend “equation” in a loosely mathematical sense as co-determining elements in a interactive process – a process which itself is ultimately characterized by the interplay of the elements involved.

The poem is introduced by the voice of an unnamed speaker who watches as “injur’d Thales bids the town farewell” (2). Thales, we are told, has “Resolved at length” to be “from vice and London far” (5), and instead desires “To breathe in distant fields a purer air” (6) located “on Cambria’s solitary shore” (7). The initial speaker at first regards Thales’s departure with a certain degree of ambivalence. Yet while the narrator says that even “Tho’ grief and fondness in my breast rebel” (1), this division is nevertheless apparently bridged by his “calmer thoughts” which “commend” Thales’s “choice” (3). Yet here the reader who is familiar with Johnson’s body of work and its frequent questioning and lampooning of schemes of rural retreat begins to wonder if something is not indeed amiss and if the ambivalence voiced in the poem has only been superficially ameliorated. In the opening of the poem, however, the strict dichotomy of the city and the country is for all intents and purposes firmly established. London is depicted, on the other hand, as a virtual storehouse for a catalogue of vices in explicit contradistinction to remote, rural spaces. Thus the initial narrator asks, in an apparently rhetorical mode:

For who would leave, unbrib’d, Hibernia’s land,
Or change the rocks of Scotland for the Strand?
There none are swept by sudden fate away,
But all whom hunger spares, with age decay:
Here malice, rapine, accident, conspire,
And now a rabble rages, now a fire;

Their ambush here relentless ruffians lay,
And here the fell attorney prowls for prey;
Here falling houses thunder on your head,
And here a female atheist talks you dead.

(9-18)

The city is not only a home to active vice, which as a distinct threat would be a direct object of fear [*Furcht*], but further elicits anxiety [*Angst*] due to the general although unspecified presence of “sudden fate” (11). In fact, the entire structure of the city itself is depicted as corrupt and uncertain – a place where “falling houses” may potentially “thunder on your head.”

Opposed to this grim view of contemporary London, Johnson calls up a vision of “Britannia’s” (26) past – a past located in a rural space. The narrator and Thales, positioned “On Thames’s banks ... / Where Greenwich smiles upon the silver flood” (21-22), stand “in silent thought” (21) regarding Britain’s past, and are “Struck with the seat that gave Eliza birth” (23). In a prayer-like gesture, the two “kneel, and kiss the consecrated earth” (24) and “In pleasing dreams the blissful age renew, / And call Britannia’s glories back to view” (25-26). The past as Britain’s having-been emerges fully into the present, and the pair “Behold” in present tense “her cross triumphant on the main, / The guard of commerce, and the dread of Spain” (27-28). This golden age, however, existed only “Ere masquerades debauch’d” (29) it, and hence we can draw the conclusion that the decline did not begin with the evils associated with present-day London, but rather they are the evidence of a cumulative process of degeneration contingent on a society predicated on “masquerades.” Contemporary London is simply the emblem of its most recent momentary culmination.

The reader is left to wonder if the country – city dichotomy is really as simple as it appears, for throughout the opening there persists the same ambivalence we saw in the beginning of the poem – an ambivalence which calls into question the supposed purity of its seemingly established distinctions. While the country is a place where one may go “unbrib’d” (9), this possibility concomitantly means that one could still be bribed; and while in rural seclusion “none are swept by sudden fate away” (11), there are yet those who have not been “spare[d]” by “hunger” – a fate which, while it is not “sudden,” is just as fell. Nor are

the “pleasing dreams” of “the blissful age” any more resilient. While the “pleasing dreams” of “the blissful age” are indeed “renew[ed],” the “calm” which “the happy scenes bestow” is merely “transient” (31), and only “for a moment” are able to “lull the sense of woe” (32) which pervades the poem as a whole. While Thales cites as one of the causes of “these degen’rate days” (35) the “devot[ion] to vice and gain” (37) displayed through all the strata of society from anonymous “attorney[s]” (16) and “female atheist[s]” (18) to “Marlb’rough” and “Villiers” (86); “gain” in some sense must also underlie the “commerce” which is listed as one of the principal attributes of “Britannia’s” supposed golden age, and thereby even the presumed time of virtue becomes suspect. Thales himself eventually comes to recognize the hopelessness of a mere change of place, and thus he gives vent to his frustration in a sigh and a rhetorical question:

Ah! What avails it, that. From slavery far,
 I draw the breath of life in English air ...
 If the gull’d conqueror receives the chain,
 And flattery subdues when arms are vain?

(117-118; 121-122)

The question goes without a direct answer, but Thales’s hypothesis regarding mere change of place is confirmed by other aspects of the poem to be only another form of imprisonment. Even though in the opening address, the speaker “praise[s]” Thales as a “hermit,” and while later Thales himself extends the monastic metaphor by asking for “Some secret cell” from “indulgent,” unspecified “pow’rs” (49) – all of which taken together characterize Thales as some sort of secular monk, although with no less pious a purpose. The resonances of “hermit” and “cell” further convey the notion of running away and merely exchanging one form of imprisonment for another equally confining situation.

Yet at the same time, dreams of a virtuous, rural retreat as a place wherein Being may reclaim itself persists, even though they persist only in a subjunctive mood – which is to say, such conditions are still only potential, but nevertheless remain at least theoretically and prospectively able to be enacted. The country is imagined as a space wherein Being may order its world according to its own dictates and wherein it may uncover its home – a home oriented in its ownmost “there,” and thus distinct from the

corruptions of the “they” represented by London. Addressing the unnamed, initial narrator, Thales voices conditions that are equally applicable to himself as he departs:

Could'st thou resign the park and play content,
For the fair banks of Severn or of Trent;
There might'st thou find some elegant retreat,
Some hireling senator's deserted seat;
And stretch thy prospects o'er the smiling land,
For less than rent the dungeons of the Strand;
There prune thy walks, support thy drooping flow'rs,
Direct thy rivulets, and twine thy bowers;
And, while thy grounds a cheap repast afford,
Despise the dainties of a venal lord ...

(210-219)

In relation to the polarity previously established in the poem between the city and the country, “the park” (210) appears to represent a third possibility, which draws on, but is no way a synthesis of, the two foregoing terms. Yet nevertheless while it is an apparently “natural” space, it is at the same time artificially constructed and is effectively more a social meeting-place and stomping-grounds of the “they” than a locale encouraging solitude and reflection, and for this reason is linked to the simulacra associated with a theatrical “play.” Thus “the park” demands its own oppositional term. Opposed to “the park,” therefore, is “some elegant retreat” which one cannot directly purchase, since it cannot be pre-fabricated, but which one “might'st ... find” (212), seemingly discovering it only by chance. Such a “retreat,” however, is not without its own refinements, and hence may be described as “elegant” in a way which does not base its elegance on the arbiters or whims of fashion. From such a place, we may “stretch” our “prospects” (214) – in the sense of viewing or envisioning, searching, overall outlook, as well as our orientation towards the future – beyond their previous limits. Dasein's “prospects” are at root a function of its ontological understanding; which, when it is determined by an attunement and instantiated in a projection, becomes a way of Being-towards which articulates a distinct daseinal world. This articulation of Dasein's world is

carried out, in the metaphor of the poem, through acts of “prun[ing],” “support[ing]” (216), “direct[ing],” and “twin[ing]” (217) – or in other words, through the appropriation and cultivation of the real. Since the place is directly reclaimed from “Some hireling senator” (213), a figure associated with the fraudulent urban scene and its ruling body, it is explicitly an alternative to the corruption represented by London; and therefore, exacts a lower cost “than ... the dungeons of the Strand” (215). The retreat can also presumably fortify its occupant with wholesome viands in spite of its previous occupant’s proclivities and activities, for such “grounds a cheap repast afford, / Despite the dainties of a venal lord” (218-219).

Now we are in a position to more clearly ascertain the full scope of the insidious effects of London’s devotion to vice in regards to ways of Being. Whereas the scramble for gold, the random acts of violence, and the various brands of impiety lurking seemingly everywhere in the city, in the view of the poem they are indeed crimes demanding redress. Yet the root vice which strangles London, and which Thales immediately addresses when he takes over the voice of the poem in line 35, is that “worth ... in these degenerate days, / Wants ev’n the cheap reward of empty praise” (35-36), and thereby goes wholly “unrewarded” (38). In such a state,

This mournful truth is ev’ry where confessed,
SLOW RISES WORTH, BY POVERTY DEPRESS’D:
But here more slow, where all are slaves to gold,
Where looks are merchandise, and smiles are sold ...

(176-179)

“Worth” (177) here is defined against worth as mere monetary, material value in regards to things present-at-hand and instead is cast as value of character or merit of Being. Ontological worth, which in opposition to the thoughtlessness of the fashionable fops of the “they,” who “Exalt each trifle, ev’ry vice adore” (148), is a result of “science” (38). “Science” here should be taken in the sense of the Latin “*scientia*,” designating “knowledge” in general, and hence it is both an internal quality and a way of Being-towards the world. It is the lack of recognition of his own worth which most directly forces Thales’s departure, and which in turn gives him occasion to continue to hope: “Quick let us rise, the happy seats explore, / And bear oppression’s insolence no more” (174-175). He argues that there must have been some as yet

uninhabited place previously “reserv’d” by “heaven” out of “pity to the poor” (170), even if it be considered of little consequence as a “pathless waste, or undiscover’d shore” (171), a “secret island in the boundless main” (173), or a “peaceful desert” (174). In changing his situation, Thales hopes to “rise” out of his present circumstances and change his fortune and instead occupy a “happy seat” (174) – here reading “happy” not only in the sense of contentment or a certain joyfulness, but also in its etymological connections to “hap,” and hence implies a relation to fortune – and hence to a domain beyond our control. This tension between the knowledge that hope itself is apparently futile and the persistent need to maintain hope often recurs in Johnson’s work (most notably in what the editors of the Yale edition refer to as his *Diaries Prayers Annals*) and usually results in a newly instated resolution, which while it cannot go back to a naïve endorsement of uncomplicated hope or feign ignorance to its own rigor of thought or turn a blind eye to underlying ambivalence, nevertheless continues to actively project an improved future. In his projections, however, Thales does not feed on “hope,” for (just as Pandora found) “hope” has an evil all its own, and thus he says, it “sooths to double my distress / And every moment leaves my little less” (39-40). Hope, while it is a form of attunement directed towards the future, and as such is akin to projection, its lack of a defined and actual direction prevents it from becoming an authentic projection arising out of resoluteness. What Thales requires is a manner of projecting which recognizes the limits of the present, while still remaining resolutely oriented towards the future as a site of possible change.

“London” establishes a dichotomy between inauthentic arts which serve only to conceal and ape the corrupt manners of the “they” and authentic arts which provide a means towards change. The former category is comprised of, and practiced by, the “they” (134) who

... venture on the mimick’s art,
Who play from morn to night a borrow’d part;
Practis’d their master’s notions to embrace,
Repeat his maxims, and reflect his face;
With ev’ry wild absurdity comply,
And view each object with another’s eye ...

(134-139)

Here we see a continuation of the “masquerades” (29), but which now no longer only conceal the true countenance of the participants in applying “the mimick’s art” (134) and merely “play[ing] from morn to night a borrow’d part” (135), and hence become the same as the “they” as exemplified by the so-called leaders of society. Such mimicking is not confined to superficial resemblance, but in “embrac[ing]” their “notions” (136) expands to pall thinking itself so that they “With ev’ry wild absurdity comply” (138). To “comply” in this way by feeling compelled to be pliant to every twist of thought is a perversion of Being-with, which “reflect[s]” the “face” (137) of the so-called master in a more or less one to one correspondence and eventually comes to wholly determine and absolutely occupy Dasein’s world. In the present moment of the poem, at a time when so many founder “lost in thoughtless ease” (103) and are presented only with the vacuity of “empty show” (103), one can only “Behold the warrior dwindled to a beau” (104) with “Sense, freedom, piety, refin’d away’ (105). The change in the inhabitants, whatever its ostensible or supposed source (we will bypass the distracting issue of Johnson’s obvious anti-Gallic prejudices as being outside the scope of our present investigations), is also due to Dasein’s falling away from itself through “thoughtless[ness]” and “sense[lessness]” – a process which similarly leads to Dasein’s being determined under the auspices of the modes of the “they” as embodied in prevailing fashions such as the “beau.” Ironically, the modes of “culture” espoused by the so-called refinements of the “they” lead only to “dwindl[ing]” and decline – which is to say, they do not become “refin’d” in the sense of attaining a higher degree of culture and a greater nicety of comportment, but rather that they are essentially diminished. In fact under these conditions, the whole of society becomes analogous to a masquerade, wherein the majority “venture of the mimick’s art” (134) and “play from morn to night a borrow’d part” (135) – a “part” which is “borrow’d” from the wardrobe of the “they,” and hence is not authentic to the Dasein who assumes it. Such a “role” must be “Practic’d” under the auspices of some arbitrary “master’s notions” (136), which are conveyed through “maxims” (137), which recall the idle talk of the “they.” In turn the loss of thought corrupts discourse by reducing it to a form of idle talk as a parroting of such “maxims,” and concomitantly distorts understanding, which in our terms is itself a function of *Insein* as worlding, and in this way Being is sequestered from its authentic “there” and can only “view each object with another’s eye” out of an alien over-there. Such “arts like these,” which are “preferred, admired, [and]

caressed" (152) by the "they" also assault each Being who struggles to be authentic. Thales indicates this duality by shifting from the use of "they" to "your" when he details the menacing nature of the adversary in their incursions upon resisters: "They first invade your table, then your breast" (153). The invasion begins by a foray into the home, before moving into the center of Dasein's ownmost Being, from whence they "Explore your secrets with insidious art / Watch the weak hour, and ransack all the heart" (154-155), and "Then soon your ill-plac'd confidence repay, / Commence your lords, and govern or betray" (156-157) in a virtual occupation of the house of Being.

The means of redress the poem advocates in order to provide a means for altering the situation is aesthetic and is carried out first and foremost through "satire" (263). Satire itself, in its criticism of current standards and its proposals for emendation, is predicated on an ontological split between inauthentic and authentic (or at least what are perceived as more authentic) ways of Being. Satire, which supplicates "the snarling muse," is "provoke[d]" (161) specifically by the "poverty" (159), which in terms of the poem is the wealth of *scientia* spurned and debased by the assumed superiority and false pomp of the "they." For this reason, at the beginning of his farewell address, Thales asks the "indulgent," unspecified "powers" to "give" (49) him "Some pleasing bank" (45) and "Some peaceful vale" (46), a retreat similar to the place "Where once the harrass'd Briton found repose" (47), wherein Thales likewise will be "safe in poverty" to "defy ... his foes" (48). Herein Thales also allies himself to the past as a way of having-been in seeking to occupy the same ontological space of "the harrass'd Briton" who sought refuge from "the Anglo-Saxon invasions" (*J Works* 6: 50 n. 47), as well as stressing the no less violent qualities of the current situation. Thales, however, even as he applies to himself the situation of "the harrass'd Briton," projects another application of defiance than that practiced by his predecessor – a defiance carried out through satire. In this project, Thales allies himself to "The laureate tribe" who "in servile verse relate, / How virtue wars with persecuting fate" (198-199). In fact, it was Thales's "rustick tongue" (79), which "Ne'er knew to puzzle right, or varnish wrong" (80), that initiated his troubles and caused him to be "Spurn'd as a begger, dreaded as a spy" (81) and to "Live unregarded" and "unlamented die" (82) as an exile. Yet the "verse" of "The laureate tribe" is only apparently "servile," for even though as a "pension band" this "tribe" would seem to a functionary of the "they," their "gratitude" is only "well-feign'd" (200), and the real goal of their efforts

is to “Refund the plunder of the begger’d land” (201) through satiric attack. In the concluding lines of his address to his unnamed friend, Thales explicitly projects just such a satiric resurgence, telling his listener that when you are “tir’d like me with follies and with crimes” (258), “Thou” will “fly’st for refuge to the wilds of Kent” (257) in order to “In angry numbers warn’st succeeding times” (259). This endeavor will be a joint project, for “Then shall thy friend, nor thou refuse his aid” (260). Yet Thales’s “aid” appears to be what ultimately invigorates such a project, for even though the “satire” and “page” are clearly assigned to Thales’s friend, it is Thales himself who will “point” the “satire” and “animate” the “page” (263), and thereby ultimately make them effectual. The “angry numbers” of this “satire,” insofar as they are intended to “warn ... succeeding times,” furthermore reveal a temporal component which seeks to alter the present through being taken up in an application; and therefore, at the same time alter the future by presenting alternative potentialities-for-Being which are paradoxically simultaneously located in the past as authentic manners of having-been. The temporal aspect of this project is further underscored in regards to Thales and his friend by the “When ... Then” structure of the passage as a whole. Here we also see the re-engagement with the world of the real, for at this time, Thales, undeterred and “Still foe to vice,” will “forsake his Cambrian shade” (261) and “In virtue’s cause once more exert his rage” (262). Yet since this re-engagement will take place specifically through the aesthetic medium of satire, we can see that the aesthetic itself is envisioned as the intersection not only of past, present, and future situations and ways of Being; but is also the portal through which one may cross back from the reality represented by the “Cambrian shade” in particular, and places of retreat in general (as we saw above), and reenter the real through a specific act of Weinsheimer’s concept of “application.”

Nor is the aesthetic immune from such “insidious arts” (154), but the aesthetic itself may also become infected. The inauthentic may equally corrupt and depotentiate the aesthetic, as it “With warbling eunuchs fill[s] a licens’d stage, / And lull[s] to servitude a thoughtless age” (59-60). As a “licens’d” undertaking, the professional theatre is turned into just another insidious functionary of the “they.” In fact, the act of licensing itself is a means of quelling authentic aesthetic, and specifically satiric, expression, for as E.L. McAdam, Jr. writes in an explanatory footnote to the text: “The Act requiring that plays and similar entertainments for which admission was charged ... had been introduced to silence satire of Walpole’s

government.” This act also had its effect on Johnson’s text of “London,” since Walpole is also the primary target of Johnson’s poetic satire, and thus since “by the date of Dodsley’s *Collection*” (wherein “London was later reprinted) Johnson’s friend “Garrick was manager of Drury Lane ... Johnson changed ‘our silenc’d stage’ to ‘licens’d’” (*J Works* 6: 51 n. 59).¹⁰³ After Johnson’s emendation, the “silenc[ing]” of the stage is no longer a more or less vaguely caused side-effect of the general cultural situation, but is now more clearly due to governmental forces brought to bear through “the official act of “licens[ing]” itself. In bringing his satire directly to bear on a specific socio-political condition, Johnson displays his basic faith in the potentially directly mitigating effects of the aesthetic, even in the face of its apparent perversion.

In the end, however, “London” appears to some degree to beg the question of application, although it does present the parameters of appropriation. While it lays out the rudiments of an ontological situation split between the poles of inauthenticity and authenticity, it still only approaches the verge of an authentic response – both in the poem itself in regards to its two protagonists, as well as in relation to a possible application to the situation of a recipient. So in a sense, we have failed in applying the poem to a specific situation of a distinct Being. But we have succeeded, on the other hand, in opening up the possibility of not only applying the poem to a range of ontological situations, but also of engendering a application of the aesthetic in a *responsa* through the notion of appropriation in general. Here we come to the verge of, and are confronted by, what Gadamer calls “The task of moral knowledge,” which “is to see in the concrete situation what is asked of it or, to put it another way, the person acting must see the concrete situation in the light of what is asked of him in general” (qtd. in Weinsheimer, “London” 315). For our purposes, the artwork itself is the “general” level which has the power of potentially illuminating the particular “concrete situation” of the recipient’s existence and the various worlds wherein it plays out. The appropriation “London” proposes, both for its protagonists as well as its potential recipients, is a decidedly aesthetic appropriation, which posits the prospect of a re-formed, authentic way of Being through its advocating a planned satirical project. Even though “Johnson considered Juvenal’s third satire a true poem and validated its truth by applying it to London,” and in so doing he succeeds in “enforc[ing] its truth on

¹⁰³ McAdam continues: “The stage had never been wholly silenced though it had been manacled: stratagems were found, then as now, to avoid the Act, which is still in force” (*J Works* 6: 51 n. 59).

the present”; and if following Johnson we analogously apply “London” to our own situation, this does not in either case mean that we “force it on the present insofar as London is not reduced to an instance of Rome.” In place of a reduction wherein “all differences” are patently “ignored,” “the type” of the historical source “is modified and extended by its application to the concrete situation of the interpreter” (Weinsheimer, “London” 321). This process is a result of “The function of analogy” which works “to establish a new type comprehending both that of London and Rome” (Weinsheimer, “London” 321) – a “comprehending” which must finally be carried out by the recipient if the work is to remain vital. Herein “Johnson finds,” and we as readers of Johnson concomitantly find, “a meeting ground, a common place, where past and future can coalesce through the process Gadamer calls the ‘fusion of horizons’” (Weinsheimer, “London” 321-322). In this way, we have succeeded in appropriating “London,” in that here we have shown how in spite of its apparently unbridgeable historical distance it can be “applied to the *perpetuum mobile* of changing circumstances,” since “the object of literary science is not a thing in itself” as a self-contained entity either as a message directly conveyed from distant speaker, or as a historical or cultural artifact, but is rather “a relation, specifically a relation” (at least *in potentia*) “to the situation of the interpreter” (Weinsheimer, “London” 309). In this way, we have also disclosed the potentiality of evolving an example of what we have termed aesthetic truth. Not only is the “London” of Johnson “a valid interpretation of validity” as “an occasional interpretation” which “answers the need of the occasion ... by responding to the truth claim of Juvenal’s poem” (Weinsheimer, “London” 322), but at the same time the recipient’s “occasional interpretation” may equally be “a valid interpretation of validity.” Now not only “The two occasions interpret one another by being applied to one another” (Weinsheimer, “London” 322), but a more or less infinite number of “occasions” may “interpret one another by being applied to one another.”

ii. The Orbit of Being and *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749)

Johnson's *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, similarly to "London," presents an ontological survey; but in the later poem, as McAdam notes, "The topical elements ... are somewhat more general than in *London*, [and] are wider in scope" (*J Works* 6: xviii). Insofar as the scope of the later survey encompasses a greater range of modes of Being, the concept of projection itself is explicitly thematized. Walter Jackson Bate marks *The Vanity of Human Wishes* as initiating a period of "twelve years (1748-60)" wherein Johnson can be seen as "turning ... more directly than ever before, to the human condition and the central problems of living."¹⁰⁴ In "*The Vanity of Human Wishes*," Bate writes "The range" of "the subject of human experience and frustration" which the poem illustrates "is brought into focus by relating it to the reactions of the human heart. It is seen as both the accumulated, swarming product of the human heart, and also the environment," what we would term respectively the worlds of reality and the real, "in which the individual, as soon as he appears" seemingly from nowhere, "suddenly finds himself" in his thrownness, "and to which he instinctively starts to contribute" (*ASJ* 20) in Being's inevitable involvement through its dealings with the world as Being-in-the-world and as *Insein*. Our approach differs from Bate's, however, in that it is not as concerned with the "psychological" aspects of Johnson interest in human existing (aspects which are treated, if not from a strictly Freudian viewpoint, at least are considered from a more or less psychoanalytic standpoint), nor are we concerned with such saccharine vagaries as "the human heart"; seeing such aspects more philosophically (yet without discounting the affective dimension of existence) as elements within the larger framework of ontology. Our approach, nevertheless, is similar to Bate's, insofar as both are interested in Dasein's structural need "to project" (*ASJ* 92) itself in various, distinct modes of Being. Thus while we agree with Bate that the "general subject" of the poem "is the enormous clutter of fitful desires and rival ambitions, of fears, projections, envy, and self-expectation"; we do not see them as being "create[d]" by "human feelings ... in their confused impulse to assert themselves and find satisfaction." (*ASJ* 18), but rather cast them as various modes of *Insein* and its ontological "projections." What Bate fails to realize is that "desires," "ambitions," "fears," and "self-expectations" are all subgroups

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Walter Jackson Bate, *Samuel Johnson* (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 1998) 277; hereafter *SJ*.

of the more inclusive rubric of “projections,” in that all impel and compel Being beyond itself in light of some future situation. Conversely, to project oneself out of a detrimental situation is not necessarily to cover up the initial scene in a more or less unconscious motive of self-delusion, as would be maintained by certain psychological approaches, but may further be an act of liberation and a distinct stage in an ongoing process of *Bildung*.

The reader is conducted on an ontological survey by and through the poem itself, which presents what are in effect a series of historical and ontological set pieces. In the course of this tour, the reader is repeatedly instructed to “Remark” (3), “watch” (4), “see” (99, 167), “Speak” (121), and “Hear” (164, 174) those elements which the narrator points out and wants to highlight. In the context of the poem, “Survey” refers not only to the casting of the eye of a scene” as the reader takes in characters, settings, and images, “but to the map or written report” which is the result of the surveying itself.¹⁰⁵ Thus we may read the poem as conducting us through, as well as helping us to delineate, a topography of Being. The editors of the Yale edition of Johnson’s *Poems* see the poem’s “topical elements” as a form of “*exempla*” in that the poem “is after all a sermon in the great tradition, of which the text is implicit in the title” (*J Works* 6: xvii). This instructional survey is announced at the outset of the poem in its first two lines: “Let observation with extensive view, / Survey mankind, from China to Peru” (1-2). Frederick W. Hilles writes that “No part of the poem has been as severely criticized as the very opening,” and cites as an example of one of “the many mocking paraphrases Tennyson’s,” which themselves are “an echo of Coleridge’s,” since they are “the most succinct: ‘Let observation, with extended observation, observe extensively.’”¹⁰⁶ While “Admittedly the first line displays, in Boswell’s words, ‘an inflated rotundity and Tumified Latinity of Diction,’” the passage is not without “its defenders” such as “Saintsbury[’s]” analysis of the range of applications of “Observation” (Hilles 68). For Hilles what is salient about the opening lines is the fact that “the lines insist on something more important,” in that they are directed towards “establishing at the outset a point of view”

¹⁰⁵ Gavin Edwards, “Why Are Human Wishes Vain? On Reading Samuel Johnson’s *The Vanity of Human Wishes*,” *Proceedings of the English Association North* 2 (1986) 53.

¹⁰⁶ Frederick W. Hilles, “Johnson’s Poetic Fire,” *From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle*, ed. Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford U Pr., 1965) 68.

which comprehends the whole of “the inhabited globe” (68). Such a point of view is presumably elevated, for “if we are to observe men so widely separated we must be above the world, looking down” (Hilles 68). This point of view is at the same time extended to the reader, so that it can be appropriated by the recipient – an appropriation which demands the reader step out of her/himself, in order to see through the perspective of an other. Additionally, since “our view” needs to “be as extensive as the poet demands” (Hilles 69), *The Vanity of Human Wishes* as a whole not only deals with our ability to see, but furthermore encourages our ability to envision.

But first we must ask: what kind of world does Being find itself thrown into, and is it even possible for us to assume such a global perspective? What is the relation between human Being’s radical finitude and its ability not only to see, but also to envision? What is the role of questioning in Dasein’s envisioning, and how does its Being as questioning conversely work to characterize Dasein?

In *The Vanity of Human Wishes* in particular, and in Johnson’s work in general, Dasein finds itself always already immersed in “the busy scenes of crowded life” (4) scrambling alongside and lost among the “they,” while at the same time struggling with itself and its situation. Being’s dealings in the with-world are all too often driven by, and directed towards, the merely present-at-hand. Given such a situation and focus, Being all too often “Fall[s] in the general massacre of gold; / Wide-wasting pest! That rages unconfined, / And crowds with crimes the records of mankind” (22-24). Nor does the gaining of the present-at-hand as the accumulation of gold bestow any help, since even “Wealth heap’d on wealth,” neither “truth nor safety buys, / The dangers gather as the treasures rise” (27-28). At the same time, the world into which Being has been thrown is full of other concealed dangers. It is “O’erspread with snares” (6) set by the affective traps of “hope and fear, desire and hate” (5). No form of attunement [*Gestimmtheit*] as Being attuned *by* something, which is to say as mood [*Stimmung*], mitigates Being’s tribulations, since each term is always either tainted or leavened by its polar opposite. Nor is attunement in the sense of Being-attuned *towards* something any more satisfactory, for here “treach’rous phantoms in the mist delude” (9), and Being in its confusions often either “Shuns fancied ills, or chases airy good” (10). Nor is Being any more certain in regards to its own situation, for it seems to be predicated on the mere nothings of “clouded maze[s]” (6) and “mist[s]” (9), and sentenced “To tread the dreary paths without a guide” (8).

Hence Being's condition is described as "wav'ring" (7) – stumbling, tripping, and repeatedly falling, and thus is unable to maintain a position reliable enough to even minimally regroup and coherently project itself, much less one sufficiently certain to recognize its ownmost "there" and attain resolution. The uncertainty and transience of this world which envelops Being is repeatedly emphasized: it is "clouded" (6); the home of "phantoms" who roam "in the mist" (9); and most of what a given Being desires is only "fancied," or if it is granted some degree of facticity, it is merely "airy" (10). We may conclude that Being's condition is due, on one hand, to its fallenness in "the busy scenes of crouded life" (4) which are characterized by the mis-directed world of the "they"; while on the other hand, Being apparently cannot guide itself, insofar as it is exiled from its ownmost "there," in the unresolved dilemma of attunement.

Lost equally in the indistinct everywhere and nowhere in which the "they" reside, as well as in the seeming indistinctness of existence, Being is unable to see beyond its current condition and recognize its constricted situation and the finitude of its own viewpoint. Johnson himself admits in "*The Rambler No. 63. Tuesday, 23 October 1750*" that "To take a view at once distant and comprehensive of human life, with all its intricacies of combination, and varieties of connexion, is beyond the power of moral intelligences" (*J Works* 3: 336). Therefore, "Of the state with which practice has not acquainted us, we" are only able to "snatch a glimpse," and perhaps by chance "we discern a point," and hence are forced by our own limitations to "regulate the rest by passion and by fancy" (*J Works* 3: 336). Here the affective and imaginative dimensions of experience, both of which are closely associated with the aesthetic, are necessary to supplement the insufficiencies of our ability to know. "In this enquiry," however, we are also beset by dangers, for "every favorite prejudice, every innate desire is busy to deceive us" (*J Works* 3: 336). Here Johnson calls our attention to not only the limitations of our ability to know, but also points towards the finitude of Being itself – a finitude wherein the forestructures of the understanding, and concomitantly our ability to project ourselves, are potentially subject to deception. Along these lines, Lawrence Lipking sees *The Vanity of Human Wishes* as explicitly thematizing the finitude of our point of view:

If Johnson paints us a picture, however, he also places remarkable difficulties in the way of our visualizing ... The picture seems fashioned, in fact, to strain our eyes. Johnson induces the reader to re-enact the confusions of Man, surrounded by images that change

shape rapidly as clouds. *Observation*, that god in the sky, has a vantage point that no man can share, since Mankind is what He sees. Our own more limited perspectives, unguided, can never stand outside themselves.

The pathos of human short-sightedness, therefore, is built into the very mode of *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, its allegorical sight-lines. We cannot take extensive views; and the reader spends himself, like the characters of the poem, in chasing shadows. Nor does the author stand much better. Involved with illusions, those poetic phantoms that function as his medium of instruction, Johnson shares the dreams of glory that he dispels.¹⁰⁷

Ironically, by attempting to enjoin the “extensive view” of “observation” announced in the opening lines of the poem, we discover our own limitations. The poem as it unfolds, on one level works to enact the progressive, incremental overwhelming of our vision.

The limitations on our vision as revealed though *The Vanity of Human Wishes* are commonly located in the interaction between Being and the world and are assigned to some deficiency, or perverted structure of self-delusion, in Being itself. When Lipking asks, “Can sight itself be trusted,” he answers his own question by adding, “Johnson’s images suggest that it cannot; that sight depends on the untrustworthy generalizations, the grasping after chimeras, painted by the mind” (Lipking 345). From a similar perspective, Bate writes:

The Vanity of Human Wishes discloses the inner landscape of his mind – that is, it reveals the image of reality that was fixed in him, and to which his experience naturally assimilated itself – more completely than any other single work. It is the somber vision of things from which he was often deliberately distracting himself ... The same vision, diffused through all his other writings, expressed itself in a total way in one other work, *Rasselas*, which he wrote ten years later. (SJ 278-279)

¹⁰⁷ Lawrence Lipking, “Learning to Read Johnson: *The Vision of Theodore* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*,” *Modern Essays on Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed. Leopold Damrosch, Jr. (Oxford: Oxford U Pr., 1988) 346.

In both these examples, the source for the dubiousness of “sight” and “vision” is attributed respectively to “the mind” and “the inner landscape of his mind,” both of which effectively overwrite the world. In Lipking’s view this overwriting is more obvious, since Being basically dwells in a world of “untrustworthy generalizations” in which it is continually “grasping after chimeras.” In Bate’s view, the same overwriting occurs, but in an even more insidious fashion. Here “the inner landscape of the mind,” which contains “the image of reality” that is “fixed” in Dasein, goes so far as to overwrite “experience” itself. The question is who is the agent of this “fix[ing]”? If it is “fixed” in Dasein *ab extra*, we must conclude that it is part of Dasein’s essential make-up. If, on the other hand, we see Dasein as doing the “fix[ing]” itself, then it becomes a reflection of Dasein’s fundamental attunement. While Bate’s position de-emphasizes the determination of this becoming “fixed” by writing that “experience ... assimilate[s] itself,” this clearly cannot be the case, since experience is unable to process itself; rather Dasein must process its own experience for itself. This is not to imply that all experiences can be processed (most especially in the case of the class of experience as *Erfahrung*), for certain experiences may indeed exceed our ability to deal with them; yet nevertheless, the very attempt to deal with an experience, regardless of whether or not it is successful, is a form of processing which must be carried out by a specific Dasein itself. Nor is this to say that any experience can indeed be fully processed, since there frequently persists in experiences a surplus and overflow which permits an ever wider range of potential approaches and orientations. Even if an experience completely overwhelms Being, and hence frustrates every attempt at “assimilat[ion],” the failure is still Dasein’s own, and may as a consequence leave it at the mercy of the experience itself, as in cases wherein Being is overwhelmed by the imaginary. Yet the aesthetic itself nevertheless provides a model and practicum for the processing of experience in general, as well as presenting us with overwhelming experiences such as in instances wherein we confront the sublime. The problem which underlies both Lipking’s and Bate’s views is contingent on their adherence to a version of the subject-object dialectic, wherein the subject as “mind” is set over against the world as the realm of the object as an essentially unknowable thing-in-itself [*Ding an sich*]. What is required is a corrective position which encompasses Being along with its worlds and its multiple spheres of concern, as well as its active-passive involvement in a range of worlds.

We must recognize at the same time, however, that Being's projective capabilities and its range of possible attunements are paradoxically due to our condition as "finite beings." Johnson maintains that in the developing of an "opinion," for example, or in formulating questioning, and in the task of thinking in general, these divergences do not become apparent in "regard to simple propositions," since it is only as "a question becomes more complicated and involved, and extends to a greater number of relations, disagreement will always be multiplied, not because we are irrational, but because we are finite beings" (*J Works* 2: 441). This "multipli[ng]" of "disagreement[s]" is also due to the fact that we each employ "a different criterion, and ... refer ... it to a different purpose" (*J Works* 2: 441) – a "criterion" and "purpose" which is each Being's own as an attunement and a hallmark of its world. Through Being's existing, its horizons, and hence its prospects, are continually expanding as possible worlds unfold ever wider before it; and while horizons are at the same time constitutive for Being, they are nevertheless finite, for structurally the concept of a horizon necessarily presupposes limits, and hence finitude, in terms of a known and a beyond. Since *The Vanity of Human Wishes* explicitly investigates not only specific horizons, but further addresses the concept of ontological horizons in general, in addition to thematizing the processes of expanding horizons, the reader can hardly be said to be "unguided" (Lipking 346), insofar as the poem itself acts as our guide, and thus we are at the same time enabled to "stand outside" ourselves. In fact, it is precisely our condition of finitude which allows us to "stand outside" (Lipking 346) ourselves, insofar as it is only in relation to the distinct finitude of an inside – not merely in the sense of an internal sense of I-ness or subjectivity in general, but simultaneously as Being-in-the-world (and in fact as Being-already-in-and-alongside-the-world) and as *Insein* – as delimiting a specific self that we are enabled to conceive of something "outside."

The self-alienation which permits us as recipients to inhabit the situation of an other through enjoining the aesthetic event, and which underlies the aesthetic equation as a whole, is fundamental to the processes of the aesthetic cycle which we have traced. Nor does "the author stand" (Lipking 346), on the other hand, inextricably delimited by either "illusions" or "poetic phantoms" (Lipking 346), regardless of whether or not "Johnson shares the dreams of glory he dispels" (Lipking 346). Like the reader, the author also enacts a form of self-alienation through the projection of an aesthetic world, and in this way is enabled

to go beyond whatever she/he previously “share[d]” in the world of the real. Both the artist and the recipient must to a lesser or greater degree acknowledge and maintain a series of divergent, multivalent selves which simultaneously occupy the various worlds at play in the aesthetic. Through the encounter with the aesthetic, for Johnson, Dasein becomes aware of both its finitude and infinitude. While as Johnson writes, “To take a view at once distant and comprehensive of human life, with all its intricacies of combination, and varieties of connexion, is beyond the power of moral intelligences” (*J Works* 3: 336), it is not impossible for the aesthetic “intelligences” of artists or recipients at play in, and mediated through, the aesthetic equation to assume a more “comprehensive” perspective.

The Vanity of Human Wishes itself, then, is an example of the nexus which brings together “all” the “intricacies of combination, and varieties of connexion,” and thus it is able “to take a view at once distant and comprehensive of human life.” In the poem, the distancing occurs in four principal ways: first is a temporal distancing which is instated through the testimony of “hist’ry” (29)¹⁰⁸; second is the distance implied by, and constitutive for, critique, not only of past, but also contemporary, situations; third is the distancing of the recipient from these same situations as she/he comes to share the critical attitude of the poem; and fourth is the distancing of the recipient from her/his previous modes of Being in favor of the new ways of Being potentially disclosed through the aesthetic event.

As a guide, the poem does not take its recipient directly by the hand and lead or drag her/him to some simplistic “moral” in the manner of a children’s fable, but rather poses a series of questions which permit the recipient and the poem to work in concert towards the potential transvaluation of the recipient’s attunements and ways of Being – and which ultimately must be responded to in the recipient’s own voice. Gavin Edwards, working along similar lines, conceives of the poem as “not so much as a logical argument but as a rhetorical performance, and act of persuasion,” and this shift allows us “to focus ... on the person whose wishes are the real subject matter of Johnson’s poem: the reader” (56). The first rhetorical set-piece addresses the reader’s reaction to “The needy traveler,” who is “secure and gay” (37); who, while he is poor in “riches,” nevertheless has a wealth of “peace” (40), since he is unsullied by desire corrupted in the

¹⁰⁸ The testifying role of history as the transmitter of messages which require interpretation to be properly understood was made even more explicit in an earlier version of the poem, where “Let hist’ry tell” (29), originally read “Historians tell” (*J Works* 6: 93).

form of greed. The poem directly asks the reader: “Does envy seize thee?” Then it implicitly asks: do you want to “crush th’ upbraiding joy” (39) which reproaches you by its contrast? Or it can “be read as a conditional ... or as an imperative” – and “If it is an imperative we may ask what the basis is for Johnson’s cynical view of our ‘charitable’ impulse” (Edwards 56). Yet the same “‘charitable’ impulse” is implicit in the line if we read it “as a conditional” or (as we suggested) as an indirect question, and hence equally seems to indicate some basic perversity in human Being: the same perversity that underlies the peculiar emotion that the Germans call *Schadenfreude*, which cannot stand to see another more fortunate than itself, and which points towards “Johnson’s view of our human character – as essentially envious” (Edwards 56). While ostensibly the passage is an illustration of the detrimental effects of an “increase” in “riches” (40), and as such forms a transition to the next section where “still one gen’ral cry” (45) for “gain and grandeur” (46) persists heedless of the detrimental consequences illustrated in the preceding passage; the direct, personal address which seems to probe the reader for the presence of just this sort of perversity must give the thoughtful reader pause. Is the poem’s interrogation of the reader a test case, which wants to determine if the reader is an adherent of the “they,” and hence unable to extract her/himself from the deluded group-think and questionable values of collective misery? Or is it intended to determine if the reader instead is able to appreciate the situation of “The needy traveler” and can take the “upbraiding” as a corrective and not a reprimand of one’s own self insufficiency the recognition of which supposedly demands some recompense as a form of vengeance practiced by the weak – which is to say, as an occasion for application to one’s own existence and not a mere occasion for “envy.” If the recipient is indeed strong enough to bear up under both the criticism implicit in the poem itself and in self-assessment, then the seemingly eternal “one gen’ral cry” will presumably be diminished by one more voice. Here we can also see an explicit example of what we have called the path of the question, wherein the aesthetic takes on the form of an appeal to the recipient, an instantiation of what we previously characterized as the call of the aesthetic – a calling which reverberates in the recipient’s own voice, since only the recipient is ultimately able to ask and answer the questions put forth.

But for the process of questioning to come full circle, it must eventually emerge from the domain of the aesthetic event through appropriation and be directly applied to the recipient’s lived existence in the

real. When the narrator demands that the reader “Speak” (121), the reader is exhorted to come out of a situation of relative disinterestedness wherein “thoughts at humble peace repine” (121) and instead directly engage the aesthetic event in a manner appropriate to, and in terms of, the reader’s ownmost existence. The question “Shall Wolsey’s wealth, with Wolsey’s end be thine?” (122), posed after the decline in Wolsey’s “fortune[s]” (100), appears to be merely rhetorical, since presumably only a fool would reply in the affirmative. The second part of the question, as signaled by the disjunctive “or,” serves to indicate the path of divergence: “Or liv’st thou now, with safer pride content, / The wisest justice on the banks of Trent?” (123-124). At the same time, the question moves into the recipient’s present as a possible “now,” or at least opens up a possible projected future, if the proposed present is not yet indeed actual. The recipient is presented with a potential, alternative attunement characterized by a “safer pride,” as opposed to the dangers attendant on the “full blown dignity” of “Wolsey” (99); and she/he is offered a humble situation “on the banks of Trent,” as opposed to Wolsey’s ultimately tenuous control over the entirety “the church” and “the realm” (101). This attunement as “The wisest justice” operates in the same general field of activity as Wolsey’s “Law” (100), but declines the “new heights” to which Wolsey’s “restless wishes tow’r” (105), preferring a more manageable sphere of influence. Originally “wisest justice” was changed to “wealthiest landlord,” a reading which was subsequently reinstated, in what the editors of the Yale edition of the *Poems* refer to as “A rare instance of Johnson’s reverting to a cancelled reading of his original MS.” Their speculation that this reversion was made “perhaps from a feeling that a wise justice made a sharper contrast with Wolsey than did a rich landlord” (*J Works* 6: 97 n. 124) is in keeping with our reading, for the comparison is “sharper” precisely because now it is a comparison of similar attunements which yet preserve a significant difference.

After having surveyed and mapped the fates of its roll call of characters, the poem poses its ultimate and most pressing series of questions to the reader:

Where then shall Hope and Fear their objects find?
Must dull Suspense corrupt the stagnant mind?
Must helpless man, in ignorance sedate,
Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate?

Must no dislike alarm, no wishes rise,
No cries attempt the mercies of the skies?

(343-348)

Both “Hope and Fear” (343) are states of mind or moods contingent on Being’s attunement toward the future concretized as a distinct situation. Yet both “Hope and Fear” are at the same time provisional states, in that they still only regard a possible state of affairs, and hence persist only insofar as the future is deferred and leave Being in an inactive condition of “dull Suspense” (344) wherein effectual projection is blunted; and while both are defined in regards to a projected future, they are not yet futural as an overt coming-towards, since those under their influence hold themselves back in the present. But this “dull Suspense” is held forth as only one possible modality of Being, for the poem specifically asks if it “Must” (344, 345) be the case. In the anaphoric use of the modal verb “Must,” which is highlighted by its placement at the beginning of each line, the reader is repeatedly asked to survey and assess her/his own attitudes to the proposed attunements. “Must” we be “helpless ... in ignorance sedate” (345) and fall in the gathering darkness “down the torrent of [our] fate?” (346). May we not instead be “alarm[ed]” by our “dislike” of our fallenness, and subsequently may we not reverse the condition wherein “no wishes rise” (347) towards an alternative future, and may we then not rather actively lift ourselves out of our own lethargy and “ignorance”? The “cries,” which are able to “attempt the mercy of the skies” (348), both recall and are the converse of the “one gen’ral cry” (45), which asks only for the “gain and grandeur” (46); and since the latter “cry” has been more or less repudiated by the interceding *exempla* of the poem, the “cries” can be read to indicate the transvaluing reorientation which the Being having undergone the event of the poem now presumably shares (or at least ideally should have attained).

If Being were enacted exclusively as questioning, however, would that mean Being itself is essentially sacrificed to a permanent condition of suspension and suspense? As an antidote to such effective stagnation, the poem addresses the reader as an “Enquirer” and instructs her/him to “cease” and exchange the attitude of questioning for “petitions” (349). Hence we see that “The questions Johnson poses ... are by no means exclusively rhetorical. They aim at a refining of the questioning process itself, as a mode of inquiry where ‘Suspense’ will be replaced by ‘Petitions’” (Lipking 349). This “refining ...

process” is functionally a determinate negation – it is a refining *away*, a paring of falsehoods, a rejecting of everything that speaks the contagion of the ultimately illusory and inauthentic. In this determinate negation, the reader is implored to address her/himself to “heav’n” (350, 352) and its “laws” (365). The redirection of Being is encouraged by the poem, for “when” it finds itself ignited by “the sense of sacred presence” (357) and its “strong devotion to the skies aspires” (358), Dasein is instructed to “Pour forth [its] fervours” in petitions “for a healthful mind” (359). The language in which Johnson casts this section of the poem involves attunement in both its senses: first, it is an attunement conceived as a mood which is manifested specifically in the “*sense* [emphasis mine] of sacred presence”; and second, it is an attunement as a defined way of Being-towards characterized as “devotion” – and as such is a form of resoluteness set up in contradistinction to the “Hope and Fear” which imprison Being in “dull Suspense” which eventually “corrupt[s] the stagnant mind.” The first form of attunement gives rise to the second, in a way analogous to that we detailed in our treatment of the aesthetics of authenticity, specifically in the call and the moment of vision and similarly brings Being out of its lostness. Here the “sense of sacred presence calls forth the attunement of “devotion” which calls Being back to, and grounds it in, its own projective articulation in and through which it is enabled to direct its Being as a “pour[ing] forth” of itself towards a clearly envisioned potentiality-for-Being characterized by the balance of “a healthful mind” grounded securely in itself and its way of Being-towards the future.

But as a petition, the address itself inevitably occasions another form of passivity, in which the petitioner “leave[s] to heav’n the measure and the choice” (352); and while through petitions one may “Implore his aid,” one nevertheless must “in his decisions rest” (355). Being’s “passions” must be “obedient” and its “will resign’d” (360). The virtues associated with the attunement of the petitioner are an admixture of activity and passiveness. While “patience” is an actively assumed attitude, which is said to be “sov’ reign o’er transmuted ill” (362), it is essentially passive – while “patience” is a way of Being-towards the world, it nevertheless is ultimately determined by and in thrall to that which is awaited. Similarly, “faith,” while it is a “panting for a happier seat” (363), and hence implies a determined effort which persists even in its own approaching exhaustion, is still a form of awaiting in that it is an ongoing pursuit and not yet an attaining (at least in the tenure of mortal life). The attainment will come (if indeed it does come)

only when “Nature” sounds the “signal of retreat” – which is to say, at the advent of “death” (364), or at the clarion announcing the Last Judgment. When it comes to positive manifestations, however, Dasein may still only ask, give itself over, hope, and wait. Being’s “Suspense,” therefore, is not ever to be simply “replaced by ‘Petitions,’” for such “Petitions,” in that they address the future as the domain of unknown and the beyond, only serve to occasion another kind of “Suspense” – albeit, a “Suspense” which in its awaiting looks toward a presumably more certain source of its deliverance, but one which nevertheless remains veiled in indefiniteness and mystery. Thus Being’s “Suspense” can never be said to be wholly eradicated. Lipking also recognizes the provisional qualities of such “Petitions” directed towards “Celestial Wisdom,” for “Indeed, celestial Wisdom herself . . . functions as an emissary rather than a goal” (351).

Now we must ask: what are the qualities of this “emissary”? What message does it reputedly bring to us, and what response does it seek from us? In terms of the poem, “celestial wisdom calms the mind” (367) through its bestowal of the “goods” (365) of “love” (361), “patience” (362), and “faith” (363), which “for man the laws of heav’n ordain” (365). “These goods,” are supports which “he grants, who” at the same time “grants the pow’r to gain” (366). Here we see the issue of active and passive attunements working towards resolution. While “These goods” are “granted” to us, and even “the pow’r to gain” them is similarly “grant[ed]”; it still requires our enacting of this power for them to be finally realized. The poem itself mimics this two-way commerce in its structure. At first, Dasein is instructed to directly and actively “Pour forth thy fervours for a healthful mind, / Obedient passions, and a will resign’d” (360) – a “pour[ing] forth” of “fervours” which seeks “For love” (361), “For patience” (362), and “For faith” (363). But insofar as “These goods” have been “ordain[ed]” and “grant[ed],” Being has already given itself over to “celestial wisdom,” which (or who) ultimately “calms the mind” (367) and composes a distinct Being’s attunements. Or does it? There is some uncertainty in the antecedents of the pronouns in the last part of this passage, which leaves the issue of ultimate agency in some doubt. Does the “he” who is the agent of the “grant[ing]” (366) find its antecedent in “the laws of heav’n” (365), or in “celestial wisdom”? Since the “laws” are plural and “he” singular, it would appear that the “he” more likely refers to “celestial wisdom”; unless, of course, they refer all the way back to “heav’n” (352) which supplies the antecedent for the “his”

reiterated in the following lines. The same confusion of pronoun antecedents occurs in the last two lines. While it is “With these [goods] celestial wisdom calms the mind, / and makes the happiness she does not find”; and while the agent of the “calm[ing]” is clearly “celestial wisdom,” the agent of the “mak[ing]” nevertheless remains uncertain. The pronoun shift from “he” to “she” would appear to indicate another, separate agent. But again we find a similar confusion: does the “she” refer back to “celestial wisdom,” or to “the mind”? If the former is the agent of the “mak[ing],” we have what is more or less a traditional religious sentiment (regardless of the less than wholly conventional designation of “celestial wisdom”), wherein divine agency ultimately calms the penitent soul. But if the latter is taken as the agent, then an active role is restored (at least in part) to Being itself to play in determining its attunement.¹⁰⁹

As a “mak[ing]” of what one “does not find,” this agency is at the same time analogous to the action of the aesthetic. Lipking for his part, however, sees the relation between “celestial wisdom as a limited expression of a sort of poetic or aesthetic compromise. While “celestial wisdom” is indeed “The harbinger of a diviner Love”; nevertheless,

she is the best that poetic imagination can do when it tries to conceive a deity. *The Vanity of Human Wishes* pauses on the brink of Christian mystery, and refuses to profane the truth of revelation by translating it into the visions of poetry. If poetry consists in a dream, then all fictions that face the truth must end with an awakening ... Nor can poetic visions themselves – which Johnson associated so strongly with the pagan classics – wholly survive this awakening. Poetry, it often seems, depends on wishes, on the lingering glances we cast back on earth in spite of heaven. (Lipking 351)

While the poem itself is clearly a medium through which and wherein we are enabled to envision, and hence to understand to some degree, the domain and agency of the divine; at the same time, Johnson’s more or less orthodox Christian beliefs, as well as the sense of apprehension which so often accompanies

¹⁰⁹ Edwards notes the same convergence and con-fusion of the divine and humanistic in the poem revealed through the notion of “Conscience,” speculating along these lines that “perhaps ‘congratulating Conscience’ is central to Johnson’s achievement in this poem. In an otherworldly perspective, conscience has a religious origin, and is evidence of God’s activity in this world. From a secular standpoint it is a purely human phenomenon. The poem requires both perspectives. Wherever you are standing, the same Conscience seems to be looking at you” (61).

his thoughts about and writings on religion, both support the hypothesis that Johnson did indeed stop short in his inquiries rather than risk “profan[ation].” Yet this does not automatically entail that “poetic visions” cannot be allowed to “survive.” “Poetry” is not merely a “dream,” but is rather a portal through which “fictions” – which themselves are concretizations of the imaginary – are made accessible to, and schematized for and by, the recipient. In the end, it is the recipient her/himself, who must “face the truth” in the spheres of both the aesthetic and her/his own life, and subsequently undergo “an awakening” in the domain of the real. The slip Lipking makes occurs in his somewhat too rigid positing of the religious and the aesthetic as antithetical. If for Johnson “poetic visions” were really “associated so strongly with the pagan classics,” he never would have modeled *The Vanity of Human Wishes* and its ultimately religious message after *The Tenth Satire of Juvenal* in the first place, in what he would have at best seen as a subtle act of profanation, and at worst as an outright act of blasphemy.

Here we may now return to the questions we raised at the beginning of our investigation of *The Vanity of Human Wishes* regarding the issues of attunements in general and their relation to observation and apply them in the domain of an ontologically grounded aesthetic. Through undergoing the experience of the poem itself, we can now see the “extensive view” taken up at the beginning of the poem works toward the extending of views in regards to horizons of Being, through presentation and assessment of both negative and positive forms of attunements. The first negative “position offered by ‘Observation’” is one “from which this compound delusion can be seen for exactly what it is” (Edwards 53). The “compound delusion” which the poem works to expose through the series of *exempla* drawn from the various historical personages, and which provide its ostensible narrative subjects, is not only relevant to the historical figures themselves and their particular situations, but also encompasses both the author and the recipient, and as such is something from which we are encouraged to extricate ourselves. In a sense, history here is presented as a nightmare from which we are summoned to awaken. This is achieved through the form of aesthetic alienation we previously outlined. In this drama we are not merely spectators, but initially must enter into the world of the work and implicate ourselves in it, and thereby not only assess the figures presented, but also assesses ourselves, for “To see a person’s life, including your own life, as it really is means to see it as a Life, to be the spectator or reader of your life conceived as a narrative in the third

person” (Edwards 53). At the same time, we still stand outside the work as its recipient, in a manner of holding ourselves back which is aided by “The generalized form in which Johnson makes his point,” and which “means that everybody, including himself and each individual reader, are credited both with the ability to see anything for what it is and with the ability to see everything for what it is” (Edwards 53). In the end, “Each of us is simultaneously observer and observed, actor in and spectator of the drama” (Edwards 53). We must in the end, however, disagree with Bate’s view that *The Vanity of Human Wishes* finally “articulates a vision more essentially tragic than comic” (*SJ* 279). The finitude of Dasein’s vision is not “tragic,” but rather determines the boundaries of its capacity for seeing, and hence its potentiality for being attuned, is paradoxically potentiated by its very finitude. Dasein is constitutionally unable to be omniscient, and can only see by fits and starts – a seeing which necessarily occurs within the context, which means at the same time under the limitations, of a horizon. But at the same time, the notion of a horizon itself not only delimits and contains, but also allows the extension of vision towards a greater reach of comprehension, as well as awakening us to an enlarging sense of what still can be done. Bate himself, in the earlier work *The Achievement of Samuel Johnson*, appears to reject his later view of the poem as on the whole expressing a “vision” which is essentially “tragic,” when he writes that “*The Vanity of Human Wishes* had ended not in complete pessimism but in urging the need for a fuller awareness and more enduring courage” (31). Here Bate places the poem explicitly in the context of Johnson’s developing body of work, proposing a view that sees “the prose of the decade that follows *The Vanity of Human Wishes*” as “enlarg[ing] upon this need and concretely illustrat[ing] it” (*ASJ* 31). Johnson, after all is said and done, always turns back again to Dasein’s Being-in-the-world, to Dasein’s facticity, to its primordial structure as projective, and hence is concerned with the anxieties and urgencies of its condition, as well as its struggles against them, in the ever ongoing disclosure of its potentialities-for-Being. While our wishes, by and large, may be vain and a sign of our vanity, our projective capacities do not necessarily have to be limited by these conditions.

iii. An Axis of Being and “On the Death of Dr. Robert Levet” (1782)

The poem “On the Death of Dr. Robert Levet” was originally written not only to mourn the death, but also to commemorate the life, of Dr. Robert “Levet, or Levett, who was a pensioner of Johnson’s and had served as surgeon to Johnson’s household for many years,” and who “died on 17 January 1782, aged 72” (*J Works* 6: 313). Dr. Levet provides another example of an ontological attunement after the pattern of the *exempla* we saw in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, but here we find not another negative example which achieves its aesthetic effect only by way of contrast, but rather one which is positive as a model which can be appropriated and applied. Yet Levet’s situation at the same time is nevertheless embroiled in the same limiting and detrimental world as the figures in *London* and the *The Vanity of Human Wishes* – a world which is, in Johnson’s view, our general inheritance. Nor is Dasein only imposed upon from without, but at the same time it is further subject to temptation and betrayal by its own structure as attuning through the misdirection of its desires which all too often characterizes the vanity of human wishes. Bate notes that while “On the Death of Dr. Robert Levet,” on the one hand, “is a lament for this dutiful, awkward, and conscientious man”; on the other hand, “it is also a lament for life – for common humanity, and for the effort that human beings try to make, in this strange purgatory of our lives, to fulfill moral values and ideals” (*SJ* 563). On this basis, we may even venture to say that in “On the Death of Dr. Robert Levet” we find a corrective to the uncertainty which seemingly ultimately characterizes all our hopes for effective projection in the world of the real displayed in *exempla* presented in *The Vanity of Human Wishes* through Dasein’s commitment to an axis of Being in which orbit it centers itself.

While we are all “Condemn’d to hope’s delusive mine” (1), and “As we toil from day to day” (2), and “By sudden blasts, or slow decline” (3), we watch “Our social comforts droop away” (4), this does not necessarily mean that things do have to be this way. For Levet, conversely, this “delusive mine” becomes the place where he “In misery’s darkest caverns” becomes “known” (17) for his “useful care” (18). Bate notes in this metaphor we find that

The image of a mine or cave has an archetypal richness: the cold, crowded cellars in the London slums into which Levet ... would descend to minister to the sick poor ... the

caverns of the human mind itself, in which hope haunts incentive and from which the sense of duty and responsibility emerges to help us march through life; and, finally, the grave into which this responsible man ... has now made his final descent ... (*Samuel Johnson* 563)

The “archetypal richness” to which Bate refers is relevant to the mythic paradigm of the journey to the underworld which we find in numerous manifestations across a wide range of religious and literary discourse across a wide range of cultures and epochs.¹¹⁰ In this analogy, Levet himself becomes a form of epic hero (however abbreviated the poem itself may be); and as such a hero, Levet returns from the tribulations and struggles which occur in the underworld and emerges back into the daylight world with a boon for all of us. He displays how “incentive” may triumph over delusive “hope,” and “the sense of duty and responsibility” may fully “emerge ... to help us march through life” as a model and inspiration. It does not matter that Levet worked in lowly haunts “Where hopeless anguish pour’d his groan / And lonely want retir’d to die” (19), for such situations may still be meliorated by “His useful care” (17). Regardless of the specific scenes wherein Levet dwells, it is precisely through the aesthetic heightening bestowed upon him through Johnson’s poetic treatment that he is transformed through the medium of the poem itself into a sort of epic hero. The everyday, for Johnson, may thus also be the scene of epic triumphs. While Levet is a more humble hero, whose overriding concern is for the immediate sphere of his own world and whose battles are of a more mundane kind, in this treatment the possibility of heroism is still held open for Dasein in its facticity. Here we can see one definite instance wherein Dasein has indeed “chose[n] itself” and its “hero” (*BT* 385).

Dr. Levet, in becoming the “hero” of his own Being, has concomitantly tuned his back on the average, everyday standards of the “they.” No heed was paid to the social standing of his patients, for “No summons,” regardless of its source, was “mock’d by chill delay” (21); nor did he care for conventional standards of value or the status of his professional position, for there was “No petty gain” which was

¹¹⁰ These include, for example: *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (ca. 2000 B.C.), Homer’s *Odyssey* (ca. 800 B.C.), Virgil’s *Aeneid* (29-19 B.C.), Christ’s descent into Hell following the Crucifixion and the subsequent Harrowing of Hell, Dante’s *Divinia Commedia* (1308-1321), Rimbaud’s *Une Saison en Enfer* (1873), and Ezra Pound’s *Cantos* (1915-1969).

“disdain’d by pride” (22). Instead Levet was concerned with his own particular situation and the world in which he dwelt, wherein “His virtues walk’d their narrow round” (25) in unflagging dedication, while he never “made a pause, nor left a void” (26). Aware of his own limitations and the scope of his powers in regards to his possible attunements and projective capacities, Levet “well employ’d” his “single talent” (28). Johnson’s use of “talent,” in combination with the approval of “th’ Eternal Master” (27), is clearly a reference to the New Testament’s *Parable of the Talents* (Matthew 25:14-30) and shows that even if our means are limited, we may still put whatever we possess to good use, provided we actively and sincerely husband our wealth. No longer is existence burdensome, such as in *The Vanity of Human Wishes* and as it all too often is in Johnson’s personal life, for here we find a situation wherein Dasein has something worthwhile to live *for* – or in other words, it has something fit for Being-towards. In accordance with the focus on projective capacities, temporality is also taken up authentically into Levet’s ownmost existence. In his constant orientation towards the potentialities of the future, the present is simultaneously dispossessed of its supposed centrality, and hence “The busy day, the peaceful night, / Unfelt, uncounted, glided by” (29-30).

Levet is described as “Obscurely wise, and coarsely kind” (10), a description which combines both the superficial criteria of conventional standards and oxymoronic truth of his character – a subtlety of distinction lost on the “they.” Herein Levet is revealed as more or less a type of anti-hero; but that does not mean that he should pass without due recognition from the world at large, for the speaker of the eulogy asks “letter’d arrogance” not to deny / They praise to merit unrefin’d” (11-12). Levet’s representative value as a model of conduct is emphasized by Johnson in the shift from second person pronouns “we” (2) and “our” (4) in the first stanza to concentrate on Levet himself – a shift in emphasis which is carried out through directing the reader to “See Levet” as he “to the grave descend[s]” (6). Yet as a positive *exemplum*, Levet is never wholly interred. Even though Levet has “to the grave descend[ed]” (6), he lives on in memory, a memory which is constructed as well as preserved in Johnson’s elegy itself; and therefore, “Yet still he fills affection’s eye” (9). Here we can also see that through “affection” itself, which for its part is a form of affect [*Affekt*] or attunement, the reader can come to internalize and identify with Levet himself. In the end, “the stability of truth” as presented and established through the aesthetic can never be

evolved only in the overview or survey, but is only able to be realized through an individual instance, whose ontological prospects must be projected in an artwork and subsequently enjoined by a recipient and from there potentially applied to an individual existence. Yet even in the intensely personal and specific case of Dr. Robert Levet such an overview is constitutive, for only by recognizing the scope of Dasein's failures can true successes be measured – which is to say, by recognizing individual over-comings through an aesthetic survey.

b. The Temporality of Idleness: Aesthetic Idlers, Adventurers, Ramblers, and the Issue of Authenticity

While Johnson is consistently concerned not only with Dasein's ontological and moral situation, but also with Being in its facticity, we should not be lead to infer that this necessarily means that he is exclusively concerned with Being only as it is evidenced in its average everydayness – which is to say, as merely another functionary of the “they.” On the contrary, Johnson oftentimes sees this latter sphere of existence as essentially limiting and potentially debilitating to evolving an authentic ontological situation, and hence as inimical to authentically taking up one's ownmost potentialities-for-Being. One corrective to the inauthentic temporality and modes of existence endorsed by the distracted and distracting busy-ness associated with the “they” is paradoxically to be found in Johnson's treatment of idleness – a treatment which recurs in various form throughout his body of work, but most notably in his periodical writings from *The Rambler* (1750-52), *The Adventurer* (1753-54), and *The Idler* (1758-60). These writings pick up where the ontological surveys presented in the poems leave off and develop several of the issues which they present – in particular those presented in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. The periodical essays, in the view of Bate, which comprise the bulk of “The moral writing of the following decade,” and “which continues throughout Johnson's forties, could be described as a prose application of *The Vanity of Human Wishes*” (SJ 289). Yet whereas the ontological surveys presented in the poems provide a general and more or less negative (with the exception of “On the Death of Dr. Robert Levet”) overview of Dasein's structure as attunement; in the treatment of the general theme of idleness in the periodical essays, Johnson both negatively and positively lays out the conditions required for the articulation of Dasein's authentic temporal structure and its distancing itself from the “they” as it moves towards the moment of vision.

The issue of idleness, however, has received scant comment in previous Johnsonian criticism. As Sarah Jordan notes in the chapter on Johnson in her book *The Anxieties of Idleness: Idleness in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture*, “Given how often this concern with idleness appears in Johnson's writing and conversation, it seems odd that (to my knowledge, at least) there are no sustained discussions of

Johnson and idleness.”¹¹¹ In the discussions of Johnson’s view of idleness which are extant, the concept is treated exclusively in regards to its harmful aspects – aspects which are succinctly catalogued by Jordan: “When Johnson writes about idleness,” both in regards to various characters and his own life, “he uses images of stasis and stagnation, dissolution and death” (175). In *Majestic Indolence: English Romantic Poetry and the Work of Art*, Willard Spiegelman, following the lead of Robert Burton, equates “indolence” with “melancholy,” and hence as related to “what was to become known for at least two centuries as the distinctive malady of the English”,¹¹² and posits that “The English malady (*morbus anglicus*) had no keener observer or sufferer in the eighteenth century than Samuel Johnson” (12). Spiegelman attributes to Johnson a “specific kind of indolence,” which along with “his accompanying fear of it, mixes conventional Christianity with a Lockean distrust of the dangers of unbridled imagination” (13). Yet at the same time, for Spiegelman, Johnson further evidences a more general “kind of indolence,” and hence can also be seen as a representative figure in the history of indolence insofar as his version of indolence “stands as a pivot between the medieval theological status of sloth and its location as a mental infirmity described by proto-psychiatrists from the Renaissance onward” (13).

While such harmful aspects, negative associations, and conflicts are clearly present in Johnson’s discussions of the theme of idleness, on closer examination there is disclosed another dimension of idleness which allows Being to not only detach and distance itself from the “they,” but also permits it to turn back to its ownmost “there” – a “there” wherein it may begin to dwell and strengthen its resoluteness, and hence at the same time idleness itself is predicated on its authentic temporality and its potentiality for disassociating itself from the inauthentic modes of the “they.” If we stick to the former, common view of Johnson’s conception of idleness, the relative lack of discussion of the full range Johnson’s conception of idleness is more or less understandable, for the negative aspects of Johnson’s view of idleness are easy enough to find

¹¹¹ Sarah Jordan, *The Anxieties of Idleness: Idleness in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture* (Bucknell Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture) (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2003) 261. Jordan continues by citing “Martin Wechselblatt’s recent *Bad Behavior: Samuel Johnson and Moral Cultural Authority*,” which while it “does devote part of a chapter to a section titled ‘Idleness and Vacuity.’” Yet in Jordan’s opinion, since “it is only six pages long, it does not go into the subject very thoroughly, although it makes some interesting points ([Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1998], 143-149)” (261).

¹¹² Willard Spiegelman, *Majestic Indolence: English Romantic Poetry and the Work of Art* (Oxford U Pr., 1995) 9.

and require very little discussion and are easily assimilated into a reading Johnson's biography, especially in regards to treatments of his personal psychological make-up. But what characterizes the obverse, positive side of idleness in Johnson – a dimension wherein idleness may in fact actually be pro-ductive?

Johnson's concern with "find[ing] business to fill up the vacuities of life" by being "employed" (*J Works* 2: 476) was a recurring concern in his own life as is testified by the reiteration of feelings of guilt about his own idleness; and as we saw in the previous section, this question is also central to his view of the demands imposed upon Dasein by its ontological and temporal structure, and is directly related to Heidegger's definition of Dasein as "a Being for whom in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it" (*BT* 12). Thus the conclusion almost presents itself: "No MAN can be happy in total idleness," for we must have some form of "employment" (*J Works* 2: 454). Conversely, the lack of attunements which on one level define idleness make it a state characterized above all by its "vacuit[y]." Jordan notes that "Mrs. Thrale was probably the first writer to discuss Johnson's preoccupation with vacuity:

The vacuity of life had at some earlier period of his life struck so forcibly on the mind of Mr. Johnson, that it became by repeated impression his favorite hypothesis, and the general tenor of his reasonings ended there, wherever they might begin. Such things therefore as other philosophers often attribute to various and contradictory causes, appeared to him uniform enough; all was done to fill up the time ... 'Why life must be filled up (says Johnson), and the man who is not capable of intellectual pleasures must content himself with such as his senses can afford.'" [Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi, *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D., 1786* (London: Oxford U Pr., 1974) 111] (174)

From this perspective, "life" is seen as merely "a series of vacuities to be filled" (Jordan 174), as if life were nothing but a sequence of more or less empty "nows" restricted merely to the present which demand to be filled. But filled by what? A momentary diversion? A simple past-time? While Jordan says, in regard to Johnson's own life, "This notion of the mind as a space needing to be filled with harmless activity so that melancholy and mad ideas cannot find a foothold" (160) is central to Johnson, she is no doubt correct. One need only recall the many examples of Johnson obsessively and compulsively busying

and distracting himself with all sorts of trivial activities ranging from touching fence posts and avoiding sidewalk cracks, to mathematical calculations for the sake of mathematical calculations, as well as his numerous “scientific” experiments carried out in the dead of night as he anxiously awaited the arrival of dawn. But what Jordan fails to discuss is Johnson’s own distinction between “intellectual pleasures” and those of a “sens[ual]” brand, the restriction to the limited sphere of the latter being mandated by the capacities of their adherents. The same lack of significant distinction in regards to the ways in which Being may occupy itself is evidenced in Jordan’s note on “Isobel Grundy’s *Samuel Johnson and the Scale of Greatness*” where [Grundy] makes the point that Johnson gives the impression he ‘was more strongly repelled by the idea of passing our time in nothingness than in wickedness’”¹¹³ (266). While due to its primordial ontological character Dasein must perforce attune itself in some direction, there nevertheless persists the distinction between inauthentic and authentic ways of Being-towards. For Johnson there is similarly a hierarchy of attunements not only on a moral (no doubt Johnson himself would have been appalled at Grundy’s suggestion that “wickedness” is in any way an acceptable attunement), but also an intellectual, scale; and while one may indeed be occupied from time to time with baser attunements, there remains the possibility to be engaged in what at least at one time were commonly referred to as “higher pursuits” – in other words, there is a significant difference between actions whereby one “diverts” oneself, and tasks wherein one is authentically “engaged.”

To accept the unavoidable and practical predominance of such ungrounded occupation as a major element in Johnson’s view of human existence is at the same time to tacitly deny the tripartite character of Dasein’s temporal structure and its capacity to authentically project itself – both of which negatively and positively underlie Johnson’s view of idleness in general. In fact, Johnson repeatedly posits two distinct conceptions of idleness, which (in light of Heidegger’s distinctions outlined above) we will term “inauthentic” and “authentic” idleness. The former type is determined negatively as a *freedom from* something, which in its most extreme forms verges on vacuity, and which is absorbed more or less exclusively in the “now” even (if not especially) in those moments wherein it deludes itself that it has

¹¹³ Qtd. from Isobel Grundy, *Samuel Johnson and the Scale of Greatness* (Leicester: Leister U Pr., 1986) 100.

indeed directed itself towards the future; while the latter as a turning towards one's ownmost ontological situation exhibits the character of authentic temporality by allowing Being to direct itself towards the future as a *freedom* for some as yet unrealized potentiality-for Being.

Idleness itself is one of the hallmarks of our human-ness, if not *the* salient characteristic, for as Johnson speculates in an Aristotelian vein in "*The Idler No. 1. Saturday, 15 April 1758*" (*J Works* 2: 3) "Perhaps man may be more properly distinguished as an idle animal; for there is no man who is not sometimes idle" (*J Works* 2: 4). Yet such idleness is not a characteristic merely of the species of the human as some sort of annexed property, but is specifically a mode of Being: "That the definition may be complete, idleness not be only the general, but the peculiar characteristic of man; and perhaps man is the only being that can properly be called idle" (*J Works* 2: 4).

Inauthentic idleness in its most basic and basest form is illustrated by the anonymous writer of the missive which forms the text of "*The Idler No. 9*" written for "*Saturday, 10 June 1758*" (*J Works* 2: 29). Nor should we take this writer to be a single, isolated example of inauthentic idleness, but rather since he makes reference to "our fraternity" which is comprised of others in my situation" (*J Works* 2: 30), we must rank him as a member of a larger confraternity – a "fraternity" in regards to which the Idler himself is both included and excluded. Since the writer is explicitly a member of a sect of like-minded idlers, he thus evidences a certain societal trend. The writer tells the Idler "you have both pleased and angered me," for while "A natural irresistible attachment to that favourable passion, 'idling,' had led me to hope for indulgence from the Idler," nevertheless "I find him a stranger to the title" (*J Works* 2: 29). In this and the preceding distinction, a dichotomy of idleness is established, whose poles are represented, on the one hand, by the present writer and others of his ilk; and on the other hand, by the Idler himself. Yet at the same time, the writer of the letter is not wholly unaware of the negative aspects of his endorsement of this peculiar form of idleness and hence makes an attempt to both justify and commend himself to the Idler:

Perhaps you will call my scheme of life indolence, and therefore think the Idler excused from taking notice of me: but I have always looked upon indolence and idleness as the same, and so desire you will now and then, while you profess yourself of our fraternity,

take some notice of me, and others in my situation, who think they have a right to your assistance, or relinquish the name. (*J Works* 2: 30)

Here the Idler is appealed to as a sort of arbiter of idleness, who sits above other idlers in the position of a judge, and who also has an additional, vaguely conceived duty towards other idlers as a kind of mentor. In spite of the letter writer's attempts at self-justification and a half-conscious desire to hold some more or less recognized position in a world outside his own limited sphere of retreat, the distinction nevertheless persists between the Idler himself and the "correspondent" (*J Works* 2: 31) and his "fraternity"; and now we must more precisely ask what underlies and informs this distinction.

As defined by, and exemplified in, the letter writer, inauthentic "idleness" is on one level merely bodily laziness, evidenced by "the slackened nerve ... the heavy eye of inattention ... and the uncontracted muscle," all of which work to "procure insensibility to the whole animal composition" (*J Works* 2: 30). This inactivity is all pervading, and hence the most basic everyday activities, down to and including "putting on [one's] cloaths," is something to be suffered as "painful and laborious" (*J Works* 2: 30). Even "getting upon my legs" becomes an action which the writer describes as a "torment," and which can be "endure[d]" only "when necessity obliges me" (*J Works* 2: 30). The perusal of *The Idler*, which would normally be considered as an act of leisure, is one in which the writer says "I committed violence upon myself, by mustering up all my strength to set about reading you" (*J Works* 2: 30). The second level of inauthentic idleness, hinted at previously in "the heavy eye of inattention," is a state of spiritual inanition wherein the practitioner "indulge[s] the live-long day" wholly "vacant of thought" (*J Works* 2: 30). The second level grows out of the first, for not only "to stir is pain," but also "To reflect is pain" (*J Works* 2: 30). Thus "happiness" in such a "vacant" state is defined summarily in a negative manner as "consist[ing] in the absence of pain" (*J Works* 2: 30). But since some perception of "pain" is occasioned by any form of activity, physical or mental, we must conclude that the letter writer's pursuit of "happiness" strives only towards a form of idleness as complete vacuity – both physical and mental.

Here the letter itself ends and *The Idler* No. 9 turns to the voice of the Idler himself, who sides (at least in part) with the missive author, when he says that "This correspondent, whoever he be, is not to be dismissed without some tokens of regard" (*J Works* 2: 31). But at the same time, the Idler withholds the

distinction of being a “true Idler” (*J Works* 2: 32) from the correspondent, since “he that calls for directions to be idle, is yet but in the rudiments of idleness, and has attained neither the practice nor theory of wasting life” (*J Works* 2: 31). This does not mean, however, that the correspondent has not at least entered onto on the correct route towards idleness, for the Idler adds that “The true nature of idleness he will know in time, by continuing to be idle” (*J Works* 2: 31). Like the correspondent, negativity – negativity amounting to a virtual vacuum – also informs the Idler’s own definition of a “genuine Idler,” for “There is no mark more certain of a genuine Idler, than uneasiness without molestation, and complaint without a grievance” (*J Works* 2: 31). “Idleness” is ultimately negatively defined as “The *vis inertia*, the quality of resisting all external impulse” (*J Works* 2: 31). In such a completely negative state, dominated by the inertia of physical or mental immobility, all one needs to do (or rather not do, since such total passivity can hardly be considered in any terms of action) is to sink more and more fully into a state of total, restive inertia; and thus genuine idleness can only be achieved “by continuing to be idle,” and “The Idler acquires weight” only “by lying still” (*J Works* 2: 31). This “weight” is not the gravitas of grave deliberations or substantial actions, but rather is simply the heaviness of body and mind attendant on torpor.

By following “The *vis inertiae*,” the aforementioned “quality of resisting all external impulse” can be found to be “hourly increasing” (*J Works* 2: 31) – to the point where it eventually overrides the temporality which underlies human existence. Over time and with dedication, eventually

the restless and troublesome faculties of attention and disjunction, reflection on the past, and solicitude for the future, by along indulgence of idleness, will like tapers in unelastic air, be gradually extinguished; and the officious lover, the vigilant soldier, the best trader, may, by a judicious composure of his mind, sink into a state approaching to that of brute matter; in which he will retain the consciousness of his own existence, only by an obtuse languor, and drowsy discontent. (*J Works* 2: 31)

Here we see how the negativity associated with idleness comes to infect the faltering temporality of an idler’s Being. The emptiness of the “now” closes off “reflection on the past” as a site of having-been and also forecloses what Johnson calls “solicitude,” or what we have termed “care” or “concern” – all of which are possible translations and variants of Heidegger’s conception of *Sorge* – “for the future.” Thus at the

same time, the “now” suffocates “like tapers” in the vacuity of the a-temporality and the idler’s “own existence” is foreclosed, and rather than having the ontological character of Dasein, gives up her/his humanness and “sink[s] into a state approaching that of brute matter” – which is to say simple presence-at-hand, wherein the only possible attunements (for here we can hardly speak of projection) are an “obtuse languor” or a “drowsy discontent” emptied of any expectation or hope for “content” – both in terms of “Being-filled” and “satisfaction.”

The Idler, in spite of his previous optimistic assessment of the correspondent’s chances for attaining “genuine” idleness, closes with a caveat which indicates a decidedly split view of idleness in general. After the description of the “*vis inertia*,” the Idler begins to indicate his disapprobation of idleness in general. He characterizes it in terms equally applicable to a descent into Hades or Limbo, calling it “the lowest stage to which the favorites of idleness can descend,” and “these regions of undelighted quiet” as a demesne wherein one “sink[s] down into their shade” (*J Works* 2: 31). While the Idler reiterates that his “correspondent, who seems, with all his errors worthy of advice” (*J Works* 2: 32), his advice in this instance takes a decidedly precautionary and didactic turn. The correspondent “must be told, that he is calling too hastily for the last effusion of total insensibility” (*J Works* 2: 32). Ironically, the Idler’s caveat is based on the fact that “labour is necessary in his initiation to idleness,” insofar as “He that never labours may know the pains of idleness but not the pleasure” (*J Works* 2: 32). Here the negative definition of “idleness” is refined specifically as a *freedom from* (rather than as a *freedom for*) something. One can know “true” idleness only in contradistinction to the rigors of active engagement and can appreciate it only as the mere cessation of effort. Yet in the end, “The comfort is” – at least to one who aspires to the position of a “true Idler,” if a “true Idler” is indeed susceptible to the enjoyment of any “comfort” – “that if he devotes himself to insensibility, he will daily lengthen the intervals of idleness, and shorten those of labour, till at last he will lie down to rest, and no longer disturb the world or himself by bustle or competition” (*J Works* 2: 32). In this way, the idler loses both “the world” and “himself”; and while one no longer is engaged in the “bustle or competition” (which as we shall see are themselves modes of inauthentic idleness accompanying fallenness into the “they” and the inauthentic, self-evading busy-ness of the real world), neither is one able to recover a situation of Being-at-home as Da-sein. In closing, the Idler opens the split

in his view of idleness more widely in the explanation of his aims in giving advice to his correspondent: “Thus I have endeavoured to give him that information which, perhaps, after all, he did not want; for a true Idler often calls for that which he knows is never to be had, and asks questions which he does not desire ever to be answered” (*J Works* 2: 32). The question is, what precisely is “that information which, perhaps, after all, he did not want”? On one level, we could simply read it as referring to the necessity of “labour” in attaining “genuine” idleness. On other level, we could interpret it as a warning specifically against idleness in general and its attendant ontological debilitations. In the latter case, we can see the Idler’s recognition of the ultimate futility and self-defeating quality of this form of idleness, which “calls for that which” can “never ... be had, and asks questions” aimlessly to no purpose in a perversion of the path of the question.

The forms of inauthentic idleness also include those forms dominated not only by “The *vis inertia*” conceived as “the quality of resisting all external impulse” (*J Works* 2: 31), but also its converse – which is to say, the quality of succumbing to any and every external impulse. In the latter case, we find ourselves still concerned with the *vis inertia*, insofar as bodies set in motion tend to stay in motion. Yet in spite of their apparent activity, they continue to exhibit a foreclosure of authentic temporality and the possibility of authentic ontological projection. These forms similarly turn too exclusively towards the “now” as the sphere of self-involved and at the same time self-forgetting busy-ness (either of business or recreation – the latter of which has arisen to almost a mania in our current age), and hence close off the future as the site of potentiality, which entails at the same time a truncating of the present. Such forms of busyness may also serve to shut off the past, for we find that “Men are often driven, by reflection and remorse, into the hurries of business, or of pleasure” (*J Works* 14: 178). Or they may also offer a route of escape from a disturbing present dominated by mental aberrations and allow them to “fly from the terrifying suggestions of their own thoughts to banquets and to courts” (*J Works* 14: 178).

This second “kind of idleness, by which we are so easily seduced” due to Dasein’s structural demand for self projection – or at least the “appearance” of self-projection – is described in “*The Idler No. 48. Saturday, 17 March 1759,*” as “that which dignifies itself by the appearance of business,” and which “by making the loiterer imagine that he has something to do which must not be neglected, keeps him in

perpetual agitation, and hurries him rapidly from place to place” (*J Works* 2: 150). This problem is more or less a universal inheritance bestowed by our ontological structure, since “To do nothing every man is ashamed, and to do much every man is unwilling or afraid,” and hence we find that “Innumerable expedients have therefore been invented to produce motion without labour, and employment without solicitude” (*J Works* 2: 150). Such a form of idleness appears to solve the dilemma of attunement, but does so only as an illusion as “the appearance of business” and in the “imagin[ation]” of “the loiterer” her/himself. Idlers such as these, since they do indeed project themselves after a fashion, do not (like the first class of inauthentic idlers) possess any degree of critical self-regard; therefore, they “never appear more ridiculous, than in the distress which they imagine themselves to feel, from some accidental interruption of those empty pursuits” (*J Works* 2: 150). Here Johnson calls our attention to the inherent difficulties for Dasein to ever become resolute through its immersion in the “empty pursuits” of mere busyness. In such “accidental interruption,” one would expect that the sudden emptiness opened up within the lull itself (much in the way Heidegger describes *deficient modes* in the sphere of equipment) might occasion an act of reflection as a stepping-back and taking-stock wherein one can see things as they themselves are when abstracted from any form of direct purposiveness as an in-order-to. But even in the midst of an “interruption,” the idler remains dominated by an “imagin[ation]” which is not authentically oriented either towards its ownmost situation, nor the imaginary as the site of potentialities-for-Being, but instead merely acts as an assistant in the continuance of self-deception. The “perpetual agitation” which we saw as underlying the mood of *Angst* which precedes and assists in occasioning the call of conscience is not overcome, but rather is both actively and passively encouraged and strengthened. As a result, Dasein’s concern, or (as in Johnson’s terms) its “solicitude,” never recognizes the emptiness at the root of its own existence, and hence is not able to become ready for the call. Dasein, therefore, does not ex-ist, but rather passes the time in “innumerable expedients” of diversion. The foreclosure of the possibility of becoming resolute further means that Dasein is unable to turn back to its home in its ownmost “there,” and instead is “hurrie[d] ... rapidly from place to place” (*J Works* 2: 150) in perpetual self-forgetting and fallenness.

The character of “Euphilia” (“*The Rambler No. 42. Saturday, 11 August 1750*” [*J Works* 3: 227]), as one of Johnson’s many former city-dwellers who have retired to rural retreats, provides another example

of one who requires the distractions of busyness as a compensation for, and distraction from, the fundamental emptiness of inauthentic existence. Upon moving to the countryside, and finding her “expectations of some nameless pleasure in rural life” (*J Works* 3: 229) frustrated; she says, “I had not in myself any fund of satisfaction with which I could supply the loss of my customary amusements” (*J Works* 3: 230). But here the “amusements” to which she refers are explicitly self-distractions – which is to say, they distract Dasein from itself. Euphilia herself says, she is “weary of myself” (*J Works* 3: 231); and turning away from herself in her existential weariness, she desires to immerse and lose herself in the distractions of the “they.” She can see herself only in relation to the modes of Being of others whose measure is cut by fashion, and for this reason her Being is exclusively determined by the “they.” All potential modes of Being, all attunements – both as projections and moods – are conditioned *ab extra*. For this reason she says, “I have no motive action, nor any object of love, or hate, or fear, or inclination. I cannot dress with spirit, for I have neither rival nor admirer. I cannot dance without a partner, nor be kind, or cruel, without a lover” (*J Works* 3: 230-231). In this state, her ability to attune her Being is fundamentally hindered, and thus she says, “I am languishing in a dead calm, for want of some external impulse” (*J Works* 3: 231) – an impulse which, in her case, can only be distributed by some emissary of the “they.” Any alteration which she undergoes in “new diversions” are only “introduced” by “fashion” (*J Works* 3: 228), which itself is merely one of the more overt and popular modes of the “they.”

Inauthentic idleness further displays a distinct version of temporality which is characterized by the foreclosure of ecstatic temporality enacted through a too narrow focus on one isolated aspect of the temporal – a concentration which in its extreme manifestations verges on the obsessive. Such a temporality is rooted in what is effectively a constitutional inability to recognize the ontologically interdependent nexus of ecstatic temporality. Returning to the case of Euphilia, we can see an almost exclusive focus on the present. The “satisfaction” which she has come to expect from her “customary amusements” (*J Works* 3: 230) is one in which the present moment is sufficient unto itself. The “dead calm” in which she perceives herself to be “languishing” (*J Works* 3: 231), even though it is the obverse side of her “amusements,” is equally centered on, and limited to, the present. This “calm” is “dead” not only because there is no motivating “external impulse” (*J Works* 3: 231) to be found in the present, but more importantly in light of

her inability to attune or project her Being, she is at the same time without a future, insofar as she lacks something to impel herself towards, or something to await. Even her “new diversions,” because they are exclusively “introduced” by “fashion” (*J Works* 3: 228), are constrained by the present, insofar as “fashion” itself is by definition a mode limited to the “now” and the “now” alone.

We find another example of such an exclusive focus on the present at the expense of the future in the case of “Jack Whirler” (*J Works* 2: 60) from “*The Idler No. 19. Saturday, 9 August 1758*” (*J Works* 2: 59). “Jack Whirler” (as his surname implies) has been sucked up into a whirlwind existence in which he dizzily spins, due to the fact that his “business keeps him in perpetual motion” (*J Works* 2: 60). Jack’s “business,” however, is mere busy-ness, and thus his “motion always eludes his business” (*J Works* 2: 60). Caught up in such a whirlwind, and in spite of his attempts to orient himself towards the future by making plans and projects, he “is always to do what he never does” (*J Works* 2: 60), and thereby even loses his hold on the “now,” and for this reason his principal “topic of sorrow” becomes “the want of time” (*J Works* 2: 61). Here Jack displays “the irresoluteness of inauthentic existence, which temporalizes itself in the mode of a making-present which does not await but forgets”; and “by busily losing himself in the object of his concern, he *loses his time* in it too. Hence his characteristic way of talking – ‘I have no time’” (*BT* 410). Jack himself actively works to keep such aimless, apparent propulsion viciously circling, encircling, and circumventing:

But overwhelmed as he is with business, his chief desire is to still have more. Every new proposal takes possession of his thoughts, he soon balances probabilities, engages in the project, brings it almost to completion, and then forsakes it for another, which he catches with some alacrity, urges with the same vehemence, and abandons with the same coldness. (*J Works* 2: 61)

While here we can see that Jack is indeed able to look towards the future through the medium of a “proposal” and can even regard various modalities of success or failure through “balanc[ing] probabilities” centered around some distinct “project” in which he “engages”; his concern, or perhaps rather we should say his mere “interest,” in any particular “project” (or *projection*) nonetheless inevitably falters, collapses, and fades through his inability to bring any project to completion, until he eventually and inevitably

“forsakes it for another” and the roundelay begins anew. His “alacrity” in “catch[ing]” – an image which conveys both the image of pulling something out of the air, as well as grasping outwards towards something to arrest its motion – a new proposal, and the “vehemence” with which he “urges” whatever new project he has glommed onto, betray a hastiness and assumed ardor which bespeak a need for self-deception and self-forgetfulness. Here we can see the same pattern which underlies the inauthentic form of projection as what Heidegger terms “curiosity,” wherein it “seeks restlessness and the excitement of continual novelty and changing encounters” (*BT* 172), and thereby loses itself time and again in the world’s hasty, thoughtless busy-ness. Herein one is solely “concerned with the constant possibility of *distraction*” – a “distraction by new possibilities” (*BT* 172) which remain stillborn merely as possibilities and are never brought towards full realization. The breakdown in temporality and the subsequent falling into mere busy-ness thus further means that Jack Whirlar can never return to his “there” and enter into an authentic situation of his own, and instead he is repeatedly tossed about in an analogue of Dasein’s initial thrownness, wherein he merely bustles about in his fallenness. In fact, for Jack place itself is always seen in terms of the mere present-at-hand, not as a place existentially to *be* in a situation, but as a place to simply occupy like some present-at-hand thing. Ironically he is everywhere and nowhere at the same time, for he “cannot stand still because he is wanted in another place,” and “he is wanted in many places because he stays in none” (*J Works* 2: 60). Mere change of place itself aids in the perpetuation of his distracted busy-ness, and thus since “Jack has more business than he can conveniently transact in one house,” he sets up a second “habitation ... about a mile distant” from the first (*J Works* 2: 60). But yet in spite of “this ingenious distribution of himself between two houses, Jack has contrived to be found at neither” (*J Works* 2: 60).

The breakdown of the temporalizing of temporality that occurs in inauthentic idleness is not, however, limited to a myopic focus on an empty “now”; it may also look towards the future, yet in what proves finally to be an equally indolent and inauthentic manner. An example of such an inauthentic attunement which apparently concerned with the future is provided by “Cupidus” (*J Works* 4: 22) from “*The Rambler No. 73. Tuesday, 27 November 1750*” (*J Works* 4: 17), who in his own words, is possessed by “an inveterate disease of wishing” (*J Works* 4: 22). “Wishing” itself ostensibly looks towards the future

as a site of the possible, and hence supposedly is a manner of Being-towards one's potentialities-for-Being; however, by focusing exclusively one specific possibility from a position of passivity, wishing ends up not only limiting, but also effectively foreclosing, the future as a site of the imaginary and the disclosure of potentialities-for-Being. For Heidegger, when Dasein is

in the mode of mere wishing, the ascendancy of Being-ahead-of-oneself brings with it a lack of understanding for the factual possibilities. When The world has been primarily projected as a wish-world, Being-in-the-world has lost itself inertly in what is at its disposal; but it has done itself in such a way that, in the light is what is wished for, that which is at its disposal (and this is all that is ready-to-hand) is never enough. Wishing is an existential modification of projecting oneself understandingly, when such self-projection has fallen forfeit to thrownness and just keeps *hankering* after possibilities ...
(BT 195)

At the same time, insofar as it constantly looks beyond itself to a future which is never a coming-towards, wishing ends up bypassing the present. Wishing constantly looks beyond the present in the desire not to supplement, augment, or more fully realize the present, but oftentimes works only to overturn or supplant the present. The act of wishing itself, insofar as it is frequently adopted as a last-ditch effort in spite of the odds stacked against the realization of its goals, inevitably smacks of desperation and an almost obsessive need to break the continuity of temporality as an individual's own historicity through a repudiation not only of the present, but also her/his past as a having-been. In this state, Dasein remains indolently hovering in a suspended present in a protracted state of desire as a longing for a certain set of conditions to be actualized. The centrality of such a form of desire is indicated by the missive writer's pen-name "Cupidus," which is the masculine form of the Latin adjective *cupidus*, -a, -um" used as a substantive, which itself is derived from the Latin noun "*cupiditas*," meaning "*eager desire, and in a base sense, passionate longing, vehement desire.*"¹¹⁴ Thus we may say that wishing is Cupidus's fundamental attunement and "*cupiditas*" his underlying mood.

¹¹⁴ "*Cupiditas*," *Cassell's Latin Dictionary*, 1955 ed.

Cupidus describes himself as having been “born” in “a family that boasts alliances with the greatest names in English history, and extends its claims of affinity to the Tudors and Plantagenets,” but whose “ancestors, by little and little, wasted their patrimony” (*J Works* 4: 18). Despite the fact that Cupidus’s “father had not enough left for the support of a family, without descending to the cultivation of his own grounds, being condemned to pay three sisters the fortunes allotted to them by [his] grandfather”; and in this way Cupidus’s grandfather “enriched his daughters by beggaring his son” (*J Works* 4: 18). Due to these circumstances, Cupidus’s “father” turned towards a projected future and “pleased himself with the foreseeing that the possessions of those ladies must revert at last to the hereditary estate” (*J Works* 4: 18). This future, however, continually remained unrealized – yet in spite of subsequent frustrations, as Cupidus describes it, “In all the perplexities or vexations which want of money brought upon us, it was our constant practice to have recourse to futurity” (*J Works* 4: 18). Such a “recourse” should be conceived not only as a “Resort or application *to* some person or thing for assistance, help, or safety”; but also in the sense of “a “Course, movement, or flow in some direction; a course, passage, or path *to* or *into* something.”¹¹⁵ The specific situation of Cupidus and his family, in light of the second definition, is furthermore a “re-course” as a reiterated plotting of an alternative trajectory as a specific deviation from the normal course of events under a given set of circumstances. Such a “recourse” has also become habitual as a “Usual or habitual going or resorting to a particular place”¹¹⁶ – to which we should add as a corollary “a particular” thing, idea, or state of mind. In this way, bent “Upon plans of elegance and schemes of pleasure,” both of which are focused towards the future, “the day rose and set, and the year went round unregarded” (*J Works* 4: 19). In this way, the present is continually overshadowed by an estimated future; and thus Cupidus says that such “plans” and “schemes” were “the amusement of our leisure, and the solace of our exigencies; we met together only to contrive how our approaching fortune should be enjoyed; for in this our conversation always ended, on whatever subject it began” (*J Works* 4: 19).

At the same time, such an exclusive and excessive focus on one possible future necessarily closes off other possible futures. For this reason Cupidus writes, “We had none of the collateral interests, which

¹¹⁵ “Recourse,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, New ed.

¹¹⁶ “Recourse,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, New ed.

diversify the life of others with joys and hopes, but had turned our whole attention on one event” (*J Works* 4: 19). Here Cupidus further implicitly recognizes a distinction between “wishes” and “hopes.” Whereas on first glance there would seem to be very little difference between a “wish” and a “hope,” in that both apparently and equally regard a projected future; on closer inspection, we find a distinction which amounts to a salient difference underlying them. Unlike the virtual tunnel-vision associated with a dominant and singular wish, a plurality of “joys and hopes” are seen as means to “diversify the life of others.” Also through coupling “hopes” with “joys,” it is implied that “hopes” may indeed be realized, and hence occasion “joys” – or in other words, some form or sense of fulfillment. A “wish,” on the other hand, as something which one can “neither hasten nor retard” (*J Works* 4: 19), is a more or less passive attunement. Such passivity leads only to an illusory state of “visionary opulence,” which even though it “for a while soothed” the “imagination” of Cupidus and his family,” it inevitably “afterwards fired” their “wishes, and exasperated” their “necessities” (*J Works* 4: 19). A wish, in other words, proves to feed on itself and only leads to more “wishes,” without ever effecting any appreciable gain in regard to the satisfaction of one’s “necessities,” which are often left to go by the boards. The “inveterate disease of wishing” is predicated on “wants” (*J Works* 4: 22) – both in the sense of things which are wanted or desired, as well as to “wants” in the sense of “lacking.” Cupidus himself eventually comes to realize his entrapment in the counter-productive temporality of wishing, but is unable to alter his fundamental attunement. After the eventual death of his aunt and his finally coming into his inheritance, Cupidus writes that the “joy” which he had for so long imagined and anticipated

is now past, and I have returned again to my old habit of wishing. Being accustomed to give the future full power over my mind, and to start away from the scene before me to some expected enjoyment, I deliver myself up to the tyranny of every desire which fancy suggests, and long for a thousand things which I am unable to procure. (*J Works* 4: 22).

The “joy” which he expected from the realization of his wishes is ultimately fleeting, for unlike hope, wishes feed only on wishing. Not only does wishing close off other possible futures by focusing on one possible future, it effectively closes off the possibility of the realization of any form of authentic future. Just as “custom” and “habit” are modes of the “they” which prevent Dasein from re-turning to its ownmost

“there”; so an individual Dasein’s “habit[s]” and “Being accustomed” may similarly prevent it from becoming resolute. By “delivering [him]self to the tyranny of every desire which fancy suggests,” Cupidus repeatedly chases after an illusory “there.”

We can also see at the same time in the case of Cupidus the negative aspect of Johnson’s view of the projective capacities of the imagination and the realm of the imaginary in general. Wishing, as a form of “visionary opulence” (*J Works* 4: 19), draws on the imaginary, and hence is able to satisfy the “imagination” (*J Works* 4: 19). Yet such “visionary opulence” only “soothed” the “imagination” of Cupidus and his family “for a while” (*J Works* 4: 19). Eventually, the real state of affairs perforce intrudes upon awareness, and thus “afterwards” Cupidus’s “father could not always restrain himself from exclaiming, that ‘no creature has so many lives as a cat and an old maid’” (*J Works* 4: 19). In the end, Cupidus’s difficulties, for which he seeks some means of redress in writing to the Rambler, similarly stem from the same conflict between evasive imaginative activities and the world of the real. While Cupidus says he “had formed schemes” and “had supposed events,” as merely acts of imagination they remain only plans and suppositions, and hence these “schemes” are ones which he “cannot execute,” and hence the “events ... do not come to pass” (*J Works* 4: 22) in the sphere of the real. In fact, imaginative projections directed only towards “wants” which will “never be supplied” are evolved against the precepts and counsel of “reason” and as such the tyrannical dominance of imagination precisely grows out of (to borrow a phrase from Francisco de Goya’s *Caprichos*) *the sleep of reason produces monsters*. In the dormancy of “reason,” the “mind” spirals into a “corrupted” state through the “inveterate disease of wishing,” and the result is a form of monomania or obsession wherein one is “unable to think on any thing but wants” (*J Works* 4: 22) – even though one is all the while wholly and ironically aware that satisfaction of these wants is completely impossible. Thus Cupidus, if the Rambler is not able to “find some remedy,” must pass “the rest of [his] life in craving solicitude” (*J Works* 4: 22) – a never to be satisfied state of protracted, self devouring longing wherein “solicitude” as concern can never become care [*Sorge*], nor even as anxiety [*Angst*] come to precipitate the *call of conscience*. Here again we find the same state of suspension associated with other inauthentic forms of idleness; however, in this specific instance, the form of idleness is accompanied by a high degree of self-awareness.

Similar to Cupidus, all of those who are adherents to some inauthentic form of idleness are not always wholly unaware of their respective conditions, nor is every case entirely one-sided. Johnson seems to recognize something in Dasein itself which implicitly recognizes its primordial character as *Insein* in spite of its apparent indolence. At the beginning of “*The Idler No. 48. Saturday, 17 March 1759*,” Johnson offers a consideration of another aspect of “idleness” (*J Works* 2: 150). While an individual of the type we have been considering merely “sits still, or reposes himself upon a couch,” she/he is still possessed of a certain degree of self-awareness, and “no more deceives himself than he deceives others” and indeed “knows that he is doing nothing” (*J Works* 2: 150). Yet idlers of this sort oftentimes are unavoidably affected by the demand for projection and vaguely wish to turn authentically back towards themselves, for even in their “insignificance” they still hang on to the “solace” of “the resolution which the lazy hourly make, of changing [their] mode of life” (*J Works* 2: 150). The same pattern underlies the idleness which disguises itself as “procrastination” (*J Works* 4: 347), which Johnson describes in “*The Rambler No. 134. Saturday, 29 June 1751*” as a situation wherein

life is languished away in the gloom of anxiety, and consumed in collecting resolution which the next morning dissipates; in forming purposes which we scarcely hope to keep, and reconciling ourselves to our own cowardice by excuses, which, while we admit them, we know to be absurd. (*J Works* 4: 346-347)

In spite of the fact that such idlers risk either becoming mere presences-at-hand as lumps “of brute matter,” or else eternally deferring their future to a date to be named later; their essential daseinal human-ness consistently rears up through the insistence of “anxiety” [*Angst*] and at least makes a show of having some regard for the future as the site for potentialities-for-Being in its continual forming of resolutions, regardless of how ineffectual they finally prove.

But what role can idleness play in becoming resolute? How might it contribute to becoming authentic and assist us in emerging into the moment of vision? Johnson himself, in the guise of the Idler, draws a distinction between “the genuine Idler” and “the Idler that pretends to be busy” (*J Works* 2: 54). The latter is said to “spin out life in trifles, and die without a memorial” (*J Works* 2: 54). At the same time, however, “many flatter themselves with high opinions of their own importance, and imagine that they are

everyday adding some improvement to human life” (*J Works* 2: 54). Since the inauthentic idler makes a show of purposive activity by “pretend[ing] to be busy”; and seeing that they often “flatter themselves with high opinions of their own importance,” by telling themselves little, ameliorating falsehoods or outright lies to hide the degree of their own inconsequence from themselves; the inauthentic idler is largely a creature motivated by self-delusion. The root cause of this self-delusion is the wish to silence the reproaches of both the “they” and the conscience conventionally envisaged as the internalized voice of the “they.” Thus insofar as “To be idle and to be poor have always been reproaches, and therefore every man endeavours with his utmost care, to hide his poverty from others, and his idleness from himself” (*J Works* 2: 54), and hence such self-delusion is often compelled to assume a noble guise in its own eyes. The characteristics of ‘the genuine Idler,’ on the other hand, are not explicitly enumerated, so we must have recourse to a negative definition evolved through contrast. If the inauthentic idler is swept up in the teapot maelstrom of her/his show of mere busy-ness, we may conclude that an authentic idler eschews busy-ness for the sake of busy-ness and is either truly idle (which as we will see below can become a condition for significant activity or can be a form of activity in itself), or otherwise is engaged in an actually meaningful activity. Similarly, if inauthentic idlers are self-deluded and in thrall to the standards and customs of the “they,” we may conclude that authentic idlers are possessed of a certain level of awareness of a distinct self and that they to a lesser or greater degree repudiate the impositions of the “they.”

While as Johnson writes in “*The Adventurer No. 68. Tuesday, 3 July 1753*” (*J Works* 2: 389) the business of “society,” in supplying us with the satisfaction of our necessities, no matter how many distractions it may heap upon us, “constitutes the happiness of human life” – this “constitut[ing]” takes place only insofar as it ultimately allows us to “gain ... leisure for intellectual pursuits, and enjoy ... the happiness of reason and reflection” (*J Works* 2: 389). Here we must read “leisure” not as a cessation of working, but rather in the sense of the Latin “*otium*” as leisure employed for the purpose of spiritual self-cultivation – and hence it is leisure as *otium* which characterizes authentic idleness. Thus Johnson speaks in “*The Rambler No. 28*” for “*Saturday, 23 June 1750*” (*J Works* 3: 151) of “The necessity of setting the world at a distance from us, when we are to take a survey of ourselves” (*J Works* 3: 156). The “benefits” of

“self-examination” are in our “power to procure ... by assigning proper portions of [one’s] life to the examination of the rest” by placing oneself “frequently in such a situation by retirement and abstraction, as may weaken the influence of external objects” (*J Works* 3: 156) of the everyday, present-at-hand world.¹¹⁷ “Retirement” (*J Works* 3: 36) furthermore has a religious application which Johnson takes up in “*The Rambler No. 7. Tuesday, 10 April 1750*” (*J Works* 3: 35), wherein one is able “To facilitate” a “change in our affections” and “weaken the temptations of the world,” and may lead us to “that conquest of the world and ourselves, which has been always considered as the perfection of human nature” (*J Works* 3: 40). Religion itself and the religious in general is conceived by Johnson along the lines of the opposition we have established between the real and realty, the inauthentic and authentic, for “It is difficult to conceive what time is allotted to religious questions and controversies by a man whose life is engrossed by the hurries of business” (*J Works* 14: 80-81). From this perspective, authentic idleness as *otium* as a generally ontological, and more specifically religious, path of re-attuning is a respite from the “they” dominated busy-ness of society, wherein Being may re-turn towards itself and moves towards becoming resolute. In this situation, authentic idleness at the same time opens up a split between the real and reality (which encompasses both Dasein’s ownmost world, as well as the “higher reality” associated with religious truths), which while lessening the dominance of the former, conversely opens up the sphere of the latter. For this reason, “The love of Retirement” itself, when it is purposively enjoined, is an indicator of such a divergence, and thus it “has, in all ages, adhered closely to those minds, which have been most enlarged by knowledge, or elevated by genius” (*J Works* 3: 36). Here we can see that such a disposition is also akin to the aesthetic and permits us to access the imaginary as a source of realities as the site of as yet unrealized potentialities-for-Being. For not only is it associated with “genius,” but also in order “To produce” it “nothing appears requisite but quick sensibility, and active imagination” (*J Works* 3: 36). In “an hour of retreat,” we are enabled to get outside of the everyday world which all too often impinges upon us and

¹¹⁷ This is not to say that Johnson advocates a complete sundering of Dasein from the “they.” Like Heidegger, Johnson also recognizes that proximally and for the most part Dasein exists in its average everydayness, and for this reason sees it as requiring only “intervals of retirement” (*J Works* 14: 34-35).

instead are permitted “to let [our] thoughts expatiate at large, and seek for that variety in [our] own ideas, which the objects of sense cannot afford [us]” (*J Works* 3: 36).

Similarly, in his discussion concerning the forming of “resolutions” (*J Works* 2: 84) in “*The Idler No. 27*” written for “*Saturday, 21 October 1758*” (*J Works* 2: 83), becoming resolute is hindered (as it is for Heidegger) by the pernicious influences of “Custom” and “habits” (*J Works* 2: 85), both of which are (as we have seen) inauthentic modes of Being which predominate among the “they.” The central difficulty, as Johnson formulates it (returning to the same theme in “*The Adventurer No. 119. Tuesday, 25 December 1753*” [*J Works* 2: 461]), is that insofar as we unavoidably exist proximally and for the most part as Being-in-the-world

Much of our time ... is sacrificed to custom; we trifle, because we see others trifle: in the same manner we catch from example the contagion of desire; we see all around us busied in pursuit of imaginary good, and begin to bustle in the same chase, lest greater activity should triumph over us. (*J Works* 2: 463)

Here the “good” we pursue is “imaginary” as the “false” in the sense of an inauthentic ideal, insofar as it is sought through the “trifle[s]” of mere busy-ness carried on for the sake of busy-ness. Thus “Custom is commonly too strong for the most resolute resolver,” even if one is already “furnished for the assault with all the weapons of philosophy” (*J Works* 2: 85). The central problem is that “business and gaiety are always drawing our attention away from a future state” (*J Works* 4: 49), oftentimes in spite of the fact that one is presumably focused beyond such empty shows through a philosophical or religious attunement. While “To abstract the thoughts from things spiritual is not difficult” since “things future do not intrude themselves upon the senses, and therefore easily give way to external objects” (*J Works* 14: 110); in order to “consider” the “evidence” supportive of (for example) “the truths of religion,” which more generally considered are a form of ontological truth, “the mind must be abstracted, in some measure” – for too much abstraction is a form of insanity – “from objects that surround us” (*J Works* 14: 176) – which is to say, the world of the everyday and present-at-hand. It is the very “near[ness]” of these “objects” which obscures our vision by causing us to become lost in the insistence and imposition of the present isolated from the temporal nexus. Conversely “the views of futurity affect us but faintly,” since they “are distant” (*J Works*

14: 177). What is demanded from Being if it is to attain authenticity is a determined constancy of purpose in orienting itself both towards its self and the future, for even when one “has resolved a thousand times, and a thousand times has been deserted his own purpose” and “yet suffers no abatement of his confidence, but still believes himself his own master” (*J Works* 2: 84) will be “able, by innate vigour of the soul, to press forward to his end, through all the obstructions that inconveniences or delights can put in his way” (*J Works* 2: 84-85). In the end, what is requisite is a fixity of purpose attained through a constant and repeated becoming resolute, for only in this way can we “conquer” our “evil habits” and “attain” the “freedom” (*J Works* 2: 86) of authenticity which results from our victory. As Paul Fussell notes, not only in regards to Johnson, but as a recurrent disposition in the eighteenth century, we find “It is the almost sacred human will which, once aware of its obligations to resist, becomes man’s primary weapon against the natural human impulse to turn automaton.”¹¹⁸

Yet becoming resolute (as we saw in our discussion of Heidegger) involves not only Dasein’s returning to itself, but further demands it orients itself towards its potentialities-for-Being in the moment of vision, and hence it must evidence an authentic tripartite, temporal structure as the temporalizing of temporality. Throughout his works, Johnson consistently conceptualizes the time associated with human existence along the lines of Heidegger’s conception of ecstatic temporality. While it may sound counterintuitive to speak of temporalizing in regards to idleness and retirement, on closer examination, it becomes evident that Johnson himself recognizes and expounds upon this temporal dimension of being – a dimension which can be disclosed only when we step outside of the world of the average and everyday.

We find this tripartite temporal structure underlying Johnson’s discussion of “our own progress in existence” (*J Works* 3: 225) from “*The Rambler No. 41. Tuesday, 7 August 1750*” (*J Works* 3: 221). The present is for Johnson (as it is for Heidegger) the point of continuance of the stretching of existence rooted in the past as a having-been and the coming towards the future as the not-yet. Thus the implication of temporality for our existence is that

¹¹⁸ Paul Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism: Ethics and Imagery from Swift to Burke* (Oxford: Oxford U Pr., 1969) 91.

Indeed, almost all that we can be said to enjoy is past or future; the present is in perpetual motion, leaves us as soon as it arrives, ceases to be present before its presence is well perceived, and is only known to have existed by the effects which it leaves behind. The greatest part of our ideas arises, therefore, from the view before or behind us, and we are happy or miserable, according as we are affected by the survey of our life, or our prospect of future existence. (*J Works* 3: 223-224)

Unlike the inauthentic forms of idleness which myopically regard the present to the exclusion of the other two dimensions, from the perspective of authentic temporality “the present is in perpetual motion” and can only attain some degree of stability in relation to the entire continuity of existence. In fact, the view of “the present” advanced here sees it as little more than a reflex of the future and the past. Fussell notes that such a view of “the present” is endemic to eighteenth-century humanist conception of temporality:

To the humanist, man can be defined as the only sentient creature whose consciousness is so constructed that he experiences no present time – he can be aware of a past and of a future, but by the time he has focused his frail and wandering awareness on the present it has become past ... Thus for man the present is entirely unknowable. It is an illusion fabricated from the desperate human need to seize and stabilize the future as it rushes past. The Augustan humanists seem intensely aware of this quality in the human experience: hence their obsessions with memory and hope, and hence also both their tender instinct for the elegiac and ... their flair for writing of serious history on the grand scale. (43)

As “an illusion” and a form of artifice, “the present” is “fabricated” or created out of the continuity of existence as a response to the relentlessness of “the future.” For this reason, the present is grounded as an orientation towards the past – an orientation grounded not only in the personal form of memory, but further through aesthetic forms such as “the elegiac” and “serious history on the grand scale.” Here we can detect Johnson moving beyond Lockean empiricism towards an essentially aesthetic characterization of Being. No longer are our “ideas” a result of immediate sensory experience, but are rather the products of aesthetic reflection.

Such reflection on the past is not limited to personal reminiscences, but may also be carried out and contextualized in a temporalizing of temporality enacted through encounters with the aesthetic. In “*The Adventurer No. 137. Tuesday, 26 February 1754*” (*J Works* 2: 487), the Adventurer himself, who says he “shall soon cease to write Adventurers,” intends “to compute the profit and loss” resulting from his “undertaking” (*J Works* 2: 488). This computation first leads him to question the assumptions of “some who affirm, that books have no influence upon the public, that no age was made better by its authors, and that to call upon mankind to correct their manners, is, like Xerxes, to scourge the wind or shackle the torrent” (*J Works* 2: 488). While the Adventurer admits that among “the several motives, which procure to books the honor of perusal” we find “the most general and prevalent reason of study, is the impossibility of finding another amusement equally cheap or constant, equally independent of the hour or the weather” (*J Works* 2: 490); it still “happens,” regardless of how “seldom” it may occur, “that study terminates in mere pastime,” for almost invariably “Books have always a secret influence on the understanding” (*J Works* 2: 491) – a “secret influence” which takes place in retirement and is carried out through aesthetic reflection. At the beginning of the essay, Johnson considers the interrelation of the past and the future in regards to reflection in general:

As man is a being very sparingly furnished with the power of prescience, he can provide for the future only by considering the past; and as futurity is all in which he has any real interest, he ought very diligently to use the only means by which he can be enabled to enjoy it, and frequently to revolve the experiments which he has hitherto made upon life, that he may gain wisdom from his mistakes and caution from his miscarriages. (*J Works* 2: 487)

Insofar as we are not “furnished with the power of prescience,” and hence cannot confront the not-yet of the future, we must instead turn towards “the past” in order to attempt to “provide for the future.” Yet such reflection nevertheless remains oriented towards the future, since it “is all in which [we have] any real interest.” Johnson emphasizes the personal dimension of the past, which provides a reservoir of previously experienced events and situations which have an implicit relevance to a personal existence, wherein existence itself is conceived as a series of “experiments.” In the same way, the aesthetic may also work by

“luring the mind by a new appearance to a second view of those beauties which it had passed over inattentively before” (*J Works* 2: 491). The past, insofar as it is (in a sense) re-lived through retracing previous steps, becomes re-vivified and again made immediate. In this way, intellectual reflection in general, and aesthetic reflection in particular, are no “mere pastime[s]” (*J Works* 2: 490), which is to say they are not merely manners of spending clock-time as a way to make time pass; and become instead ways of becoming open to the imaginary by turning back towards the past. Through reliving, going over, and assessing ways of having been in the present, Being again opens its self to the future insofar as it may now grasp previously unapprehended potentialities-for-Being – ways of Being which had been available to it, but went unrecognized.

While our “future existence” is conditioned and to some degree limited by our personal past, Johnson specifically characterizes the “future” as a “prospect” (*J Works* 3: 224) – both in the sense of “A place which affords an open and extensive view; a look out” as “A mental view or survey”; as well as “A scene presented to the mental vision, esp[ecially] of something future or expected; a mental vista” realized through “A mental looking forward; consideration or knowledge of, or regard to something future.”¹¹⁹ In the latter sense, insofar as it takes place in a “mental” sphere and is a form of Being-towards “something future,” a “prospect” becomes both a horizon and a staging ground for the projective capacity *Insein* as worlding. Such a “view” or “survey” as a “mental vision” or “looking forward” regards that which has not yet come to pass, and hence exists only as a potentiality-for-Being. While in our relation “to futurity ... events are at such a distance from us, that we cannot take the whole concatenation into our view”; at the same time “Futurity” as it is regarded through reflection is a personal site which “is pliant and ductile”; and therefore, “will be easily moulded by a strong fancy into any form” (*J Works* 3: 224). As the editors of the *Yale Edition* inform us in the variorum notes, Johnson’s use of “fancy” was later altered to “imagination” in The Folio edition of 1750-52 (*J Works* 3: 224), and thus we may conclude that Johnson makes no essential distinction between “fancy” and “imagination.” Here we can see that “futurity” is aesthetically constructed and envisioned in a specific shape drawn from a range of modalities of Being through the active power of “fancy” or “imagination.” Here Johnson departs from the exclusively retrospective view of imagination

¹¹⁹ “Prospect,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, New Ed.

propagated earlier by Hobbes and Locke and inches towards a more decidedly “Romantic” position, wherein what Coleridge later terms the “secondary imagination” is predominant. Thus paradoxically by retiring from the world, by becoming ostensibly idle, we go forth from ourselves as we are, and hence are enabled to encounter and disclose new realities. As Johnson implies in *Sermon Number 25*,¹²⁰ it is principally through the agency of the “imagination” that we are able to “sally ... out into futurity” (*J Works* 14: 262) – a “futurity” which is at the same time the domain of the imaginary.

¹²⁰ This Sermon was first published in 1788. Although it was initially composed in 1752 for the funeral of his wife Elizabeth “Tetty,” it “was never preached” (*J Works* 14: 261).

c. The Domain of the Aesthetic in Johnson's Criticism

For Johnson, the aesthetic provides a domain of reality wherein we may project ourselves as worlding Beings and move beyond the world of the everyday and given, and subsequently disclose an authentic world of our own. Mahoney also notes the relationship between worlding or *Insein* and the aesthetic in Johnson, when he writes, "There is something remarkable about Johnson's underlining the reality of literature, its ability to catch us up in its world" ("True" 194). While "The outward jump of the imagination ... is indispensable in every step of growth that ever takes place in a human being ... The same forward thrust of the imagination to our own future condition ... is also able to catch at other objects and develop other desires" (*ASJ* 139) – "other objects" and "other desires" which exists outside of, and beyond, our selves and the real, and hence are oriented towards the imaginary. What is required is a medium, in the sense of an intermediary, as both a basis and a direction for moving beyond some given present state of Being. For "We could not project ourselves forward, that is into our future condition – which exists as it were in blueprint and in our imagination – and bend our efforts to secure it unless we were equally able to turn outside our present sensations in another way, and lose our sense of our 'personal identity' in some *other* object" (*ASJ* 139-140). Such a medium is supplied by the aesthetic in general, and literature in particular, insofar as they permit us through forms of aesthetic alienation to access the imaginary as a storehouse of worlds and potentialities-for-Being through forms of aesthetic alienation and re-cognition. Through the aesthetic and our encounters with the imaginary, we may also meet ourselves both in our limitations and also as we may yet become. More specifically considered, a literary work functions as a medium between the worlding of both the author and the recipient, both of whom undergo a form of alienation in the continuum of the aesthetic equation. While this process is at least in part dependent on the "forward thrust of the imagination," it further requires the disclosure of the imaginary, insofar as the imagination reaches beyond the given, everyday world towards worlds slumbering *in potentia*.

For Johnson aesthetic criticism should not be wholly fascinated by merely formalistic criteria, but rather must also be concerned with the issue of Being, and hence demands a critical conception that makes room for the ontological dynamics of the aesthetic. Herein Johnson presages aesthetic theories commonly

thought to be a unique evolution of the Romantic movement. Iser offers the traditional view of the progress of criticism, when he writes, “Literary theory in the modern sense dates back to the Romantic era. It marks a break with the Aristotelian tradition of prescriptive poetics; instead of laying down the rules according to which literature had to be produced, it set out to explore what literature was able to achieve” (P 131). Johnson himself enacts a similar “break with the Aristotelian tradition” grounded on *a priori* principles, in that for him “analysis and discrimination of literary devices are not ... the central business of criticism. Criticism is above all a matter of judgment and evaluation.”¹²¹ Bate also perceives Johnson’s departure from the received Aristotelian critical tradition and calls our attention to Johnson’s significant deviation from the received critical tradition in his concern with the utility of aesthetic criticism, when he speculates that

Certainly if Johnson had ever written the ‘History of Criticism ... from Aristotle to the present age’ that he projected – a strangely novel ambition to find in any writer before the nineteenth century – the work would have focused on the ways in which criticism, in its desire to find issues and make stands, becomes prematurely exclusive. It would follow the pattern of Johnson’s other writing, which, in trying to find what can be ‘turned to use,’ starts out by probing first the over-simplifications that the human imagination is always constructing. (ASJ 180-181)

At the root of this revaluation, we find “Johnson’s fundamental conviction ... that no valid poetic criteria can be derived from consideration of linguistic or technical devices, apart from their function in achieving poetical effects” (Keast 303). Here we can see that both “judgment and evaluation” and “poetical effects” are *a posteriori* phenomena evolved out of the experience of a work of art, and hence not only addresses all the moments of the aesthetic equation, but also ultimately cast an eye towards the professedly “Romantic” criteria of “what literature [is] able to achieve.” In his aesthetic investigations, Johnson manages to maintain a balance between all three elements insofar as his aesthetic philosophy “does not become so preoccupied with the mental processes of the poet or the reader that it forgets to prize the fullness of what is

¹²¹ William R. Keast, “Johnson’s Criticism of the Metaphysical Poets.” *Eighteenth Century English Literature: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. James L. Clifford (Oxford: Oxford U Pr., 1971) 302.

being experienced, or what is able to provide the satisfaction and integrate the mind” (*ASJ* 208). On the most fundamental level, “Johnson, unlike his modern readers, demands an instructive literature: books that are of some *use*” (Lipking 336), and hence ironically at the same time reveals Johnson’s more “modern” outlook insofar as “the central value of Johnson’s example” is that “he forces upon our attention a concern for the ultimate effects and values of literature” (Keast 309). Now we must ask: how does the utility of the aesthetic show itself? What is “literature” specifically “able to achieve”? How is the aesthetic integrated with existence, and what is its relation to inauthentic and authentic existence?

Due to its imaginative character, the aesthetic transcends the strict guidelines of pre-scribed “rules” – those seemingly omnipresent bugaboos of eighteenth-century criticism – and alternatively must be allowed space to incorporate the peculiar and interdependent ontological dynamics of all three factors of the aesthetic equation. Since for Johnson “Judgment and taste” are not a result of pre-established standards and positions, but rather are considered as the outgrowth of individual tendencies, they potentially “are fallible”; and since “the critic deals with an object whose essential character derives from the imagination, a faculty that is limitless in its potentialities for discovery and combination” (Keast 302-303), a new, more elastic critical approach becomes necessary. The focus on the immediacy of the aesthetic event has as its necessary “corollary ... that no *pure* aesthetic experience – pure in the sense of removed and abstract – is desirable, even if possible, as the general aim of art” (*ASJ* 208). This is not to say, however, that Johnson endorses a purely relativistic aesthetic approach, either from the side the author, critic, or audience – but rather means only that we must (and can) only enter into the aesthetic as it shows itself through the playing out of the tripartite phenomena of the aesthetic equation. In fact, as Johnson writes in “*The Rambler No. 158*” written for “*Saturday, 21 September 1751*” (*J Works* 5: 75), “The rules hitherto received” are all too often more or less an expression of a relativistic (and hence more or less capricious and “arbitrary”) aesthetics, since they “are seldom drawn from any settled principle or self-evident-postulate, or adapted to the natural and invariable constitution of things” such as is the case with geometric or philosophic theorems, “but will be found upon examination” to be “the arbitrary edicts of legislators authorized only by themselves” (*J Works* 5: 76). Yet “This authority may be more justly opposed” by instead turning to one’s own conscience as a more authentic authority, insofar as the said authority “is apparently derived from

them whom they endeavour to control” (*J Works* 5: 76). We must return to the dynamics of the personal involvement with the event of a work of art, in order to disclose what is not only universally but also particularly effective in a given aesthetic work. While “we owe few of the rules of writing to the acuteness of criticks, who have generally no other merit than ... having read the works of great authors with attention,” and thereby “have observed the arrangement of their matter, or the graces of their expression”; and while these are “precepts which they never could have invented” themselves; nevertheless this basic manner of proceeding is all that is authentically open to us not only as artists, but also (we should add) equally as critical recipients, for “rules” cannot “direct ... practice,” for “practice” must instead “introduce ... rules” (*J Works* 5: 76). The danger of the former methodological direction crouches chiefly in the fact that there are a certain number well established critical opinions, especially when “consider[ing] the merit of a production yet unpublished,” which merely parrot “sounds which, having once been uttered by those that understood them, have since re-echoed without meaning, and kept up the disturbance of the world, by a constant repercussion from one coxcomb to another” (*J Works* 3: 127). In such instances, criticism as not only the mouthpiece of “an imagination heated with objections” and the desire to offer “some proof of his abilities” (*J Works* 3: 127) through specious carping becomes a means for the recipient to assert her/his supposed authority; furthermore such critical toadying acts as a functionary of the whims of the “they” by giving voice to and passing on a form of critical idle talk. The primacy of practice over “rules” is especially clear in regards to “work[s] of the imagination,” wherein “the disposition of parts, the insertion of incidents, and use of decorations, may be varied a thousand ways with equal propriety” (*J Works* 3: 127). Due to their close kinship with the imaginary, as well as their latitude in respect to both content and form, such works are not able to be adjudged according to any previously established, codified criteria, and hence must be approached on a case by case basis wherein the “rules” of criticism brought to bear must be derived from the highly individual qualities of a given work.

For Johnson, the establishment of “practice” is the purview of “genius” – not in the sense relevant to naturalistic, polytheistic religions such as the Greek and Roman as in the idea of a “genius of a place,” but rather as a creative power, such as found in Alexander Gerard’s conception of “original genius” or Coleridge’s notion of “genial criticism.” Hence “The imagination of the first authors of lyrick poetry,”

unconstrained by previous examples or established precepts, “was vehement and rapid, and their knowledge various and extensive” (*J Works* 5: 77). In the *Life of Cowley*, Johnson defines what “is commonly called Genius” along these lines as not the result of a codified plan or course of development, but rather as the outcome of “accidents, which, sometimes remembered, and perhaps sometimes forgotten, produce that particular designation of mind and propensity for some certain science or employment” (*Lives* 1: 2). Hence “genius” cannot be inculcated, but is rather “designed by nature for extraordinary performances” (*J Works* 3: 326). As extra-ordinary, genius by definition goes beyond what is given in the average and everyday by drawing on the imaginary through its own creative force, and thus “The highest praise of genius is original invention” (*Lives* 1: 194). At the same time “invention” conditions not only the work itself, but also plays a role in its reception, for while “The essence of poetry is invention,” at the same time “such invention as by producing something unexpected, surprises and delights” (*Lives* 1: 291).

Apart from invention, there are still other “qualities which constitute genius” – all of which must be integrated and “very nicely adjusted to each other” (*Lives* 3: 247). In the *Life of Pope*, Johnson expands his conception of “genius” to include the power of “judgment,” defining it as “that power which constitutes a poet; that quality without which judgement is cold and knowledge is inert; that energy which collects, combines, amplifies, and animates” (*Lives* 3: 222). While “Invention, by which new trains of events are formed and new scenes of imagery displayed” is necessary, one must also possess “Judgement,” which when it is infused by the life-giving warmth of genius acts upon invention by “select[ing] from life or nature what the present purpose requires, and, by separating the essence of things from its concomitants, often makes the representation more powerful than the reality” (*Lives* 3: 247). While invention (as we saw above) is extra-ordinary, the world which it evolves through its “new trains of events and “new scenes of imagery” still requires the “select[ive],” ordering, and “amplif[ying]” influence of creative judgment, so that the world of the work as a “representation” may go beyond and be more powerful than the “reality” which it supplants. Here we can see that for Johnson an artwork cannot be strictly mimetic as the reflection of some given material, objective reality; but rather it seeks to re-present an individual reality as disclosed through the worlding of genius. Additionally, “genius” needs all the “colours of language always before him ready to decorate his matter with every grace of elegant expression” (*Lives* 3: 247) in order to make the

full breadth of the work accessible to a recipient and to make its “matter” as coterminous as possible with articulation of *Insein* which gives rise to it.

Yet “genius” is more than an amalgam of faculties such as invention and judgment. It is also a disposition, an attunement wherein the “mind” is “active, ambitious, and adventurous, always investigating, always aspiring; in its widest searches still longing to go forward, in its highest flights still wishing to be higher; always imagining something greater than it knows, always endeavoring more than it can do” (*Lives* 3: 217). This disposition of mind is enacted and manifested through the agency of “Imagination,” which is another one of the “qualities which constitute[s] genius” (*J Works* 3: 247). In “*The Rambler No. 125. Tuesday, 28 May 1751*” (*J Works* 4: 299), Johnson defines “Imagination” as “a licentious and vagrant faculty, unsusceptible of limitations, and impatient of restraint, has always endeavoured to baffle the logician, to perplex the confines of distinction, and burst the inclosures of regularity” (*J Works* 4: 300). While in this definition Johnson’s characteristic distrust of the imagination comes to the fore, at the same time we find an implicit opposition between scientific approach of “the logician,” which is circumscribed by “the confines of distinction” and “the inclosures of regularity”; and the aesthetic, which by contrast is predicated on similitude or correspondence (though not in the one to one ratio of pure mimesis) and a certain degree of irregularity. We find, “therefore,” that there is “scarcely any species of writing, of which we can tell what is its essence, and what are its constituents” (*J Works* 4: 300). Here again we uncover the same relation between “practice” and “rules” which we discussed above, only now Johnson himself goes further by positing that the “essence” of an artwork grows organically out of “its constituents,” and in so doing looks towards not only Romanticism in general, but also more specifically Goethe’s formulation from the *Faust Plan of 1800* that “Content provides form.”¹²² “Essence” is no longer defined according to the *a priori* Platonic or Christian model¹²³ as subsisting outside of and beyond the realm of direct apprehension and experience – or to employ the taxonomic, biological language rejected by Heidegger as

¹²² Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Walter Arndt (New York: Norton, 1976) 396.

¹²³ The latter of which, in spite of its apparently repudiation of the Classical world, has its roots (as Nietzsche and Heidegger postulate) in Platonism and its Neo-Platonic heritage principally established by Plotinus. This tradition (we would add) is carried into the Italian (or more properly Florentine) Renaissance by philosophers and scholars such as Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, where it begins to explicitly merge with Catholicism.

inapplicable to questions of specifically human Being, “essence” no longer stands in the same categorical relation to a Being as that which subsists between the notions of *genus* and *species*. In this way, “every new genius produces some innovation, which when invented and approved, subverts the rules which the practice of foregoing authors had established” (*J Works* 4: 300) by establishing and propagating its own rules out of its own essential qualities. Yet while such a process has the appearance of irregularity when judged by traditional standards, the caveat that any “innovation[s]” must not only be “invented” but also “approved” removes the twin dangers of complete arbitrariness and total opacity by subjecting it after the fact to the scrutiny of a type of *sensus communis* similar to that theorized by Kant in his third *Critique*.

Yet Johnson’s conception of “Imagination” reveals a further dimension when he further defines it as one of the “qualities which constitute[s] genius” insofar as it “strongly impresses on the writer’s mind and enables him to convey to the reader the various forms of nature, incidents of life, and energies of passion” (*Lives* 3: 247). In this context, imagination emerges not simply under the direct control of genius, and thus Johnson writes in “*The Rambler No. 101. Tuesday, 5 March 1751*” (*J Works* 4: 173), “invention is not wholly at the command of its possessor” (*J Works* 4: 178). “Imagination” or “invention” are not simply faculties under the command (at least to a certain extent) of their possessor: the former, when it is described as a force which “impresses” itself “on the writer’s mind,” it is seen as imposing itself on the writer *ab extra*; while the latter, in that it “is not wholly at the command of its possessor,” also evidences a similar sort of external influence. Due to the fact that both “imagination” and “invention” are not mere faculties of genius, they must at the same time be located in relation to the imaginary, a domain toward which genius is especially open. For this reason, Johnson posits that via the “imagination” we may “rove at large ... unconfined in the boundless ocean of possibility” (*J Works* 3: 128) – possibilities or potentialities-for-Being which exist *in potentia* in the realm of the imaginary. The reality evolved through the disclosure of the imaginary is constitutionally opposed to the real, which is not properly the province of the aesthetic, but is rather the field of science. Whereas “science” is “fixed and limited,” the aesthetic is open and boundless, and thus “there appear no reason, why imagination should be subject to the same restraint” as “The roads of science” (*J Works* 4: 282). The latter are described as “narrow, so that they who travel them, must either follow or meet one another” (*J Works* 4: 282) in the tracing the well-worn paths of average, everyday

experience trod by the “they.” The imagination and the imaginary, on the other hand, are infinite since they dwell “in the boundless regions of possibility,” and in spite of the many areas “which fiction claims for her dominion, there are surely a thousand recesses unexplored, a thousand flowers unplucked, a thousand fountains unexhausted, combinations of imagery yet unobserved, and races of ideal inhabitants not hitherto described” (*J Works* 4: 282). This is not to say that Johnson endorses any wholesale untethering of the imagination, nor does he advise an unconditional surrender to the influx of the imaginary, but rather advocates a balanced approach (a striving for balance which is one of the hallmarks of Johnson’s thought – one which is not only present in his critical writings, but also continually surfaces in his biography) for “the tasks that exercise the intellectual powers ... require” both “the active vigour of imagination” and “the gradual and laborious investigations of reason” (*J Works* 5: 9).

The recipient of an aesthetic work must be able to open her/himself to the influence of the imaginary, but to do so it is first requisite that one must also be able “to evacuate his mind,” and “bring ... an intellect defecated and pure, neither turbid with care nor agitated by pleasure.” The recipient must remain, at least in the initiatory moments of the encounter with an aesthetic work, subservient, for “He only is the master who keeps the mind in pleasing captivity; whose pages are perused with eagerness, and in hope of new pleasure are perused again” (*Lives* 1: 454). Thus we find that “Works of imagination excel by their allurements and delight; by their power of attracting and detaining the attention” (*Lives* 1: 454). The recipient must be in a sense emptied, or effectively (in Iser’s terms) *bracketed off*, insofar as “If the repositories of thought are already full, what can they receive? If the mind is employed on the past or the future, the book will be held before the eyes in vain” (*J Works* 2: 232). Here we should also note another facet of the temporality of the aesthetic. In the midst of an aesthetic encounter, the recipient’s personal past or projected future is subsumed by the continuous present of a given work of art. Since “the work of art is the absolute present for every present” as a continuous present which anyone with access to an artwork may enjoy, it would appear to be merely present-at-hand, albeit as a universal presence-at-hand; however, since it “at the same time holds its word in readiness for the future” (*PH* 104), the artwork itself provides an alternative temporal horizon wherein the present is conceived only as it arises out of the future.

The universality of the language and world of an aesthetic work disclosed through language, however, are made concrete and accessible only through the “Standing of the word” – a “standing” which can be achieved through a distinct instantiation, for example, in a “lyric poem,” wherein “the poetic word brings time to a standstill” (*RB* 114). The “time,” which is brought “to a standstill” through the “standing of the word,” however, refers to what Heidegger designates as “clock-time” – a mechanistic conception of time which regulates the everyday world of the real, and thus the aesthetic provides us with an alternative temporality. The arresting of everyday temporality in and through the aesthetic is on one level evident in the continuous present of the artwork itself; yet at the same time, the temporality of a specific work lies dormant until it is temporalized through its reception. Yet this does not mean that we must remain in the suspended present of an aesthetic experience indefinitely, for by sacrificing our ostensible freedom to “pleasing captivity,” we potentially become “master[s]” of our selves and turn towards the future through anticipation of “new pleasure[s]” as hermeneutic agents.

To be open to the imaginary is not sufficient for an authentic aesthetic encounter. As we saw previously, in order for the movement of the aesthetic equation to complete its cycle, the recipient must come out of a given aesthetic reality and cross back over into the world of the real and everyday. As Johnson writes, in the *Life of Waller*, “From poetry, the reader expects, and from good poetry always obtains, the enlargement of his comprehension and elevation of his fancy” (*Lives* 1: 292). But how does such intellectual “enlargement” and imaginative “elevation” take place in and through the aesthetic?

In “*The Idler No. 97. Saturday, 23 February 1760*” Johnson posits two, principal authorial goals: “all authors ... undertake ... either to instruct or please” (*J Works* 2: 298). In this maxim, Johnson apparently merely echoes the first two elements of well-known formula of “Cicero” which was “followed by most other writers on rhetoric in antiquity and in modern times,” and which

classified the orator or writer’s intention towards the speaker under three related heads: *docere*, to teach or instruct; *delectare*, to please or interest; and *movere*, to move the emotions. Originally *docere* implied simply informing the judge and jury, or a political assembly (often very large, made up of ordinary citizens lacking specialist knowledge), of the facts of the issue under debate, but it subsequently came to mean teaching morally

informed lessons. *Delectare* involved attracting the hearers' or readers' attention, and maintaining it through the speech.¹²⁴

Yet, as applied by Johnson, instruction is no longer simply the conveyance of particles of information from one party to another in regards to some particular circumstance, but rather attempts to in-struct the recipient through directing the recipient towards the issue of attunement of Being itself, and thus Johnson is in line with the later goal of "teaching morally informed lessons." While "all authors undertake ... either to instruct or please," in order to be aesthetically effective, "He that instructs must offer to the mind something to be imitated or something to be avoided" (*J Works* 2: 298). Here Johnson echoes the fundamental note of Cicero's third dictate, which states that rhetoric ought "to move the emotions" of the audience. "*Movere*" for its part works to "arouse" the audience's "emotions" not for their own sake, but rather seeks to "focus ... them on behalf of the policy advocated, the person prosecuted or defended, the virtues or vices being described" (Vickers 15). In this "focusing," the rhetorician seeks to condition a specific manner of Being-towards an individual or situation. The Ciceronian formulation was adopted and adapted by Horace explicitly in relation to the poetic "in his casual-seeming but all inclusive *Ars Poetica*," wherein he

Restated the triad in words which every practitioner, and every reader knew by heart:

'Non satis est pulchra esse poemata: dulcia sunt | et quocumque volent animum auditoris
agunto ... | si vis me flere, dolendum est primum ipsi tibi' (99 ff.): 'It is not enough for
poetry to be beautiful; it must also be pleasing and lead the hearer's mind wherever it
will' – so uniting *delectare* and *movere* ... (Vickers 15)

The recipient is not a wholly free agent, but rather is more or less directed and guided by the artist's "will" through (and in spite of) the intervening medium of the work. The author, therefore, does not only move the emotions of the recipient; but, if the work gains its intended goal, it literally impels the recipient in a predetermined direction. In the process of "instruct[ion]," which "offers to the mind something to be imitated or something to be avoided," we see the same provocation, but here the manner of Being-towards which the author seeks to inculcate eventually turns back upon the ontological situation of the recipient

¹²⁴ Brian Vickers, *English Renaissance Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford U Pr., 2003) 15.

her/himself through acts of self-assessment and re-direction which result from the completion of a revolution of the aesthetic cycle.

Johnson extends the so-called “classical” models offered by Cicero and Horace by characterizing the interplay of the imagination and the imaginary in the dynamics of the aesthetic equation. The artist, as one “that pleases” in order to be effective, “must offer new images to his reader, and enable him to form a tacit comparison of his own state with that of the others” (*J Works* 2: 298). In its efforts to “please,” the aesthetic does not delight us only by affording an occasion of enjoyment or pleasure which merely holds one’s attention as in Cicero’s formulation, but additionally and specifically appeals to the imagination by “offering new images” drawn out of the imaginary for contemplation and reflection. The “new images” evoked through the aesthetic manifestations of the imaginary, insofar as they “enable” us “to form a tacit comparison of [our] own state with that of others” (*J Works* 2: 298), not only provide us with an author-led excursion down a scenic branch of the imaginary, but furthermore allow the recipient to both appraise her/his own condition, as well as to compare that “state with that of others.” The latter actions are similarly performed by the imagination, insofar as in order to make such an appraisal or comparison we must get outside the situation of our own Being through an act of self-alienation and reflection – we have to get outside ourselves in order to truly see our selves. Nor can we directly experience another’s existential condition, but can only figuratively approximate it – or as we commonly say, we can only (or more often *cannot*) imagine what it is like.

In “*The Rambler No. 3*” written for “*Tuesday, 27 March 1750*” (*J Works* 3: 14), Johnson characterizes “The task of an author” of instructing the audience as requiring the interplay between the imagination and the imaginary, and at the same time necessitating the exchange between the real and reality. Their “task” is

either to teach what is not known, or to recommend known truths, by his manner of adorning them; either to let in a new light upon the mind, and open new scenes to the prospect, or to vary the dress and situation of common objects, so as to give them fresh grace and more powerful attractions, to spread such flowers over the regions through

which the intellect has already made its progress, as may tempt it to return, and to take a second view of things hastily passed over, or negligently regarded. (*J Works* 3: 14-15)

The aesthetic is related to the imaginary not only in disclosing “truths” which are “not known,” which is to say truths that are formless potentialities in the imaginary until they have been given contours through the medium of an aesthetic work; but it also draws on the imaginary in its “recommend[ing] of known truths” through the specific “manner of adorning them” in a certain work – so that while the content is more or less familiar, the form itself is no less drawn from the imaginary than in the previous instance. The imaginary also plays a role in the disclosing of new worlds or realities as “new scenes,” which concomitantly include new potentialities-for-Being and attunements as “prospect[s],” through aesthetic experience. Yet this disclosing is not limited to new worlds, but may also disclose new aspects of “regions” already supposedly familiar to “the intellect,” causing it to turn again towards them and “take a second view” in a transvaluation of what through a corollary to aesthetic alienation has become no longer familiar. Here Johnson looks forward to Wordsworth’s poetic program as spelled out in his various “Preface[s]” to *Lyrical Ballads* by finding evidence of the extra-ordinary concealed in the everyday.

Yet the imagination of the recipient is not limited to the passive, receptive position of simply registering and internalizing the influence of the imaginary, but also plays a part in the reflection on, and projecting of, Being. As Bate notes, “The *projective* capacity of the imagination is a major theme in Johnson” (*SJ* 315). Iser, drawing on Engell’s *Creative Imagination*, writes, “Dr. Johnson – unlike Hobbes – considered imagination no longer a ‘decaying sense’ but a central guide, linking past, present, and future together so as to enable us to hold a steady course in the midst of all the changes we undergo” (*FI* 175). Here “imagination” is akin to Heidegger’s conception of the “Self”:

The question of the “who” answers itself in terms of the “I” itself, the ‘subject,’ the ‘Self’. The “who” is what maintains itself as something identical throughout changes in its Experiences and way of behaviour, and which relates itself to this changing multiplicity in so doing. (*BT* 114).

In “*The Rambler No. 60. Saturday, 13 October 1750*,” “the imagination” (*J Works* 3: 318) is assigned an active role insofar as it is posited as underlying and enacting the moment of aesthetic reception. First, the

imagination makes aesthetic investment possible, since “All joy or sorrow for the happiness or calamities of others is produced by an act of the imagination” (*J Works* 3: 318). Second, it allows us to transgress the boundaries of the real and enter into the fictive reality presented in a particular work (which as we have seen is a form of in-vestment) or the Being of an other through aesthetic alienation, for it is precisely “the imagination, that realizes the event however fictitious, or approximates it however remote, by placing us, for a time, in the condition of him whose fortune we contemplate” (*J Works* 3: 318-319). Third, and finally, the imagination permits us to bring an aesthetic experience to bear on our own situation through aesthetic identification. In fact, the end of the aesthetic is constructed “so that we feel, while the deception lasts, whatever motions would be excited by the same good or evil happening to ourselves” (*J Works* 3: 319).

By returning us to the consideration of our own Being, the imagination is central to aesthetic reflection and further functions to bring the recipient out of the condition of aesthetic alienation. In *Rasselas*, Imlac says,

When the eye or the imagination is struck with any uncommon work the next transition of an active mind is to the means by which it was performed. Here begins the true use of such contemplation; we enlarge our comprehension by new ideas, and perhaps recover some art lost to mankind, or learn what is less perfectly known in our own country. At least we compare our own with former times, and either rejoice at our improvements, or, what is the first motion towards good, discover our defects. (*J Works* 16: 113-114)

Thus the aesthetic comes up short if it loses sight of the recipient by becoming too exclusively involved in its own fictive world and its circumstances, and hence cannot be appropriated and applied to the recipient’s own situation. As Johnson writes in “*The Rambler No. 208. Saturday, 14 March 1752*” (*J Works* 5: 315), in an *envoi* to *The Rambler* project as a whole, while “Some enlargement may be allowed to declamation, and some exaggeration to burlesque,” insofar “as they deviate farther from reality, they become less useful, because their lessons will fail of application.” As a result, “The mind of the reader is carried away from the contemplation of his own manners; he finds in himself no likeness to the phantoms before him; and though he laughs or rages, is not reformed” (*J Works* 5: 320). Referring to Pope’s “praise of Kyril, ‘the Man of

Ross” in “the *Epistle to Lord Bathurst (1733) On the Use of Riches*” (*Lives* 3: 172) in the *Life of Pope*, Johnson censures Pope’s unreliable account, and adds, “Narrations of romantick and impracticable virtue will be read with wonder, but that which is unattainable is recommended in vain: that good may be endeavoured it must be shewn to be possible” (*Lives* 3: 173). While “wonder” itself is a valid response of the imagination to the imaginary, and as such is fundamental to aesthetic experience, it must reveal something attainable by the recipient, something which as a potentiality-for-Being is “possible” in the domain of the real. Likewise the matter of the work itself must eventuate its application by the recipient. For this reason we find that “all the power of description is destroyed by a scrupulous enumeration; and the force of metaphors is lost when the mind by the mention of particulars is turned more upon the original than the secondary sense, more upon that from which the illustration is drawn than that to which it is applied” (*Lives* 1: 45) – namely, the specific and unique situation of the recipient. The same condition may occur if the writer her/himself intrudes too prominently into the work. For example, Cowley’s works often “turn the mind wholly on the writer” (*Lives* 1: 42), and thus they “produce no correspondence of emotion” (*Lives* 1: 42) in the recipient, and hence forecloses any possibility of appropriation and application.

In the trans-spiraling of the aesthetic cycle, the author is eventually and inevitably transcended both by the work itself and its recipient – a condition which is most evident in instances where the work transcends its author’s intentions or a disconnect occurs between a work and its content and that of the author’s lived existence. Here we return to our earlier investigation of the autonomous dimension of the aesthetic, which “implies the possibility that the ‘matter of the text’ may escape from the author’s restricted intentional horizon, and that the world of the text may explode the world of its author” (Ricoeur 91). While on the one hand, “The literary work as such is a purely intentional formation which has the source of its being in the creative acts of consciousness of its author and its physical foundation in the text,” yet “By virtue of the dual stream of its language, the work is both intersubjectively accessible and reproducible, so that it becomes an intersubjective intentional object, related to a community of readers,” and “As such it is not a psychological phenomenon and is transcendent to all experiences of consciousness, those of its author as well as those of the reader” (Ingarden 14). On the other side, we will inevitably find, as Johnson writes in “*The Rambler No. 77. Tuesday, 11 December 1750*” (*J Works* 4: 38), that “few men, celebrated for

theoretic wisdom, live with conformity to their precepts” (*J Works* 4: 40-41). Johnson, however, finds in this discontinuity no sufficient reason for recommending the censuring of the author, “since no man has power of acting equal to that of thinking, I know not whether the speculatist may not sometimes incur censures too severe, and by those, who form ideas of his life from their knowledge of his books, be considered as worse than others, only because he was expected to be better.” (*J Works* 4: 41). On the contrary, any author “By whose writings the heart is rectified, the appetites counter-acted, and the passions repressed, may be considered as not unprofitable to the great republic of humanity, even those whose behaviour should not always exemplify his rules” (*J Works* 4: 41). It is explicitly the business of criticism to vitiate the potentially pernicious influences of authors’ own biographies, for “It is particularly the duty of those who consign illustrious names to posterity, to take care lest their readers be mislead by ambiguous examples.” (*J Works* 5: 109). Ultimately in forming critical judgments, “We must determine our opinion by facts uncontested, and evidence on each side allowed to be genuine” (*J Works* 4: 40) – “facts” and “evidence” which, in the sphere of the aesthetic, must be sought within the work itself.

In Johnson’s schematization of the domain of the aesthetic in general, he leaves a space open in any given artwork wherein the recipient may enter and engage in an authentic encounter through the foundational concept of *generality*. In the *Life of Cowley* Johnson draws an explicit connection between generality and the poetic, insofar as when something is “more generally ... expressed,” it is “therefore more poetically, expressed” (*Lives* 1: 46). Along these lines, Gadamer writes, while the fact “that descriptions can be vivid – clearly belongs to the ‘art’ of discourse, primarily to narratives and particularly to literature”; and while such “Vividness is here an authentic presence of that which is narrated: ‘we literally see it before us’” (*RB* 162); at the same time, “we also know that here it is the imaginations of the reader and listener that bring such presence about – a singular form of presence” (*RB* 162-163) evolved by the recipient her/himself. Since this “singular form of presence ... is surely not that of an unequivocal and fixed pictorial representation” (*RB* 163) such as one would find in a scientific presentation of materials or catalogue entry, and since “the ‘art’ of discourse” must be able to attain a condition of “Vividness” for a range of recipients, it follows that a certain degree of equivocality and lack of fixedness is requisite for the aesthetic. For this reason, “Poetry cannot dwell upon the minuter distinctions, by which one species differs

from another, without departing from that simplicity of grandeur which fills the imagination; nor dissect the latent qualities of things, without losing its general power of gratifying every mind by recalling its own conceptions” (*J Works* 3: 197). Here we should not mistake Johnson’s idea of “recalling” as only a mere calling something again to consciousness that has been previously experienced. If this were the case, one would be compelled to admit that not only is the aesthetic radically subjective, but also that the aesthetic is merely a handmaid to memory. While the “recalling” enacted through an aesthetic event may not only bring to consciousness something which has previously been experienced, but may also call up objects, scenes, or situations we presumably have encountered; at the same time, such “recalling” may also introduce elements or facets which we failed to recognize in the initial encounter, or have not seen it in the same way it is represented in a particular work, but which nevertheless re-calls us to our own situation – yet in this recalling we come to dwell to a greater degree in the truth. In this way, “Johnson’s position ... avoids the usual monotonous quarrel over the issue of generality versus particularity in art. It avoids this debate by subsuming it in a larger context.” In order for an aesthetic event to be relevant and accessible to the recipient, “What is wanted is detail – the familiar, the concrete, the vivid, and sensory – for the sake of the form; and what is desired in the form is the ability to apply not only to the particular details that serve as the immediate vestibule or conductor to it, in a work of art, but also to others that are cousin to them.” Thus we find that “The ‘general nature’ desired is thus a species of symbolic value” relevant to the recipient, which “proceeds through the concrete detail, but the test is still how applicable it is beyond” (*ASJ* 199) the circumstances or specific work which originally gave rise to it.

For Johnson, the movement of the aesthetic requires the interplay of the imaginary and the familiar, of reality and the real. Most obviously, the imaginary is found in fantastic tales, allegories and fables insofar as they are more overt works of the imagination; but it can also be found beneath “the surface” of supposedly everyday “knowledge”:

It is, however, not necessary, that a man should forebear to write, till he has discovered some truth unknown before; he may still be sufficiently useful, by only diversifying the surface of knowledge, and luring the mind by a new appearance to a second view of those beauties which it had passed over inattentively before. (*J Works* 2: 491)

Here Johnson not only anticipates Wordsworth's view of the presence of the supernatural which is concealed by the appearances of the common and everyday, but further looks forward to Viktor Shklovsky's concept of aesthetic "defamiliarization."¹²⁵ In his essay "Art as Technique," Shklovsky sees the aesthetic as working against the "Habitualization" which "devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war" (Shklovsky 12) – which is to say, it chews up not only the world of the real, but also the world of reality in which Dasein dwells. In order to combat this process, "art exists" and provides a means through which "one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things" in their essential reality – for example, it works "to make the stone *stony*." Thus "The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known" (Shklovsky 12) – in other words, as they are encountered by Being and not as they are surmised by the "they." Under these auspices, the aesthetic becomes "*a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important*" (Shklovsky 12). In this way, "The range of poetic (artistic) work extends from the sensory to the cognitive, from poetry to prose, from the concrete to the abstract" (Shklovsky 12) – which is to say, art intends beyond the one-to-one correspondence of a signifier and a signified as is the case in everyday discourse, and enters into the field of a distinctly aesthetic discourse, wherein an ontologically grounded aesthetics thematizes a way of Being-towards-the-world. Nor is the effect of "defamiliarization" limited to the aesthetic, for Shklovsky believes it

is found almost everywhere form is found ... An image is not a permanent referent for those immutable complexities of life which are revealed through it; its purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object – *it creates a 'vision' of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it.* (Shklovsky 18)

Like Shklovsky, Johnson is primarily concerned not with the mere perception of an object, but rather with the "view" of it into which one enters – a "view" which "*creates a 'vision' of the object*" which transcends its obvious and customary appearance. Such a "view," since it is no longer a way of merely looking at an object, is furthermore involved with what Shklovsky terms "cognitive" processes – which in the framework

¹²⁵ Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, eds. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Pr., 1965) 13.

of our investigation are more fundamentally related to the ontological function of Being-towards in the sense of Heidegger's broader notion of understanding. In Johnson we also find the same goal of recovery "of those beauties" which are beneath "the surface" of our supposed "knowledge" – a recovery which is brought about precisely through alterations in the orientation and projection of *Insein*.

While in undergoing an aesthetic event "Our emotions are engaged only when we are struck by something new or out of the ordinary" – even if it is "new or out of the ordinary" in a purely relative sense – since "'the pleasures of the mind,' he says, 'imply something sudden and unexpected' [*Lives* 1: 458-459]"; and while "'nothing can strongly strike or affect us, but what is rare and sudden.' [*Rambler* No. 78]" (Keast 304); at the same time, there must also be an element of recognition, insofar as "our feelings are moved only by what is recognizably human, like ourselves" (Keast 304). Even though "what is recognizably human" encompasses facets common to humanness in general due to the primordial structure of Dasein itself, it further includes the notion of generality of the average situation of human Being in its facticity. Thus Johnson writes in "*The Rambler* No. 60. *Saturday, 13 October 1750*" (*J Works* 3: 318), "Histories of the downfall of kingdoms, and revolutions of empires, are read with great tranquility" (*J Works* 3: 319), since such circumstances do not directly concern the situations of the majority of humanity. Similarly, "The general and rapid narratives of history, which involve a thousand fortunes in the business of a day, and complicate innumerable incidents in one great transaction, afford few lessons applicable to private life" (*J Works* 3: 319). The case is the same with tragedy. Even though "Pleasure and terrour are indeed the genuine sources of poetry ... poetical pleasure must be such as human imagination can at last conceive, and poetical terrour such as human strength and fortitude may combat," otherwise "The good and evil of Eternity are too ponderous for the wings of wit; the mind sinks under them in passive helplessness, content with calm belief and humble adoration" (*Lives* 1: 182). Thus as Bate notes, "Experience" in general, and aesthetic experience in particular, "is a process ... involving the interplay of familiarity with novelty, and with it the leading out of human resources through an expression or form which is meaningful because it rests on the 'stability of truth' or includes some sort of 'contiguity' with 'things as they are'"

(*ASJ* 181). Keast echoes Bate's view of "the interplay of familiarity with novelty" in Johnson's aesthetic theory when he writes,

All readers demand, if they are to be attracted and pleased, two qualities in literary works: truth – the ideas that slumber in the heart and the sentiments to which every bosom returns and echo – and novelty – the pleasure of sudden wonder. The two most engaging powers of an author satisfy these demands together – making new things familiar and familiar things new. (303)

This interplay, as Keast finds, is especially evident in Johnson's "assessment of the metaphysical poets," wherein "The pathetic, the movement of the passions arise fundamentally from the representation of what is uniform in human experience; the sublime, the stimulation of wonder and admiration, arises basically from the presentation of what is new and hence striking" (303-304). In this way, Johnson maintains a balance between the novel and the familiar, between the imaginary and the real. Thus while the metaphysical poets "have a quality which Johnson prizes beyond most others – originality" (Keast 307), at the same time "'originality' and 'novelty' are not used quite as battle cries" (*ASJ* 190). Here we can see that "Nothing so quickly illuminates Johnson's conservatism" – if we read "conservatism" as referring not to some radical conservation but to Johnson's balanced approach, which eschews the extremes of an aesthetics grounded exclusively either in the imaginary or in the real – "as this constant appetite for 'novelty' and 'originality' which still refuses to let these fluid and subjective concepts serve as a final basis for critical judgment" (*ASJ* 192).

As we have repeatedly seen, Johnson consistently returns to the concrete and ontologically relevant existential ramifications of the aesthetic, for ultimately "The value of the familiar is as a means, a basis from which to move; the new is also a means, and incitement or arousal" (*ASJ* 192). The "incitement" occasioned by the aesthetic is finally directed back towards the recipient, and when we hear its appeal or call, it impels us towards an authentic encounter. Here we see the rationale underlying Johnson's high valuation of "biography" (*J Works* 3: 319) not merely as a historical [*historische*] document, but as an aesthetic mode. In "biography," even though its "narratives" are necessarily imbued with the novelty inherent in the events, thoughts, and feelings of an other, we nevertheless find "above all other writings":

Those parallel circumstances, and kindred images, to which we readily conform our minds ... and therefore no species of writing seems more worthy of cultivation than biography, since none can be more delightful or more useful, none can more certainly enchain the heart by irresistible interest or more widely diffuse instruction to every diversity of constitution. (*J Works* 3: 319)

Here Johnson brings together a number of the concerns central to his conception of the aesthetic in general. Not only is the interplay of the familiar and the novel central to biography, but also the demand that art should not only delight but also must move or “incite” the recipient. While biography appeals to the recipient and thereby “enchain[s] the heart by irresistible interest” in its world, the call to which it gives voice must be enjoined by the voice of the recipient, and thus “more widely diffuse instruction to every diversity of constitution.”

The artwork itself in the view of Johnson, however, is not a fixed quantity, but demands the active and engaged response of the recipient. In literature in particular, since “words” are more or less “arbitrary,” they “must owe their power to association” (*Lives* 1: 58). But we must depart from this view of Johnson, when he opines that “the influence” of the aesthetic is exerted “only” through the various “association[s] ... which custom has given them” (*Lives* 1: 58). While “Language is the dress of thought” (*Lives* 1: 58), any “thought” which is unfamiliar or novel arises out of the imaginary, and must concomitantly be expressed in “Language” suited to it, and hence by definition must be beyond the scope of mere “custom.” In other words, there is a form of *decorum* pertinent to the imaginary. In “*The Rambler* No. 93,” written for “*Tuesday, 5 February 1751*” (*J Works* 4: 130), Johnson himself appears to offer a corrective to his other opinion by apprehending the relation between aesthetic language and the imaginary, when he writes, “The beauties of writing” are “such as cannot in the present state of human knowledge be evidenced by evidence, or drawn out into demonstrations; they are therefore wholly subject to the imagination” (*J Works* 4: 130). As such they “do not force their effects upon a mind preoccupied by unfavorable sentiments, nor overcome the counteraction of a false principle or of stubborn partiality” (*J Works* 4: 130), and instead require an imaginative openness on the part of the recipient. Here Johnson anticipates and incorporates the central concerns of the various approaches associated with reader-response

criticism, and as such Johnson advocates “for a more dynamic conception of form” (*ASJ* 196). As we saw in regards to Johnson’s conception of “genius,” we similarly find in the moment of reception that “Content provides form” (Goethe, *Faust* 396) – only here the “dynamic conception of form” arises out of the recipient’s interaction with an artwork, the specific (or specified) content of which is supplied to a lesser or greater degree through the investigations and schematizations of the recipient her/himself. Similarly to the necessary superceding of the so-called “rules” which we witnessed in the case of genius associated with the artist, there is likewise a genius of reception, which is equally dependent on the imagination and the imaginary. In order for a genius of reception to be authentic in its evaluations, it must not “trust ... the sentence of a critic,” for in such a case it would be “in danger from that vanity” of a personal short-coming “which exalts writers too often to the dignity of teaching what they are yet to learn,” or “from that negligence which sometimes steals upon the most vigilant caution, and that fallibility to which the condition of nature has subjected every human understanding,” as well as being subject to dangers attendant on personal prejudices resulting “from every thing which can excite kindness or malevolence, veneration or contempt” (*J Works* 4: 131). Such a genius instead must work with and evolve its own standards of evaluation and judgment – standards which are relevant to its own situation, both as it is and as it may potentially be – which are nevertheless relevant to, and at least initially conditioned by, the particular work under consideration.

In “*The Idler No. 76. Saturday, 26 September 1759*” (*J Works* 2: 235), which was actually composed by Sir Joshua Reynolds (and is included in the Yale Edition of Johnson’s *Works*), the relation of “rules” and “genius” to aesthetic reception is explicitly taken up. The text is ostensibly the missive of an anonymous letter-writer, who begins by praising the Idler for his “ridicule of those shallow critics, whose judgment” being “unable to comprehend the whole” of any given work, is reduced to being able to “judge only by parts” (*J Works* 2: 236). Here the letter-writer by implication advocates a critical method based on practice rather than rules (as we outlined above). While the latter is able only to judge of “parts” insofar as rules may govern only the segments of a work which are under its aegis, the former evolves its evaluations only in relation to “the whole” – both of the work itself as an integrated Being of its own, as well as in regard to the total effect of the work on the recipient registered through ever widening, which at the same

time are ever narrowing, acts of investigation. The letter-writer then continues by supplementing the Idler's previous discussions by including "another kind of critick still worse, who judges by narrow rules" (*J Works* 2: 236). These "rules" are "too often false" even "tho' they should be true and founded on nature," and thus "they will lead him but a very little way towards the just estimation of the sublime beauties of the works of genius" (*J Works* 2: 236) – which as we have seen are not only products of invention and judgment, but more fundamentally bear a relation to the imagination and the imaginary. Similar to creative genius, a genius of reception is an inborn or authentically evolved disposition. Since "whatever part of an art" which "can be executed or criticised by rules ... is no longer the work of genius, which implies excellence out of the reach of rules"; it follows "that, if a [one] has not" any "immediate perceptions" of one's own "it will be in vain ... to endeavour to supply their place by rules" (*J Works* 2: 236). Such "perceptions" are "immediate" in not only the temporal sense of arising on a precise instant, but are also "immediate" in the sense of not requiring any mediation through the influence of an extrinsic source – which is to say they cannot be taught by any inculcation of "the rules," but must rather be already present in, and surge forth intuitively from the recipient her/himself. But in this surging forth, recipients "must giv[e] up the reins of their imagination into their author's hands," lest "their frigid minds are employed in examining whether the performance be according to the rules of art" (*J Works* 2: 236). In this way, the recipient gives up ostensible control in order to be more fully open before, and to enter more completely into, the totality of a given artwork – not as it is defined only in regards to artificially isolated segments *ab extra* by the generally haphazard imposition of more or less arbitrary rules, but rather as it defines itself *ab intra*.

On the side of the recipient there is also an active form of imagination which goes hand in hand with the attunement of *curiosity*. Johnson defines "curiosity" in terms equally applicable to his conceptions of "genius" and "imagination":

Curiosity is, in great and generous minds, the first passion and the last; and perhaps always predominates in proportion to the strength of the contemplative faculties ... and in proportion as the intellectual eye takes in a wider prospect, it must be gratified with variety by more rapid flights, and bolder excursions; nor perhaps can there be proposed to

those who have been accustomed to the pleasures of thought, a more powerful incitement to any undertaking, than the hope of filling their fancy with new images, of clearing their doubts, and enlightening their reason. (*J Works* 5: 34)

Since “in great and generous” it is “the first passion and the last,” and since it “perhaps always predominates in proportion to the strength of the contemplative faculties,” curiosity itself is a species of genius – even Johnson’s stipulation that it “*perhaps* [emphasis mine] always predominates” underscores this relationship by preserving the sense of the mysterious which surrounds genius. As “the first” and “last passion,” curiosity is like genius a grounding attunement and similarly brings itself to bear on Being-towards as a “passion.” As a function of “the intellectual eye” which continually “takes in a wider prospect,” which is to say, “wider” in comparison with a the average, everyday perspective; and which engages in “more rapid flights, and bolder excursions,” Johnson again utilizing the comparative to indicate a category of transcendence; curiosity itself in-formed by the imagination. But again as we saw in regard to genius, the imaginative dimension of curiosity is not only active as a “more powerful incitement to any undertaking,” but is also receptive to the imaginary through “the hope of filling the fancy with new images” – which is to say “the hope of filling” the imagination “with new images,” since (as we saw above) Johnson uses “fancy” and “imagination” interchangeably.

Yet curiosity, as well as and the encounter with the imaginary that it makes possible, are not to be counted as ends in themselves. Curiosity is here no longer defined along the same lines as Heidegger as a self-devouring, continual craving after newer and newer objects of pursuit; Nor is it an “*inauthentic understanding*” wherein “existence” is “determined primarily not by itself but by things and circumstances and by the others,” due to which “the existent Dasein does not understand itself primarily by that apprehended possibility of itself which is most peculiarly its own” (*BPP* 279). Instead, as a means “of clearing [one’s] doubts, and enlightening [one’s] reason” (*J Works* 5: 34), curiosity is a form of vision (or re-vision) which leads us to “apprehend” our ownmost potentialities-for-Being. While “Poets, indeed, profess fiction ... the legitimate end of fiction is the conveyance of truth” (*Lives* 1: 271) – a “truth” which is an ontological truth of Being. Thus Johnson writes, in “*The Adventurer No. 137. Tuesday, 26 February 1754*” (*J Works* 2: 487), “it seldom happens, that study terminates in mere pastime. Books have always a

secret influence on the understanding” (*J Works* 2: 491) – which is to say they “have always a secret influence on the understanding” as an authentic understanding defined in accordance with Heidegger’s terminology as an understanding of Dasein’s apprehending its ownmost potential ways of Being-towards-the-world and Being-towards-itself. In order to actualize such an understanding, we must directly respond to the call of the aesthetic. While through aesthetic experience “many have caught hints of truth ... it is now their duty to pursue” (*J Works* 2: 492) the implications and ramifications of these “truth[s]” for themselves – each one in light of her/his own existence. We proceed “From conceptions, therefore, of what we might have been, and from wishes to be what we are not” disclosed through our encounters with the imaginary, and move away from “conceptions that we know to be foolish, and wishes which we feel to be vain” and find that ultimately “we must necessarily descend to the consideration of what we are” (*J Works* 2: 481) – a consideration which is the first step on the path towards becoming resolute and authentic. Bate sees “the great theme of Johnson’s own work” to be precisely this concern with “human fulfillment – the developing and completing of human nature,” which itself “arises from awareness, from going beyond the slavery of our own subjective cage ... into a rounded, charitable, and vital grasp of persisting forms and principles” (*ASJ* 40). The aesthetic supplements our own understanding of ourselves, a supplementing predicated on the “sense of human incompleteness,” which “as an important attribute of man the Augustan humanists enlist on behalf of a critique of man himself” (Fussell 36). This “human incompleteness” is part and parcel of our daseinal Being which understands itself in relation to a projected future and its potentialities-for-Being; and thus conversely, “When we are full and satisfied, we have become something less than” human (Fussell 37). Fussell further sees this “incompleteness” as central to Johnson’s aesthetic philosophy, positing that “Johnson’s basic critical criterion, a literary work’s being interesting, rests squarely upon this sense of the natural incompleteness of the mind” (Fussell 37) – or more specifically in the framework of our investigation, it “rest squarely upon” the essential “incompleteness” of human Being. This “natural incompleteness” is innate to Dasein due to its temporal structure. As a projecting Being oriented towards and determined by the future, human Being never attains completeness – not even in death. Yet we may still re-turn to our ownmost “there” and become resolute. A returning which can be

made possible and furthered through our encounters with the aesthetic when the imaginary takes on a gestalt in the real and merges with existence.

While “the natural incompleteness” of human Being and its attendant “inconsistency” are primordial parts of Dasein’s temporal structure, and while such incompleteness may ultimately be productive and positive, it simultaneously conceals a negative side. Since this incompleteness is precisely what drives the imagination and gives the imaginary its aesthetic force, we next must turn to a consideration of the potentially negative aspects of the relationship between the imagination and the imaginary.

d. The Devouring Imaginary and the Struggle of Resolution

“If thou canst read the heart, in mine behold
The bitter conflict of a troubled spirit,
That agonis’d by woe, doubt, fear, despair,
Dreads e’en the wreck of reason ...
Thou talk’st to one of that disastrous mood
Whose mind is no longer master of itself
Acts not its resolve.”

William Sotheby: *Orestes: A Tragedy* (1802) III.i.62-64; 71-73

The “credit” which is proper to the aesthetic is due to the qualities of the aesthetic as an affective state, not as a mere emotional condition, but rather as a shared way of Being attuned, both as attuned-towards and attuned-by. As Johnson’s writes in the “Preface to Shakespeare” (1756), while an artwork is re-presentative “as a just picture of a real original,” the “real original” is ontologically grounded “as representing to the auditor what he himself would feel, if he were to do or suffer what is there feigned to be suffered or done. The reflection that strikes the heart is not, that the evils which are before us are real evils, but that they are evils to which we ourselves may be exposed” (*J Works* 7: 78). Here Johnson also shows his concern with the way in which we undergo an aesthetic event. Yet since such an event does not deal with presences-at-hand, it is not part and parcel of the “real” in the everyday sense, and instead is situated in relation to the imaginary; therefore, Johnson’s conception of “reflection” is a way of Being-towards potentialities-for-Being. These potentialities are at the same time not immediate, but rather conditional. In fact, it is paradoxically this aesthetic distance enjoyed by the audience that makes our aesthetic participation and response possible. In our experience of tragedy, for instance, we find that “The delight of tragedy proceeds from our consciousness of fiction; if we thought murders and treasons real, they would please no more.” Thus the aesthetic for Johnson depends upon its status as what Iser terms an *as-if* construction, for “Imitations produce pain or pleasure, not because they are mistaken for realities, but because they bring realities to mind” (*J Works* 7: 78). While we are not wholly immune to a direct and immediate affective response, as for instance when one becomes “agitated in reading the history of Henry the Fifth” (*J Works* 7: 78-79), it does not concomitantly follow that any one “takes his book for the field of Agencourt” (*J Works* 7: 79). During an aesthetic experience, we give credence to that which is presented in the artwork itself, while all the while withholding our belief, an orientation succinctly stated by Coleridge’s

oft-cited definition of “poetic faith” as being “constitute[d]” through the “transfer from our inward nature an human interest and a semblance of truth” which is “sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment” (*BL* 2: 6).

Yet at the same time, Johnson recognizes the autonomy of the imaginary as it is disclosed through the aesthetic. This autonomy is something which Johnson himself experienced in his own existence, and thus he “notes time and again the too powerful influence that romances and fantastic stories had over his imagination, and his experience reveals another, more troubling interpretation of imaginative ‘assent’” (Engell 74). Such “assent,” on the one hand, is a form of openness to an aesthetic work, analogous to Coleridge’s concept of the “willing suspension of disbelief” (*BL* 2: 6); but on the other hand, it differs from it insofar as for Johnson the imagination is often not to be subjected to conscious control, nor is the influence of the imaginary itself limited to the aesthetic. The power of the aesthetic and the imaginary is not terminated when, for instance, we lay a book aside: “it seldom happens, that study terminates in mere pastime” for “Books always have a secret influence on the understanding; we cannot at pleasure obliterate ideas” (*J Works* 2: 491). This “secret influence” forces its “ideas” on us and does not wait on our “pleasure” – the imaginary may pertinaciously intrude into everyday existence and disrupt it. Here we turn away from a concern with the interplay of the imagination and the imaginary purely in the domain of the aesthetic, and seek instead to further trace their influences in relation not only to Johnson’s personal biography, but also in regards to his conception of existence in general. Here we will also find the obverse and shadowy side of the imagination and the imaginary, an aspect which is embedded in Johnson’s view of aesthetic reception. In the passage from the “Preface to Shakespeare” cited above, for example, Johnson specifically concentrates on the aesthetic “as representing to the auditor what he himself would feel, if he were to do or suffer what is there feigned to be suffered or done,” and while “The reflection that strikes the heart is not, that the evils which are before us are real evils,” they are still “evils,” and more specifically “evils to which we ourselves may be exposed” (*J Works* 7: 78) without our willful assent.

In “*The Rambler No. 89*” for “*Tuesday, 22 January 1751*” (*J Works* 4: 104), Johnson ostensibly treats the paradox “advanced” by “Locke,” which posits “that whoever hopes to employ any part of his time with efficacy and vigour, must allow some of it to pass in trifles,” since “It is beyond the power of

humanity to spend a whole life in profound study and intense meditation,” and hence “the most rigorous exacters of industry and seriousness have appointed hours for relaxation and amusement” (*J Works* 4: 105). Yet in this context, Johnson also reveals the autonomous and negative aspects of his view of the imagination and the imaginary. On one side, Johnson at times conceives of “imagination” in the sense employed by Hobbes and Locke as a functionary of the memory which allows us to recall images of things or events not immediately or actually present, such as in the “Preface to Shakespeare,” when he says that “the imagination is recreated by a painted landscape,” here using “imagination” to specifically refer to an image in the mind. Such imaginations are not conflated with the actual presence which is the hallmark of the real, and hence “the trees are not supposed capable to give us shade, or the fountain coolness” (*J Works* 7: 78). Yet on the other side, Johnson attributes a distinct autonomy and irrationality to the imagination. In “*The Rambler No. 89. Tuesday, 22 January 1751*” (*J Works* 4: 104), Johnson writes: “It is certain, that, with or without our consent, many of the few moments allotted us will slide imperceptibly away, and that the mind will break, from confinement to its stated task, into sudden excursions” (*J Works* 4: 105). Again we find a superseding of the will as the agent which gives “consent,” wherein “the mind” takes the opportunity to “break ... from” its present, rationally directed “task” and go abroad beyond itself “into sudden excursions.” Those “whose business is to think,” a conglomerate of which Johnson is no doubt to be numbered (an inclusion which assuredly would not be lost on Johnson himself), are particularly disposed and susceptible to “the art of regaling [the] mind with those airy gratifications” which cause “the mind” under the sway of the influence of the imagination to be subject to a state of an “invisible riot” (*J Works* 4: 106). Such individuals initially lose themselves in the “voluntary visions” of the imagination “by choice” and depart from “the journey of life,” and thereby “instead of pressing onward with a steady pace, delight themselves with momentary deviations” (*J Works* 4: 106). Yet these “voluntary visions” are themselves another form of lostness to which Dasein may become subjected. In this passage, Johnson explicitly tropes “life” as a “journey,” and while he doesn’t specify a distinct goal, such a “journey” still must move “onward”; and hence “life” should not be taken as referring to “life” simply in a biological sense, but rather can be read as indicating a view of life as existence (i.e. as an ex-isting) – which is to say, as *Insein*, and thus as an ongoing process. In this context, the “deviations” occasioned by such lostness are

“momentary” in the sense that their accompanying “delight[s]” turn Being away from its authentic orientation towards the future by concentrating to the exclusion of all other concerns on a seemingly unending succession of equally transient presents.

Yet while such diversions are at first willfully pursued, in time the practitioner may come to find her/himself in thrall to the demands and control of the imaginary. Johnson describes the processes and progress of this disorder in language applicable to our phenomenological conception of the aesthetic:

The dreamer retires to his apartments, shuts out the cares and interruptions of mankind, and abandons himself to his own fancy; new worlds rise up before him, one image is followed by another, and a long succession of delights dances round him. He is at last called back to life by nature, or by custom, and enters peevish into society, because he cannot mold it to his own will ... The infatuation strengthens by degree, and, like the poison of opiates, weakens his powers, without any external symptom of malignity. (*J Works* 4: 106)

“The dreamer,” in manner similar to the idlers discussed in the previous section, “retires” from the everyday business and “custom[s]” of “life” of the “they” aggregated as “society” – a self-secluding underscored by specifically referring to the scene of retirement as “apartments” (i.e. apart-ments). “The dreamer” next passively enacts a process of self-alienation by “abandon[ing] himself to his own fancy” – which is to say, dreamers give themselves up to the imagination, since (as we have seen) Johnson uses the terms “fancy” and “imagination” more or less interchangeably. But here the imagination, as something to which one may “abandon” oneself, can no longer be viewed only as a faculty presumably to a lesser or greater degree under the control of the one who imagines; but has rather become a manner of schematizing related to the fictive insofar as it is a medium through which the imaginary is disclosed. These “new worlds” are modalities of reality as shapes of the imaginary [*gestalten des Imaginären*] analogous to the realities instantiated as aesthetic worlds in that they are comprised of a series of “image[s].” At first, the dreamer’s repudiation of “society” is due to the fact that one “cannot mold it” according to the dictates of one’s “own will”; but as “the infatuation” with imaginary worlds “strengthens by degree[s]” like the addictive properties of “the poison of opiates,” one’s “powers” are ironically ever more and more

“weakened.” Thus, in the end, dreamer becomes an addict more or less wholly dominated by the imaginary – at least internally, since there is no external “symptom of malignity” which can be detected.

The detailed and vivid description of the stages of the process of becoming subsumed by the imagination and the imaginary inevitably trigger speculations on our part involving the pernicious influence of both in Johnson’s own existence. We know, for instance, that Johnson himself used opium. Although he did not take opium until later in life, some time after composing the above passage, he appears to have certain established views in regards to the effects of narcotics, which could have been formed at any time from observations not only of himself, but of others, since “from the middle of the eighteenth century ... the moderate use of opium ... was the most common single medical treatment for calming the nervous system, in everything from heart palpitation and troubles in breathing to digestive spasm” (*SJ* 585). Even though “Sir Astley Cooper’s” groundbreaking research concerning “addiction to opiates” was not published until “many years later (1824)” (*SJ* 585); Johnson appears to have recognized its addictive properties on his own. When Johnson himself was prescribed opium, “Despite his physicians, he cut [his] prescribed dose to a sixth ... and in addition, did not even take” the prescribed “amount daily but confined it to two or three times a week” (*SJ* 586). In connection with Johnson’s related speculations concerning the medical field, sanity, and the possession or loss of self-control, Hester Lynch Piozzi notes in her *Anecdotes* that Johnson “studied medicine diligently in all its branches,” and adds he “had given particular attention to the diseases of the imagination, which he watched in himself with a solicitude destructive of his own peace.”¹²⁶ This solicitude,” in the opinion of Ms. Thrale, was due to “his over-anxious care to retain without blemish the perfect sanity of mind,” and ironically had “contributed much to disturb it” (*J Misc* 1: 199). Yet G.B. Hill departs from this view, writing in a footnote, “I believe that there is great exaggeration in Mrs. Piozzi’s statement” (*J Misc* 1: 199, n. 6). Hill cites as evidence for his qualification of Ms. Piozzi’s statements Johnson’s desires expressed in his *Prayers and Meditations* “to write a history of my melancholy” (*J Misc* 1: 48), but it is difficult to see how this invalidates Mrs. Piozzi’s speculations, especially in light of Johnson’s next two sentences, wherein he expresses uncertainty in regards to both the proposed project

¹²⁶ Hester Lynch Piozzi, “Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson, LL. D.”, *Johnsonian Miscellanies*, ed. G.B. Hill, 2 vols. (Oxford 1897) 1: 199.

itself, as well as the possible effect such an endeavor would have on his own mind and sanity: “On this purpose I plan to deliberate. I know not whether it may not too much disturb me” (*J Misc* 1: 48). Hill furthermore for some unknown reason disregards or neglects his own footnote to this passage:

[Johnson] later wrote to Boswell, twelve years later: – ‘Make it an invariable and obligatory law to yourself never to mention your own mental diseases; if you are never to speak of them you will think of them but little, and if you think little of them they will molest you rarely.’ *Life*, iii. 421 (*J Misc* 1: 48)

It is clear that not only does Johnson evidence repeated, and at times obsessive, “solicitude” of self-observation and assessment; but also that he sees such “solicitude” as a self-perpetuating and self-feeding danger in itself, especially when one passively gives oneself up to such an attitude, and thereby risks being “molest[ed]” by such “mental diseases.” In “*The Rambler No. 8. Saturday, 14 April 1750*” (*J Works* 3: 40), Johnson extends such concerns to the domain of the “imagination” and advocates for “the importance of keeping reason a constant guard over imagination” (*J Works* 3: 43), since “the pleasure of fancy, and the emotions of desire are more dangerous as they are more hidden, since they escape the awe of observation” (*J Works* 3: 46). When the “imagination” is unchecked by “reason,” it becomes a “disease of the soul” (*J Works* 3: 43). Here Johnson goes beyond a mere medical diagnoses of the disorders of the “imagination” as merely forms of a psychological mental disorder, and instead conceives it as infecting the essence and totality of one’s Being and existence.

But Johnson at the same time recognizes that the projective capacities of the imagination as a reaching beyond itself are essential to our Being as human, specifically in regards to the temporal, futural character of Being. In the study and assessment of “this disease of the soul,” therefore, “it is of utmost importance to apply remedies at the beginning,” and for this reason Johnson says he “shall endeavour to show what thoughts are to be rejected or improved, as they regard the past present, or future” (*J Works* 3: 43). It is “In futurity chiefly” that “the snares” are “lodged, by which the imagination is intangled,” insofar as “Futurity is the proper abode of hope and fear, with all their train and progeny of subordinating apprehensions and desires” (*J Works* 3: 45). It is “In futurity” that “events and chances are yet floating at large” (*J Works* 3: 45), and hence “futurity” itself is the site of potentialities-for-Being. The past, for its

part, as a “recollection” of ways of having-been, “is only useful” in regards to futurity “by way of provision for the future” (*J Works* 3: 44). In Chapter 30 of *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* (1759), Johnson appears to assign ascendancy to the past, for “To judge rightly of the present we must oppose it to the past, for all judgment is comparative, and of the future nothing can be known” (*J Works* 16: 112). But he continues by characterizing the present as being determined by both the past and the future, and concludes “The truth is, that no mind is much employed upon the present,” since “recollection and anticipation fill up almost all our moments” (*J Works* 16: 112). For Johnson even the act of “recollection” is a way of Being-towards the future. “Recollection” becomes in a very direct sense a re-collection wherein we make provision (both as a storehouse of supplies and as a pro-vision) for the future. The futural orientation of recollection is clarified by Johnson’s views regarding the study of history which follow the above quoted passage from *Rasselas*. While “The present state of things is the consequence of” past events, and hence is an extension of having-been as historicity, the real significance of history is moral, and thus “it is natural to inquire what were the sources of the good that we enjoy, or of the evil that we suffer” (*J Works* 16: 112). Yet this is not to say that the study of history is recommended so that we can merely assess and calibrate the relative good or ill of our present state; but rather is advocated so that we may provide ourselves with new directions for future existence, both in regard to ourselves and our Being-with-others; thus Johnson writes, “If we act only for ourselves, to neglect the study of history is not prudent: if we are entrusted with the care of others, it is not just” (*J Works* 16: 112-113). The moral dimension of historical recollection is akin to the aesthetic, and as such is dependent on imaginative capacities and is concerned primarily with

the progress of the human mind, the gradual improvement of reason, the successive advances of science, the vicissitudes of learning and ignorance which are the light and darkness of thinking beings, the extinction and resuscitation of the arts, and the revolutions of the intellectual world. (*J Works* 16: 113)

History provides, and is illustrated by, distinct “Example[s],” which are “always more efficacious than precept[s]” (*J Works* 16: 113), which is the domain of philosophy in general, and ethics in particular, and may be expanded to include various codes of conduct relevant to specific professions or callings. As

vehicles of illustration, such “Example[s]” are aesthetic insofar as they are conveyed through distinct images, be they verbal or pictorial. For this reason, “contemplative life,” which in one of its guises is centered in the aesthetic, “has the advantage: great actions are seldom seen, but the labours of art are always at hand for those who desire to know what art has been able to perform” (*J Works* 16: 113).

Insofar as the present is concerned only with a generalized knowing of actualities in the world of the real, it is limited to “thoughts on present things” (or in our terms mere presences-at-hand), is “determined” and constrained “by the objects before us” (*J Works* 3: 45), and hence has ceased to enjoin projective, modalizing existence, and thus is more or less empty since it is not opened out towards futurity as the site of potentialities-for-Being. Yet it is precisely in this affective emptiness of the present that futurity gains ascendancy and what Johnson terms “the ‘hunger of imagination,’ or what he elsewhere calls the ‘hunger of mind’” (*ASJ* 64) is disclosed – a hunger which seeks to found its own alternative reality, and which itself feeds off the imaginary. Here Johnson

puts in a strong metaphor a perception almost constantly present in Johnson’s writing: that ‘few of the hours of life are filled up with objects *adequate to the mind of man*,’ since the mind of man can conceive so much more than the present can ever supply. We are therefore ‘forced to have recourse, every moment, to the past and future for *supplemental* satisfactions’ [*Rambler* 41]. (*ASJ* 64)

For this reason, addressing the same issue in “*The Rambler No. 203. Tuesday, 25 February 1752*,” Johnson writes, “It seems to be the fate of man to seek all his consolations in futurity. The time present is seldom able to fill desire or imagination with immediate enjoyment, and we are forced to supply its deficiencies by recollection or anticipation” (*J Works* 5: 291). The perceived insufficiency and emptiness of the present which seeks to be “filled up” is only empty when placed in comparison with what “the mind of man can conceive” – which is to say, due to the imagination’s anticipation of, or desire for, fulfillments envisioned as slumbering in the imaginary, one may attribute an emptiness to the present which in fact does not inhere in the present in and of itself, but is rather an echo and reflex of an internal emptiness – an emptiness which

Heidegger refers to as Being's apprehension of itself as "*being* the thrown basis of a nullity" (BT 325).¹²⁷

Johnson further details the manner in which Being may be directed towards, and subordinated to, the future as the site of the imaginary in his discussion of "Curiosity" in "*The Rambler No. 103. Tuesday, 12 March 1751*" (*J Works* 4: 184). While "Curiosity is one of the permanent and certain characteristics of a vigorous intellect," and while through the force of its influence "Every advance into knowledge opens up new prospects, and produces new incitements to farther progress," we nevertheless inevitably find that

All the attainments possible in our present state are evidently inadequate to our capacities of enjoyment; conquest serves no purpose but that of kindling ambition, discovery has no effect but of raising expectation; the gratification of one desire encourages another, and after all our labours, studies, and enquiries, we are continually at the same distance from the completion of our schemes, have still some wish importunate to be satisfied, and some faculty restless and turbulent for want of employment. (*J Works* 4: 184-185)

Here again we find the same nagging insufficiency and emptiness of the present, but at the same time another dimension of the "hunger of the imagination" is made explicit. Not only is the appetite kindled by "Every advance" which supposedly new horizons of Being as "new prospects," but insofar as these "advance[s]" consistently "produce ... new incitements to farther progress," we continually become swept up in a vortex of self-encircling energies which feed off of themselves – energies which at the same time feed off those caught up in them. Since "we do not find that any of the wishes of men keep a stated proportion to their powers of attainment" (*J Works* 4: 332), and since "The desires of mankind are much more numerous than their attainments, and the capacity of imagination much larger than actual enjoyment" (*J Works* 4: 191), if we are held long enough in thrall to such "wishes" and "desires," we will eventually come to discover that "Every desire, however innocent, grows dangerous, as by long indulgence it becomes ascendent [sic] in the mind" (*J Works* 5: 312), for "We are in danger from whatever can get possession of our thoughts" (*J Works* 3: 38). It is precisely at this point that the imagination ceases to be a faculty more or less under the control of the conscious will and "becomes ascendent," and concomitantly the imaginary becomes a power of imposition under the sway of which Being is waylaid – a subjection

¹²⁷ Cf. *supra* "The Aesthetic As *Erfahrung*: The Call and the Moment of Vision" (II.b.ii).

with which Johnson himself, given his own compulsions and obsessions, was undoubtedly personally intimate. Thus we see that the “hunger of the imagination” eventually exposes Being to the devouring imaginary.

In the mouth of the devouring imaginary, the imagination is no longer simply a faculty that can be controlled and becomes instead a more or less a detached, autonomous force. By wholly turning its back on the present, the imagination turns back on itself: “When fed with objective knowledge the ‘hunger of imagination’ may be turned to profit and lead to growth. But if this awareness is lacking, as is generally the case, the imagination will seek to fill itself in some other way, or will uneasily begin to prey upon itself” (*ASJ* 65). The same conflict between the “objective” sphere of “reality” and the “imagination” is referred to in “*The Idler No. 88. Saturday, 22 December 1759*” (*J Works* 2: 273). Such a conflict occurs when an individual “compares what he has done with what he has left undone” (*J Works* 2: 274) – which is to say, when one “compares” one’s present state of Being with a projected potential way of Being. As a result, such an individual

will look with contempt upon his own unimportance, and wonder to what purpose he came in to the world; he will repine that he shall leave behind him no evidence of his having been, that he has added nothing to the system of life, but has glided from youth to age among the crowd, without any effort for distinction. (*J Works* 2: 274)

While ostensibly this passage is a meditation on fame and one’s ability or inability to attain it, even though it is a concept of fame which is predicated on a “mistaken notion of human greatness” (*J Works* 2: 274); it at the same time nevertheless speaks to the divide between “the crowd” of the “they” and an unfulfilled vision of an authentic self and shows how in such cases the imagination turns back on the one who formerly wielded it and exacts a sort of revenge. In both these instances, the corrective of influence of facticity (which as we have seen Johnson repeatedly stresses) is no longer an option, insofar as such a corrective is no longer available to one who has peered into the maw of the imaginary; yet at the same time, she/he still has the option to seek some solace, and potentially an eventual corrective, in the field of the aesthetic.

Paul Fussell's view of "Johnson's theory of literary pleasure" can be seen as being based on the same conflict between an insufficient "present," which does not look towards any future and is constrained by the inauthentic, fallen modes of the "they"; and the potential for Dasein to re-turn to its "there," become resolute, and temporalize itself in regards to the future and its ownmost potentialities-for-Being. Johnson's model of aesthetic reception "can be called humanistic because, like Reynolds's theory of artistic pleasure, it starts from an empirical examination of the nature of man, the creature distinguished by an 'impatience of the present' which stimulates his perpetual 'hunger of imagination'" (Fussell 50). But here "impatience" may also be an impetus for moving beyond a limiting and restrictive present. Fussell posits (quoting from Johnson's *Life of Butler*) "variety" as "The great source of [literary] pleasure" (Fussell 50). By seeing "pleasure" primarily as a result of "variety," he could be seen as more or less limiting the range of influence of the aesthetic to a merely diversionary, entertainment value; while on the other hand, "variety" may also refer to a range of possible aesthetic variations and worlds. Such worlds may become the arena for the transformative potentialities of the aesthetic, which through the combined effect of aesthetic non-differentiation and aesthetic distancing thematizes the boundaries between the real and reality, inauthentic and authentic Being, calls them into question, and eventually permits one to reflect an aesthetic event back into lived existence. In this way, the imaginary itself, when channeled through the aesthetic, may provide a means towards becoming resolute. Similarly for the artist her/himself, we have seen how the aesthetic may provide a medium wherein Being may return to its "there," attain resoluteness, and take up a direction towards the realization of its ownmost potentialities-for-Being.

In the poem "ΓΝΩΘΙΣ ΕΑΥΤΟΝ (POST LEXICON ANGLICANUM AUCTUM ET EMEDNATUM.) / KNOW YOURSELF (AFTER REVISING AND ENLARGING THE ENGLISH LEXICON, OR DICTIONARY.)," written on "12. Dec. 1772" (*J Works* 6: 273),¹²⁸ Johnson addresses the issue of becoming resolute, attaining authenticity, and the possibility of projecting our selves upon our ownmost potentialities-for-Being from the position of an insufficient present. In this poem, Johnson

¹²⁸ "The translation" with which we will be working "was written by Murphy for his *Life*, 1792, p.82" (*J Works* 6: 271, ed. note). All future references to the poem will be designated only by line number/s parenthetically enclosed within the body of the text following the relevant passage.

“returned once more to an allegory of human life” (Lipking 351), a form which as we have seen is for Johnson principally concerned with the choice of life – or in other words, with the issue of *Insein* and the grounding of authentic Being as indicated by the Socratic dictum “KNOW YOURSELF” which provides the main title for the poem. Here we also return to the mode of moral *exempla* we saw Johnson employ in *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, but in this instance we do not find the same historical distance and tendency towards abstraction which comprises the main body of the earlier work; but rather encounter a “very personal poem” (*J Works* 6: 271, ed. note), which in the view of Lipking, is “one of [the] most personal (and most neglected) works Johnson ever wrote” (351).¹²⁹ The fact that Johnson originally wrote the poem in Latin underscores the intensely personal qualities of the work, for “Johnson would write in Latin, a language that allowed him to hide sensitive thoughts from some others while exploring those thoughts himself.”¹³⁰ Here again we also turn along with Johnson towards the issues of aesthetic appropriation and application and the potentiality for becoming resolute which we addressed in our discussion of *London*, but now these issues possess a pointed immediacy for Johnson himself – an immediacy and insistence compelled and heightened by incursions of the devouring imaginary.

The “personal” situation of the poem as an instigating occasion for the writing of the poem itself is ostensibly the cessation of Johnson’s work on revising the *Dictionary*. In this poem, “Johnson records his emotional exhaustion after revising the *Dictionary* for its fourth folio edition (1773)” (Weinbrot 83). Johnson opens the poem by turning towards the past as the site and source of ways of having-been disclosed in this case through the historical *exempla* of “Scaliger” (1). Yet unlike the majority of *exempla* presented in *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (with the exception of “the young enthusiast” [136]), the situation of the Classical scholar, poet, and textual theorist Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540-1609) is directly analogous and applicable to Johnson’s own. Through the first 46 lines of the poem, however, the comparison remains implicit, for while reference is made to Scaliger’s “whole years of labour past” in the

¹²⁹ This is not to say that *The Vanity of Human Wishes* was in no way a personal poem for Johnson, especially in light of reports that there were portion of the poem which Johnson could not read without becoming subject to fits of emotion but only intended to distinguish a personally affecting work from one dealing with personal situations.

¹³⁰ Howard D. Weinbrot, *Aspects of Samuel Johnson: Essays on His Arts, Mind, Afterlife, and Politics*, (Newark, Delaware: U Delaware Pr., 2005) 83.

opening line, Johnson does not refer explicitly to his own “task” having been “perform’d, and all [his] labours o’er” until line 47. Reading back into the opening lines, we obtain a clearer picture of the roots of Johnson’s own situation. Like Scaliger, Johnson “weary of his task,” looked up from his work “with wond’ring eyes” (3) to see the results of his efforts like “a fabric rise” – yet the work of the *Dictionary* as “a fabric” comprised only of “words pil’d on words” (4) is not a carefully interwoven whole, but merely a hodgepodge of fragments and loosely scattered building-blocks of words without an articulated, organic structure. Johnson expresses his amazement that such “creeping toil ... could persist so long” (6) without looking up to view the sum of its labors, both as in their entirety and a way of Being (i.e. as a form of *sum*, I am). Like Johnson, Scaliger “upon finishing his own dictionary regarded lexicography as a form of punishment” (Weinbrot 83) and imprisonment; and hence Johnson in his poem describes “The drudgery of words” as something only “the damn’d world would, / Doom’d to write lexicons in endless woe” (10-11).

The “personal” situation of the poem, however, on the most fundamental ontological level, is Johnson confronting possible futures from the position of an empty present – an emptiness ostensibly opened up by the conclusion of his work on the *Dictionary*. This present vacuity, therefore, has its roots in Johnson’s own past as comprised of manners of having-been. The foregoing comparison with Scaliger undergoes further development wherein Johnson is negatively defined in opposition to Scaliger in relation to their respective projective potentialities, and causes Johnson’s turning towards the past as the site of a way of having-been to assume a more decidedly personal dimension. First Johnson presents the positive pole of the comparison in his direct address to Scaliger:

Yes, you had cause, great genius! To repent;
 “You lost good days, that might be better spent;”
 You might well grudge the hours of ling’ring pain,
 And view your learned labours with disdain.
 To you were giv’n the large expanded mind,
 The flames of genius, and the taste refin’d.
 ‘Twas yours on eagle’s wings to soar,
 And amidst rolling worlds the Great First Cause Explore;

To fix the aeras of recorded time,
 And live in ev'ry age and ev'ry clime ...
 To learn whate'er the sage with virtue fraught,
 Whate'er the Muse of mortal wisdom taught.
 These were your quarry; these to you were known,
 And the world's ample volume was your own. (11-20; 23-26)

Again reading back into the foregoing lines, we find Johnson drawing a negative comparison between himself and Scaliger in personal terms with the repetition of “you “ and “yours” (the latter being implied as an antecedent in lines 19-24) – against which we can almost hear Johnson’s tacitly reiterated rejoinder, “not I.” When Johnson says to Scaliger, “You had cause ... to repent,” the implication is that he himself has no “cause ... to repent” (11), nor did Johnson have any “good days” which could have been “better spent” (12). While Johnson sees the countless “hours” he exhausted engrossed in the *Dictionary* project as moments of “ling’ring pain” (13); and in the end, while he no less “view[s]” his own learned labours with disdain” (14), there persists Johnson’s own acknowledgment of his personal insufficiency for anything better than lexicographical drudgework. Since unlike Scaliger, Johnson does not believe himself to be a “great genius” (11), nor since there was ever “giv’n” to him “the large expanded mind, / The flame of genius, and the taste refin’d” (15-16), he is unable to realize his ownmost potentialities-for-Being in any one of a wide range of fields. Due to his perceived lack of “genius” (11, 16), Johnson neither views himself in the role of a philosopher who is able “on eagle wings aloft to soar, / And amidst rolling worlds the First Great Cause explore” (17-18); nor does he suppose himself to be fit for the endeavors of the historian, who is able “To fix the aeras of recorded time, / And live in ev’ry age and ev’ry clime” (19-20); nor does he prize himself as an artist, who is able “to learn whate’er the sage with virtue fraught, / Whate’er the Muse of moral wisdom taught” (23-24). In this context, “moral wisdom,” insofar as it has its own “Muse” through whose agency it is “taught,” is a form of aesthetic knowledge concerned with the issue of existence. Johnson rhetorically says to Scaliger in regard to these fields that “These were your quarry” (25) – “quarry” here serving as both a noun as an area of mining and a verb as the act of excavating, as the uncovering of something and bringing it to light – as well as a “quarry” as an object of a pursuit or hunt. In

the conclusion of his address to Scaliger, Johnson offers his summation of Scaliger's accomplishments, positing that since "these" fields "to you were known" (25), as a result "the world's ample volume was your own" (26). Here again in the reference to "the world's ample volume" Johnson not only makes a passing reference to the *book of nature*, but also strikes a note whose overtones are in harmony with the aesthetic and serve to sustain the echo of "the Muse of moral wisdom."

Johnson makes the polar comparison between himself and Scaliger explicit in the next section and turns toward a direct consideration of his own shortcomings and existential situation, both of which have been progressively brought to light through the previously established and elaborated contrasts with his predecessor. In making the comparison between himself and Scaliger, Johnson at the same time effectively places himself in a position similar to the reader's wherein Scaliger becomes an *exemplum* in light of whom Johnson weighs himself. Yet for Johnson the manner of Being and the reality associated with Scaliger are not able to be appropriated: "For me, though his example strike my view, / Oh! not for me his footsteps to pursue" (29-30). Next Johnson speculates on the causes of his apparent shortcomings, but soon abandons the project:

Whether first Nature, unpropitious, cold,
This clay compounded in a ruder mould;
Or the slow current, loit'ring at my heart,
No gleam of wit or fancy can impart;
Whate'er the cause, from me no numbers flow,
No visions warm me, and no raptures glow. (31-36)

The first possible "cause" (35) is assigned to "Nature," which as "unpropitious" and "cold" (31), had originally "compounded" the "clay" from which Johnson was formed "in a ruder mould" (32) (here echoing not any Judeo-Christian account of creation or the emergence of individual souls, but rather recalling the Greek myth of Prometheus), and hence the "cause" lies in Johnson's own inborn abilities and disposition as created, which in comparison with Scaliger's makeup are comparatively "ruder." The second possible "cause" also refers to some supposed lack in Johnson's innate abilities and disposition, but in this case Johnson locates it in his manner of Being which is defined and restricted by "the slow current,

loit'ring at my heart," which "No gleam of wit or fancy can impart" (33-34). Johnson then forsakes his speculations and leaves the matter undecided, for the answer is of no useful consequence and to indulge any further would be speculation for mere speculation's sake. What is important is not the fact of one's shortcomings in themselves, but rather (as it is repeatedly in Johnson's works) that one personally confronts the existential problematic of the *is* – in other words, Being must sacrifice every self-evasion and honestly encounter the parameters and horizons of its own *situation*. Being's encountering its ownmost situation and emerging into the moment of vision at the same time involves the nexus of temporality in its ecstatic unity, since (as we have seen) the moment of vision "must be understood in the active sense as an ecstasis," which is "the resolute rapture with which Dasein is carried away to whatever possibilities and circumstances are encountered in the Situation as possible objects of concern" (*BT* 338). But for Johnson in his current situation the future is apparently closed-off, and hence the present is concomitantly empty, since as Johnson says, "from me no numbers flow, / No visions warm me, and no raptures glow" (35-36). Here Johnson considers his Being and its situation in relation to the aesthetic. His inability to project himself is equated with his inability to compose the "numbers" (35) of poetic verse, and his failure to enter into the moment of "vision" which grounds and energizes authentic projection and attain the "raptures" (36) of ecstatic temporality, are all described in terms of aesthetic phenomena – terms which are hardly associated with the "Neo-Classical" or "Augustan," but rather bespeak an emerging trend which will eventually be codified as "Romanticism." Similarly, in his speculations on the possible sources of his shortcomings, Johnson emphasizes the centrality of the aesthetic in relation to the issue of Being by positing the "gleam of wit or fancy" as potentially able to "impart" (34) impetus to "the slow current" (33) at the center of his present Being.

The analogy between Being and the aesthetic also underlies Johnson's consideration of Scaliger's strengths in the next section of the poem – strengths which play out in the sphere of the aesthetic. No longer does Johnson place himself in self-depreciating comparison with his predecessor as if taking his own advice, but rather holds Scaliger forth both to himself (and at the same time to us) as a paradigm of resoluteness and the enactment of authentic existence:

A mind like Scaliger's, superior still,

No Grief could conquer, no misfortune chill.
 Though for the maze of words his native skies
 He seem'd to quit, 'twas but again to rise;
 To mount once more to the bright source of day,
 And view the wonders of the aetherial way.
 The love of fame, his gen'rous bosom fir'd;
 For him the sons of learning trimm'd the bays,
 And nations grew harmonious in his praise. (37-46)

Even though the implicit, negative comparison between Scaliger and Johnson nevertheless continues to underlie the first part of the above passage, the emphasis has already begun to shift. While “A mind like Scaliger’s” remains “superior still” (37) to Johnson (and therefore presumably to us), this superiority is no longer simply a natural endowment, but rather is attributable to his fortitude and strength of character – qualities which are themselves forms of resoluteness – that “No Grief could conquer, no misfortune chill” (38). Unlike Johnson, Scaliger only “*seem’d* [emphasis mine] to quit” (40) the demesne of “his native skies” as he merely appeared to lose himself in “the maze of words” (39) – a “maze” from which he was “again to rise” (40). At this point, the *exempla* of Scaliger for Johnson becomes positive. If Scaliger could “again ... rise,” then perhaps Johnson could too, and even if Johnson cannot return “to the bright source of day, / And view the wonders of the aetherial way” since he has never like Scaliger beheld such a vision, he might at the very least return from shadowed seclusion to a more humble light. Phrases such as the “bright source of day” and “the wonders of the aetherial way” again presage what is generally considered Romantic imagery and again as above herald a return to a concern with the aesthetic. While Scaliger’s “gen’rous bosom” was on one level “fir’d” by “The love of fame” (43), and while “Each science hail’d him” for his erudition; he was “inspir’d” by “each Muse” (44), and his reward from “the sons of learning” was “the bays” (45) of the laurel wreath reserved not for mere scholars but rather is the triumphant sign of poets.

Returning to the present moment of the poem itself, with his “task perform’d, and all [his] labours o’er” (47), Johnson is forced to turn towards the future and ask, “For me what lot has Fortune now in store?” (48). Yet at this point, the future appears foreclosed by the vacuity of the present opened up by the inauthenticity of Johnson’s having-been – a present wherein for all intents and purposes projection seems impossible. Johnson’s diagnosis of his own mood as the consequence of the “worst disease” wherein “The listless will succeeds” (49) is equated with “The rack of indolence, the sluggish ease” (50), wherein “Care grows on care, and o’er my aching brain / Black melancholy pours her morbid train” (51-52). Here in both the hypertrophy of “care” and the pernicious influence of “Black melancholy” we can detect signs of the incursions of the devouring imaginary. “Care” in this context is not used in its positive, everyday sense as a “Charge” or “oversight with a view to protection, preservation, or guidance,” or the act of “tak[ing] thought for, provid[ing] for, look[ing] after, [and] tak[ing] care of”; but rather refers to its negative and more obscure usages as noun indicating “Mental suffering, sorrow grief, trouble”; or as a verb meaning “To be troubled, uneasy, or anxious,” as well as “To mourn, lament.” “Care” in the latter sense defines a state of Being wherein one becomes possessed and depotentiated by a “Burdened state of mind arising from fear, doubt or concern about anything; solicitude, anxiety, mental perturbation.”¹³¹ The former sense is temporally characterized by a focus on the present, for in spite of its apparent orientation towards the future as “a view to protection, preservation, or guidance,” all these conditions take place in the present and refer to the threats or opportunities as they are revealed in the present moment. Whereas in the latter sense, we find a mood defined by either regret or anxiety [*Angst*]. “Mental suffering, sorrow, grief, [and] trouble,” in this context refer not to the debilitations contingent upon some direct, immediate cause, but rather refer to the past as a site of loss or the future as a site of undefined intimidation. Attuned as anxiety, Being is confronted by a negative and threatening vision and anticipation of the future. Insofar as such cares arise from a vision from a future characterized by uncertainty, and hence occasions an attitude of doubt, it is a reflection of the devouring imaginary in that the imaginary is the domain of the future as the site of potentialities-for-Being. Similarly the “Black melancholy” which “o’er [Johnson’s] aching brain ... pours her morbid train” also can be traced back to incursions of the devouring imaginary. The image of “Black

¹³¹ “Care,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, New Ed.

melancholy” as a “morbid train” recalls our previous treatment of Hobbes’s “TRAIN *of Imaginations*” (12).¹³² In the context of the poem, the “morbid train” conducted by “Black melancholy” as a “train of thoughts, or mental discourse” is related to the initial form which Hobbes characterizes as “*unguided, without design*, and inconstant, wherein there is no passionate thought to govern and direct those that follow to itself, as the end and scope of some other passion; in which case the thoughts are said to wander, and seem impertinent one to another, as in a dream” (12). The lack of guidance and “design” finds a corollary in the poem both in the passivity of a state of Being dominated by “The listless will” (49), “indolence,” and “sluggish ease” (50), as well as in the “aching brain” which supplies the passive vessel into which such “morbid train[s]” are “pour[ed]” (51). This passivity also conditions a disaffected state wherein a fundamental attunement as a mood or “passionate thought,” and hence an attunement as a Being-towards “as the end and scope of some other passion,” are both lacking. In such a passive state, an empty space is opened in the vacuum left by the withdrawal of the imagination as an active projecting wherein the imaginary is able to intrude specifically in the form of the “morbid train” of thoughts and images steered by the shadowed agency of “Black melancholy.” Later in the poem, Johnson again addresses this issue and offers a more detailed schemata of the incursions of the devouring imaginary in regards to his own present, ontological situation. Johnson turns his glance inward:

I view myself, while reason’s feeble light
Shoots a pale glimmer through the gloom of night,
While passions, error, phantoms of the brain,
And vain opinions, fill the dark domain;
A dreary void, where fears with grief combin’d
Waste all within, and desolate the mind. (75-80)

In the act of self-reflection, “reason’s . . . light” (75) is merely “feeble” and is too weak to effectively penetrate “the gloom of night” (76). Null Being itself becomes a vacuum as a “dark domain” (78) and “A dreary void” (79) (in language which looks forward to formulations more commonly associated with post World War II existentialism) which is “fill[ed]” (78) by the invasions of the devouring imaginary in the

¹³² Cf. “Imagination and the Imaginary” (II.a.iii).

forms of “passions” and “error” as “phantoms of the brain” (77). Here we see how the devouring imaginary is a force opposed to “reason” which “Waste[s] all within, and desolate[s] the mind” (79-80). Both “Waste” and “desolate” function as both verbs and adjectives, not only describing the action of the devouring imaginary, but at the same time revealing the debilitated condition of “the mind” itself as the center of Being and the seat of *Insein*.

Johnson “seek[s]” (54) in the mouth of the devouring imaginary some “relief” or “lenitive” (53) first by fleeing back into the “they” as represented by “midnight clubs” and “the social band” (54) – but these diversions “Delight no more” (57) one who has already begun to turn towards the question of authentic Being. Nor is Johnson able to retreat from his own existence by negating his own awareness of his own short-comings by “call[ing] on sleep to sooth [his] languid head” (58), since “sleep from [his] sad lids flies far away” (59), and in the end the temporalizing of temporality falters as he “mourn[s] all night and dread[s] the coming day” (60). The same failure of temporalizing is referred to later in the poem, when Johnson writes, “Whate’er I plan, I feel my pow’rs confined / By Fortune’s frown and penury of mind” (71-72). The future which is projected by Johnson’s “plans” is closed off “By Fortune’s frown” and apparently provides an answer to Johnson’s earlier question asking “For me what lot has Fortune now in store?” (48); while his supposed “penury of mind” is a form of “confine[ment]” conditioned by the past as ways of having-been, since as Johnson writes, “I boast no knowledge glean’d with toil and strife, / That bright reward of a well-acted life” (73-74).

“Exhausted” and “tir’d” by his struggles with himself and the confrontation with the devouring imaginary, Johnson again turns towards the mode of the aesthetic – just as he turned towards the aesthetic in his previous assessment of Scaliger’s strengths – as a way to escape from the devouring imaginary and discovers a site whereupon he can engage in authentic projection: “I throw my eyes around, / To find some vacant spot on classic ground; / And soon, vain hope! I form a grand design” (61-63). This grand design is paralleled to the example of “Phidias” who as an artist “gives” through his creative powers “A form to rugged stone” (67), and hence “Beneath his touch a new creation lives” (68). But at this point, as Johnson says, “languor succeeds, and all my pow’rs decline” (64). Since Johnson’s “pow’rs decline” by his own admission, we may conclude from the conditional that “science” has “not” “open[ed] ... her richest vein”

(65), and that Johnson is indeed “Without materials,” lacking which “all our toil is vain” (66). Not even the “genius” (69) of a “Phidias” is able to overcome such a lack of “materials,” for if we “Remove his marble ... his genius dies” (69). Here we must be careful, however, not to read “materials” as indicating mere presences-at-hand, for while “materials” does on one level refer to the matter which is transformed aesthetically into art, on another level as a specifically aesthetic material it is at the same time the site and the portal for opening the future as the aesthetically enacted disclosing of potentialities-for-Being. Johnson makes this differentiation clear through a bi-valent concept of “Nature” (70) which refers to not only “Nature” as a collection of things as mere presences-at-hand, but also to “Nature” in the sense of inherent Being – both as primordial structure, as well as inborn capabilities. While “With Nature ... no breathing statue vies” if one lacks the “materials” with which to work, the game is no less futile if one is not predisposed to engage in the contest. This conception of “Nature” as the capacity or incapacity to enact a given form of projection is carried over into the next stanza, when Johnson writes, “Whate’er I plan, I feel my powers confin’d” (71). To “plan” is to project, and such “powers” are the extension of our “Nature” are “confin’d” or free depending on the limits of one’s own “Nature.” Yet Johnson hardly endorses a view wherein human nature is fixed and immutable. Insofar as he continues to “plan” (71), and especially in light of the implication of his repeated failures to realize any of his “plan[s],” it is evident that Johnson has refused to give up on projection and a dynamic conception of existence.

At the conclusion of the poem, we find Johnson explicitly taking up the path of the question. In light of the foregoing analysis of his ontological situation, Johnson asks, “What then remains?” (81). Answering his own question, Johnson sees three options:

... Must I in slow decline
to mute inglorious ease old age resign?
Or, bold ambition kindling in my breast,
Attempt some arduous task? Or, were it best
Brooding over lexicons to pass the day,
And in that labour drudge my life away? (81-86).

The first and the third options are for all intents and purposes the same, insofar as both preclude the possibility authentic projection either by giving up in an act of resign[ation]" (82), or by continuing down the same path of mere "drudge[ry]" (86) the poem as a whole speaks so strongly against. Only the second option leaves open the possibility for authentic projection in "some" new work as an "arduous task" (84) to be entered into and borne. Here we return to the point at which we initiated our phenomenological investigations of Johnson by addressing ourselves to his central "question" (*J Works* 2: 476) – that is, the moral question of *how to live*. This question, as we have seen, cannot for Johnson (or for us) be divorced or abstracted from the facticity of Being. In this light, the question then becomes clarified as the question of how to live *in the real*. Johnson always returns from the aesthetic event to the question of application (or at least to the question of becoming prepared for the eventual application) of what has been appropriated through an aesthetic experience in the sphere of lived existence. Nor is this only relevant for Johnson as an artist in search of a direction, but it is also applicable for us as recipients. I agree with Weinbrot's reading of the conclusion of "KNOW THYSELF" as showing how "Johnson understands our concerns because they are his own" (84). While it may be accurate to say subsequently that Johnson "also knows that such concerns must be met by individual responsibility within a larger community," and that "Failure to met obligations, to use one's talents, endangers ourselves and those who depend upon us"; it is more fundamentally true that before Johnson (or anyone) can speak in her or "his public voice" (Weinbrot 84), she/he must first consolidate her/his private, personal voice. As an expression of an individual reality, and in reference to an individual's ontological situation, an aesthetic work first and foremost provides a platform for personal experiments in, and forays of, *Insein*. Thus in the specific case of Johnson, "In private he lets us know how he feels" – a private context which is especially predominant in "KNOW THYSELF," a fact recognized by Johnson himself, since "in the manuscript poem he sent to Mrs. Thrale" he included "a request that she not show it to others" (Weinbrot 84). Earlier in the poem, before he turns fully towards a consideration of his own situation, Johnson addresses the tribe of "pigmy wits" to whom he gives warning, telling them to "beware" (27) and not to "compare" themselves "with immortal Scaliger" (28). Since Johnson reserves for himself the privilege to draw just such a comparison through this rhetorical gesture, he obviously desires to differentiate himself from these "wits," and hence effectively

distinguishes and distances himself from the diminutive creatures of the “they”; while at the same time desiring to (perhaps less obviously) assert some token of his own self-respect – and hereby preserves a self-regard and sense of dignity which are expressions of resoluteness, and hence necessary (although not sufficient) condition for becoming authentic.

But where does this leave us? By entering onto the path of the question, Johnson enjoins a path which is preparedness for resolution and authentic projection. While “Like *The Vanity of Human Wishes* the riveting ‘Post Lexicon Anglicanum’ ends with a series of questions,” and even though these questions in the scope of the poem remain “without answers” (Weinbrot 84), we should not be lead to prematurely conclude that questions may not ultimately be productive. In the view of Lipking, “the poet, in his journey through the night” – a darkness which descends through the encroachments of the devouring imaginary – does not “find a path to a better life (‘melioris semita vitae’),” insofar as “This allegory, like so many others, concludes with nothing concluded,” ending instead “with a series of questions” (352). Yet in the possibilities opened out by such questions, and in preparing for the enacting of a de-cision through the act of questioning itself, “He does receive, however, a proper point of view: look to yourself. Nor can allegory, for Johnson, have any better purpose. To survey the self, one needs to set the world at a distance, by such a process of ‘retirement and abstraction, as may weaken the influence of external objects [*Rambler* 28].’ The visions of poetry, a preceptor knows, supply that distance” (Lipking 352). The “distance” to which Lipking refers is in our terminology the distance between the real and reality, between the aesthetic and the everyday. Furthermore while “The visions of poetry” do indeed “supply that distance,” it at the same time provides a pathway along which we are enabled to return to the real – a pathway which obtains its direction specifically along the path of the question. The series of questions which conclude the poem, therefore, go without direct answers, not because there are no answers, but only because there are no absolute conclusions to be drawn. This openness is on one side a consequence of Being’s temporal, articulating, and projective structure, due to which existence itself can never be concluded – unlike mere narratives of “life” (a term replete with biological connotation, which we have therefore assiduously avoided), existence does not admit closure. The openness underlying and potentiating the structure of the aesthetic equation itself on another side is that which permits the recipient to enter fully into the aesthetic

event. Through enjoining the path of the question, Johnson has prepared not only himself for a decision – a preparedness which in itself is a form and proof of resoluteness – but has also made such preparedness possible for us.

The preparedness for resolution, therefore, is not a permanent state, but must be constantly reaffirmed and reenacted. The reader of Johnson's works as a whole, and his *Diaries, Prayers, and Annals* in particular, on one hand, is inevitably struck by his concern with the recurring assault of what he calls "scruples" or "vain scruples";¹³³ but on the other hand, one is just as consistently impressed by his repeated resolutions to actively oppose them right up until the end of his life. In the final estimation, one who follows Johnson's tribulations is not left with a sense of hopelessness, but rather finds an unswerving optimism and an unshakable resolution – qualities which remain our durable inheritance from the currently often maligned Enlightenment project. Johnson addresses the relationship between resoluteness and overcoming the devouring imaginary and offers a caveat in "*The Rambler No. 129*" written for "*Tuesday, 11 June 1751*" (*J Works* 4: 320):

... few will be persuaded to wish that they may be awakened by want or terror to the conviction of their own abilities. Every one should therefore endeavour to invigorate himself by reason and reflection, and determine to exert the latent force that nature may have reposed in him before the hour of exigence comes upon him, and compulsion shall torture him to diligence. It is below the dignity of a reasonable being to owe that strength to necessity which ought always to act at the call of choice, or to need any other motive to industry than the desire of performing his duty. (*J Works* 4: 324-325)

As emissaries of the devouring imaginary, either "want or terror" may in turn rouse Being to not only an awareness of, but also a "conviction" in, its "own abilities" (*J Works* 4: 324). Against the incursions of the devouring imaginary, we must rely on the countervailing and "invigorat[ing]" forces of "reason and reflection" (*J Works* 4: 324) both of which work to detect and labor to unseat the phantoms of the devouring imaginary. By attaining resoluteness, we "determine to exert the latent force" (*J Works* 4: 324)

¹³³ Cf. *J Works* 1: 64, 70, 82, 84, 99, 105, 106, 108, 110, 155, 161, 276, 363, 368, 378; *J Works* 16: 124, 162-163

which inheres in the primordial structure and slumbering potentialities of Being as *Insein*. While “compulsion” may indeed eventuate the same result, to be “torture[d] ... to diligence ... is below the dignity of a reasonable being” insofar as such “compulsion” implies the loss or surrender of “that strength” (*J Works* 4: 324) which as evidence of free will is not only an essential attribute of Johnson’s Christian view of what constitutes the human, it is more generally a primordial part of our ontological structure. As “act[ing] at the call of choice” (*J Works* 4: 324-325), this “strength” is Being’s capacity to “choose itself” and become its own “hero” (*BT* 385) by responding to the *call of conscience*. Ultimately for Johnson, Being must through responding to its self turn towards, and project itself upon, its ownmost potentialities-for-Being, for “There are qualities in the products of nature yet undiscovered, and combinations in the powers of art yet untried” (*J Works* 4: 325). Nor are these potentialities limited exclusively to an individual existence, and therefore “It is the duty of every man to endeavour that something may be added by his industry to the hereditary aggregate of knowledge and happiness” (*J Works* 4: 325) in the sphere of Being-with-others. Johnson’s imperative is incumbent on us all. While “To add much can indeed be the lot of few,” nevertheless “to add something, however little, every one may hope” (*J Works* 4: 325). Nor does it matter if these potentialities are ever fully realized. It is sufficient that we make the attempt, that we continue to work towards projecting our selves onto our potentialities with a clear eye and an open heart; and if we are persistent in our unflagging efforts, we will discover that “of every honest endeavour it is certain, that, however unsuccessful, it will be at last rewarded.” (*J Works* 4: 325).

IV. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)

a. The Imagination vs. the Imaginary

Samuel Taylor Coleridge is recognized as the foremost theorist on the imagination in the English-speaking world, and even though a number of Coleridge's theories pertaining to the imagination are derived from the German philosophical tradition (particularly from Immanuel Kant and F.W.J. von Schelling), he nevertheless refines the notions of his predecessors and makes undeniably original contributions of his own. The majority of the seemingly numberless commentators who treat Coleridge's philosophy of the imagination deal predominantly with either parsing out the distinction between the fancy, the primary imagination, and the secondary imaginations, or otherwise in delineating the relationship between the imagination and some other aspect of Coleridge's theology, philosophy, or aesthetic theory. Yet in spite of all the attention which Coleridge and the imagination have received, nothing so far has been written concerning Coleridge's philosophy of the imagination and its relationship to the imaginary; therefore, our forays into this arena should be considered in the broadest sense as exploratory. The implications and repercussions of the inclusion of the imaginary in the investigations of Coleridge's works are extensive: no longer can we simply consider the imagination as a faculty solely under the control of the conscious will, but we must also see it as falling under the influence of the imaginary. Our investigation will thus at the outset be concerned with delineating the tensions between what we will call the *voluntary imagination* and the *compulsory imaginary*. This conflict at the same time forces a shift in the conception of the aesthetic event on the sides of both the artist and the recipient, from an experience in the sense of *Erlebnis* towards a conception of aesthetic experience as *Erfahrung*.

But before we can embark on a consideration of the dynamics of the interplay of the imagination and the imaginary, we must first outline the rudiments of Coleridge's conceptions of *the romantic imagination* and its relation to the real and reality, the role of the imagination and imaginary in aesthetic education, and the ontological dynamics of the aesthetic as a medium for ontological projection. These conceptions also have a resonance the echoes of which sound in the sphere of phenomenology; and therefore, we not only discover in Coleridge features which mark him as a precursor to aesthetic

phenomenology, but we will also find herein an expansive territory in which to pursue the path of our own investigations.

In the first installment of his 1818-1819 series of lectures on Shakespeare, Coleridge draws a distinction between “the ethereal connexions of the romantic imagination” and the “historical” imagination.¹³⁴ A historically conditioned imagination demands more overt connections than its counterpart – connections built on supposed relations of cause and effect, place as delineated by surveyors and cartographers, and the superficial sweep of the second-hand as it marks out clock-time; whereas “the romantic imagination” conversely is predicated on “ethereal connections” insofar as such connections are not established in the present-at-hand world of the real, but rather are grounded on the less certain, more cloudy foundations of analogy and correspondence, the topographies of Being projected through *Insein* as modes of ontological realities, and measured by the temporalizing of temporality which underlies the moment of vision. Along these lines, in notes for a later lecture from the 1819 series of “*Lectures on Shakespeare & c.*,” Coleridge notes that in Spencer we find displayed “The marvelous independence or true imaginative absence of all particular place & time – it is neither in the domains of History or Geography, is ignorant of all artificial boundary – truly in the Land of Faery – i.e. in mental space” (*Lect 1808-1819* 2: 409-410). Later in his *Literary Correspondence* from *Blackwood's* x (1821), Coleridge further equates “Fairy Land” with “the World Within” (*SW&F* 2: 916). Both of these descriptions of “the Land of Faery” and of “Fairy Land” as found “in mental space” and “the World within” locate it not only in the language of psychology or metaphysics, but also can be read to place it in an internal ontological space in spatial language which looks forward to Heidegger’s phenomenological, spatial terminology. In fact, the shift from “mental space” to “the World within” overtly works to deemphasize the specifically psychological associations and turns instead towards phenomenological terminology, wherein “the World within” is related to our use of “world” in sense of “reality.” Coleridge himself employs the term “reality” in contradistinction to the world of the real (strangely enough) in his essay “Advice on Marriage” (1821), where he distinguishes “reality” from “all without” (*SW&F* 2: 915). The realm of “all without” is itself for

¹³⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1808-1819 On Literature*, ed. R.A. Foakes, 2 vols., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 5 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1987) 2: 271; hereafter *Lects 1808-1819*.

Coleridge, the result of the “superinduction of the sense of *outness* on the feeling of the *actual*” wherefrom “arises our notion of the *real* and *reality*” (*SW&F* 2: 926). From here “the terms real and actual soon become confounded and interchangeable, or only discriminated in the gold scales of metaphysics” (*SW&F* 2: 926-927). While Coleridge, on one level, is clearly drawing on the Kantian distinction between the merely apparent and an underlying (although in Kant’s opinion inaccessible) reality; on another level, Coleridge holds forth a conception of the domain of reality which is not entirely contained or limited by actuality as presence-at-hand, but is rather daseinal.

“Reality” in Coleridge’s terminology also has an aesthetic dimension, which is informed by all three moments of the aesthetic equation. The term “aesthetic” itself in Coleridge’s definition indicates a “coincidence of form, feeling, and intellect,” which while “confirming the inner and the outward senses,” at the same time “becomes a new sense in itself, to be tried by laws of its own, and acknowledging the laws of the understanding so far only as to not contradict them” (*SW&F* 2: 938). The aesthetic for Coleridge, analogously to Iser’s notion of the fictive, is a world of its own which partakes of both the real and reality, while at the same time transcending the real by drawing on the imaginary. Along these same lines, Coleridge writes, in his *Contributions to J.H. Green’s Lectures on Aesthetics* (1825), “The universal Condition of Beauty in the beautiful or beauty-exciting is, that the form of this Object shall appear to be the product of an intelligent Will ... as living Will causative of *reality* [emphasis mine]” (*SW&F* 2: 1312). The “reality” contained in an artwork is contained not only in “the form” of a given aesthetic “Object,” but is also disclosed through the aesthetic event as “The universal Condition of Beauty.” Insofar as “The universal Condition of Beauty” may be either “in the beautiful” itself, or it may be realized as “beauty-exciting,” it is respectively either a product of the act of artistic creation, or conversely is the result of aesthetic reception. Since “the form of this Object shall appear to be the product of an intelligent Will,” the “intelligent Will” itself may be that of either the artist or the recipient. Thus both the artist and the recipient can be inferred to be “causative of” their respective “realit[ies]” through their own acts of aesthetically directed *Insein*.

The parallels between Coleridge’s concepts of reality and “faery-land” and phenomenological terminology are also applicable to the overlapping domains of ontological projection, the imagination, and

the imaginary. When Coleridge speaks of “the faery-world of Possibility!” (*Lects 1808-1819* 1: 430), we see that “the faery-world” is clarified not only as the “world” of an individual Being as a “reality,” but is also characterized as the sphere of potentialities-for-Being; which means, at the same time, that the “faery-world” (as a form of what Iser terms “the Fictive”) occupies a medial position as the conduit between the world of the real and the imaginary. Along these lines, Coleridge himself details the ontological connection between “Possibility,” the imagination, and the temporality of Being in his notes for *Lecture 11* from the *1818 Lectures on European Literature*. Since “The imagination is the distinguishing characteristic of man as a progressive being” (*Lects 1808-1819* 2: 193), the imagination itself is a primordial element in our ontological structure as human beings which potentiates *Insein* as projection, and thus at the same time is governed by the temporizing of temporality. For this reason, we find that “Men of genius and goodness are generally restless in their minds in the present ... because they are by a law of their nature unremittingly regarding themselves in the future, and contemplating the possible [sic] of moral and intellectual advance towards perfections” (*Lects 1808-1819* 2: 193). Such individuals are “restless in their minds in the present,” since “they are unremittingly regarding themselves in a Future” – which is to say, a projected ontological situation as a future state of Being. In the act of “contemplating” these “possible” modes of Being, horizons of Being are thematized through the “moral and intellectual advance towards perfections,” wherein such “perfections” themselves demark the farthest extent of Being’s projected progression. Here Coleridge also implies a connection between “genius” and “goodness” as fundamental attunements, and thereby allies the aesthetic and ethical insofar as both are concerned with our “moral” (in the sense again of addressing the question of how to live) and “intellectual advance.” While Coleridge apparently limits this form of the imagination to “Men of genius and goodness,” the result that “The contemplation of futurity inspires humility of soul in our judgment of the present” (*Lects 1808-1819* 2: 193) works to mitigate against any egomaniacal or elitist application of such contemplation and serves rather to recall one back to an awareness of its Being-with-others, while at the same time not allowing us to wholly lose sight of the notion of “perfections.” Thus such individuals characterized by “genius and goodness” may also stand forth as *exempla* for all those who struggle in their wake.

For Coleridge, therefore, tales of the imagination play an integral role in the education of Being through a process of moral and aesthetic education evolved through encounters with the imaginary. In the instruction of children via the aesthetic, “much is to be effected by works of imagination ... they carry the mind out of self, and show the possible of the good and the great in the human character” (*Lects 1808-1819* 2: 192). For this reason, Coleridge preferred imaginative stories and fairy-tales to children’s books which merely seek to inculcate a dry, conventional moral, for through the former he says, “I first learnt the powers of my nature, and to reverence that nature” (*Lects 1808-1819* 1: 278). But such “works” do not only give us access to the primordial structure of our Being, nor do they solely teach us a regard for the capacities of Being itself; but furthermore they provide a path whereby we may look into the imaginary, and hence towards futurity as the site for the realization of potentialities-for-Being. Thus those who have been schooled by imaginative tales oftentimes encounter “that delightful dream of our inner nature which was in truth more than a dream. It was a vision of what we might be hereafter – which was the endeavour of the moral being to exert, and at the same time to express itself in the infinite” (*Lects 1808-1819* 1: 278-9).

Coleridge perceived the relationship between imaginative tales and “the infinite” early on and discusses its ramification for his own existence in a letter to Thomas Poole, written on “16 October 1797”: “For from my early reading of Faery Tales, & Genii &c &c – my mind had been habituated to *the Vast* – & I never regarded *my sense* in any way as the criteria of my belief. I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions not by my *sight* – even at that age.”¹³⁵ In this context, “the infinite” and “*the Vast*” characterize the limitless or the boundless as a horizon beyond the constriction of the everyday. This is the fundamental reason why Coleridge advocates for the educational value of imaginative tales, writing in the same letter to Poole: “Should children be permitted to read Romances, & Relations of Giants & Magicians, & Genii? – I know all that has been said against it; but I have formed my faith in the affirmative. – I know no other way of giving the mind a love of ‘the Great’, & ‘the Whole’” (*CL* 1: 354). Walter Jackson Bate also notes that in Coleridge’s predilection for, and “defen[se]” of, “the value of fairy tales and stories of romance and magic”; they are prized “as a means of exciting a child’s imaginative curiosity and habituating

¹³⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 6 vols., ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Pr., 1956-1971) 1: 354; hereafter *CL*.

him to conceptions beyond the routine.”¹³⁶ Coleridge values the aesthetic and the imaginary not only as a counter-measure to the weary (and wearying) customs of the everydayness; but also, by explicitly placing acts of the imagination in contradistinction to the inauthenticity of the “they,” we may infer that Coleridge invests the exercise of the imagination from our earliest years with a central role in Being’s progress towards authenticity, and hence its projection onto its ownmost potentialities-for-Being. Here again we also see the same dichotomy between, on the one hand, the world of the real as the object of the faculties of “sense” and everydayness as the stomping grounds of “routine; and on the other hand, reality as the “the faery-world of Possibility!” (*Lects 1808-1819* 1: 430), which as such is “regulated” in accordance with the powers of our “conceptions” and limited only by our capacity for imaginative projection and openness to the imaginary.

Coleridge’s notion of aesthetic education in its connections to the supposed “irrationality” of the imagination is thus constitutionally opposed to those systems wherein one is “*rationally* educated” (*CL* 354). Coleridge offers his observations on the condition of “some he has “known” who were trained according to the latter plan:

They were marked by a microscopic acuteness; but when they looked at great things, all became a blank & they saw nothing – and denied (very illogically) that any thing could be seen; and uniformly put the negation of a power for the possession of a power – & called the want of imagination Judgment, & the never being moved to Rapture Philosophy! (*CL* 1: 354-355)

Such a “microscopic acuteness” is slavishly directed towards the world of the real and attuned by an empirical, basically scientific outlook, which due to its myopia can only see “nothing” in “great things.” Yet the adherents of this viewpoint are commonly self-deluded “and uniformly put the negation of a power for the possession of a power – & call the want of imagination Judgment, & the never being moved to Rapture Philosophy!” Herein we can see that the empirical *ratio* is implicitly opposed to the imagination insofar as the “power” must wanted is precisely that of imagination itself. The results of an imaginative, aesthetic education, on the other hand, can be negatively inferred from its opposition to such rational

¹³⁶ Walter Jackson Bate, *Coleridge* (New York: Macmillan, 1968) 3.

programs. A truly logical approach transcends the limitations of a calculative “illogic...” through its Being-towards the possible. “Judgment” is no longer merely deductive, but rather becomes reflective and allows us to move from the specific to the general, from the “microscopic” to the “great.” The “great things” which are outside the purview of conventional rationality are accessible to the imagination precisely because the latter is able to go beyond itself and the given world of the real into which it has been thrown; and therefore, in order to access true “Philosophy,” we must project our selves and be “moved to Rapture,” which itself is a form of *ecstasis* which Heidegger associates with the moment of vision.

The concept of projection as a going beyond one’s self is central to Coleridge’s conception of both existence in general and the ontology of the aesthetic in particular. Dasein as existential projects itself ahead of itself as a Being-towards, which at the same time is Being beyond itself; and therefore, “to exist is the same as to act or work” and “whatever exists, works” (*SW&F* 2: 927). Conversely, “not to work, as agent or patient, is not to exist” (*SW&F* 2: 927). In this context, “work” as a form of ontological projection should not be conceived merely as direct action by some “agent,” but may also be a form of receptive openness as a “patient.” This selfsame duality of action is constitutive for the aesthetic, in regards to both the moment of creation and that of reception.

Using Shakespeare as his example and paradigm, Coleridge posits “the ‘chief requisite’ of the poet” (Bate, *Coleridge* 167; *CN* 3: 3290) as being “the ability to ‘project his mind out of his own particular being’” (Bate, *Coleridge* 168; *CN* 3: 3290). The opposite of this ability is the mere act of “‘ventriloquism,’ in which the poet ‘distributes his own insipidity’ by projecting himself upon a phenomenon rather than into it” (Bate, *Coleridge* 168). To project oneself “Upon a phenomenon,” is to overwrite it through the imposition of one’s personality onto some aspect of the real as a mere grafting of a point-of-view onto a copy of the present-at-hand; whereas on the other hand, to project one’s self “into it” is an act of worlding, since the force of Being as existing in brought into play. In the third lecture of the *1808 Lectures on the Principles of Poetry*, Coleridge characterizes poetry as demanding a degree of self-abstraction combined with the authentic (or at least a movement towards becoming authentic) projection of Being. There are some “who can write most eloquently ... on circumstances personal & deeply exciting their own passions,” but they are “not therefore poets.” In these cases, “Nature is the poet” (*Lects 1808-1819* 1: 69), since the

“circumstances” which stir up a writer and occasion an act of composition come directly from “Nature” as the sphere of the present-at-hand. Shakespeare, on the hand, projects himself outside himself and is able “to become by the power of Imagination another Thing.” This does not mean that the self of the artist is wholly effaced, for as a creator the artist is “yet still the God felt to be there” (*Lects 1808-1819* 1: 69); but rather implies that as a creator, the artist is a *deus absconditus* (or at least an astronaut), for as in the case of Shakespeare there remains a “perfect abstraction from himself – he writes exactly as if of an other planet” (*Lects 1808-1819* 1: 70). As a “perfect abstraction,” all specific details of an artist’s personal situation in the real are in the end moot, and the “other planet” wherein the artist starts out from is her/his own reality, which is translated into, and superceded by, the reality of the created artwork. Coleridge’s conception of poetry and the poetic, therefore, is ontologically grounded, and hence “Imagination” in this context is analogous to *Insein*. Here we also see that the artist must undergo a process of alienation whereby such “abstraction” takes place and hence demands a certain degree of receptive openness to, and encounter with, the imaginary.

The concept of the aesthetic as a medium towards self-transcendence through projection as a dialectic of creative activity and receptive openness is also clearly constitutive for the aesthetic event on the side of the recipient. This selfsame “project[ion]” beyond one’s “own particular being” which we witnessed in the case of the artist also takes place on the part of the recipient through the mediation of the world of the work of art, insofar as the aesthetic works “to arouse in others ‘that sublime faculty by which a great mind becomes that on which it meditates’” (Bate, *Coleridge* 168; *Lects 1808-1819* 1: 80-81). In this way, the recipient also undergoes a process of alienation by transgressing the sphere of the real and crossing over into the world of an artwork as a reality orchestrated by the artwork itself through the interplay of the real and the imaginary. But in order for the aesthetic event to come full circle, the recipient must eventually emerge from the state of alienation and turn back towards her/his own situation in the real. In the short essay “On the Nature of Music” (1821), Coleridge concludes with a summation of these processes of alienation, reflection, and re-cognition which is relevant to the aesthetic event in general:

Thus ~~our~~ man’s conscious & reflective being projects into ~~external the~~ external nature acting upon him, ~~his~~ our own powers & modes of action, & like the northern savage

when presented with a mirror starts back at his own reflected image awed by the
~~revelation~~ manifestation of a correspondent which is, not ourselves, but the revelation.

(*SW&F* 2: 962)

After having passed beyond itself in undergoing an aesthetic event as an “acting upon,” in what remains a more or less “conscious” process which never leaves behind “reflective being” (which is to say, a “being” which reflects not only on itself, but also on its situation and its world), Being sees the “reflected image” of itself. As the “manifestation of a correspondent,” this “reflected image” is simultaneously both an image of ourselves and “not ourselves.” This paradox wherein our self is apparently not our self, is finally resolved through “the revelation” that the not-self is indeed the self as it has the potentiality to be. “Revelation” itself as a form of revealing or disclosing is itself also a mode of reflection which leads to a re-cognition as a transvaluation.

Now we are in a position to ask: to what extent is the encounter of the imagination with the imaginary for Coleridge conscious and voluntary, and to what degree is it unconscious and compulsory? What more clearly are the features and dynamics of aesthetic “revelation”? In the next two sections, we will address these questions by tracing the interplay between the imagination and the imaginary beginning with the dominance of the voluntary imagination in the “Conversation Poems,” and then will turn towards the emerging dominance of the compulsory imaginary specifically as it is revealed in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and “Kubla Khan, a Vision in a Dream.”

i. The Voluntary Imagination: *Erlebnis* and the “Conversation Poems”

In Coleridge’s so-called “Conversation Poems,” we are presented with examples of the voluntary imagination in action and experience as *Erlebnis* as they play out within the domain of the aesthetic. Yet the grouping of several of Coleridge’s poems under the rubric of “Conversation Poems” is somewhat oxymoronic. Since the poems address silent and inarticulate companions such as the infant Hartley Coleridge in “Frost at Midnight,” or absent friends like Charles Lamb in “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison”, or predominantly silent sounding-boards such as Sara in “Eolian Harp,” the very act of conversation itself as an exchange between two or more participants is forestalled. But viewed from another angle, there is indeed a conversation which transpires in these poems, in that through the act of discourse itself each lone speaker is split into two or more figures as alternate or parallel *personae* or doubles of himself via sympathetic identification. Along similar lines, Bate sees Coleridge as employing in these poems “the late Augustan mode of reflective verse” which has “become inevitable to the poet since the middle eighteenth century” (*Coleridge* 47), and which is “familiar, casual, uninvolved, [and] often elegiac in tone” (Bate, *Coleridge* 43-44). Yet Coleridge does not merely adopt it *ad hoc*, but further develops this mode, expanding on it, so that “the verse becomes more flexible, the idiom still more colloquial ... the interplay and development of association is on a higher plane. What is being considered is more interesting; it assumes more mind” (Bate, *Coleridge* 47). By taking up “more mind” into this mode of poetry, not only is the speaker directly and personally involved, but at the same time the question of Being itself is able to be addressed. Nor are the conversation poems like their generic predecessors predominantly “elegiac in tone,” but at the same time look not only back at the past, but also beyond the present and towards the future.

The conversation poems are also a form of *confession* – wherein the reflective, speaking persona is simultaneously both confessor and supplicant – and hence they present a discourse which strives towards forms of reconciliation. While I agree with Charles J. Rzepka that “Coleridge’s conversation poems express two ... impulses or moments, the one self-removed and visionary, the other self-present and confirmatory”;

these “impulses” are hardly “contradictory,”¹³⁷ but rather are mutually affirming. Through a “visionary” act of “self-remov[al],” Coleridge manages to “confirm” himself, and in so doing become “self-present” – but present in a reconciled way which is not accessible before the intervening imaginative, aesthetic event.

In what is perhaps the most famous of schematization of the basic pattern of the conversation poems, M.H. Abrams ranks these poems as “exemplify[ing]” a type of poem which he terms the “Greater Romantic Lyric.”¹³⁸ As such these poems

present a determinate speaker in a particularized, and usually localized, outdoor setting, whom we overhear as he carries on, in a fluent vernacular which rises easily to a more formal speech, a sustained colloquy, sometimes with himself or with the outer scene, but more frequently with a silent human auditor, present or absent. The speaker begins with a description of the landscape; an aspect or change of aspect in the landscape evokes a varied but integral process of memory, thought, anticipation, and feeling which remains closely interwoven with the outer scene. In the course of this meditation the lyric speaker achieves an insight, faces up to a tragic loss, comes to a moral decision, or resolves an emotional problem. Often the poem rounds upon itself to end where it began, at the outer scene, but with an altered mood and deepened understanding which is the result of the intervening meditation.” (“Greater Romantic Lyric” 527-528)

In the movement of these poems, the “speaker” initiates the imaginative process whereby “the landscape evokes,” or is rather made to evoke, a series of temporal reflections, be it towards the past as “memory,” the present as immediate “thought,” the future as “anticipation,” or some combination of the three.

Whatever “insight” “the lyric speaker achieves,” however, is one evolved through the direct, willful, and more or less conscious direction of the imagination as a conscious faculty under the sway of the will. Thus the form of the imagination involved is one we shall term the voluntary imagination, and the aesthetic experiences associated with it must be characterized as forms of *Erlebnis*.

¹³⁷ Charles J. Rzepka, *The Self as Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard U Pr., 1999) 114.

¹³⁸ M.H. Abrams, “Structure and Style In the Greater Romantic Lyric,” *From Sensibility to Romanticism Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle*, eds. Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford U Pr., 1965) 527.

We must disagree with Tilottama Rajan, who deconstructively frames “the conversation poems” as merely examples of what she labels “Coleridge’s vicariousness.”¹³⁹ In Rajan’s specific usage, “vicariousness” is defined as a state wherein “the language of a mind ... can see the forms of beauty but cannot feel them except ambiguously, and which recognizes something substitutive and sentimental in the claim of poetry” – or for our purposes (since as we have seen discourse is not simply rhetorical, but is also an ontological function as *Insein*), the declaration of *imagination* – “to possess the plentitude it designates” (Rajan, *Interpreter* 231). In the specific context of the conversation poems, according to Rajan, “Coleridge’s vicariousness involves a complex mixture of what psychologists call projection and introjection: he at once attributes to another what he wishes to disown, and claims as his own what he cannot have” (231). While we agree that “projection” does indeed underlie the conversation poems, it is not necessarily a form of evasive transference as maintained by the dictates of Psychoanalysis (with the exception of Jung’s Analytical Psychology), but is rather an ontological projection whereby he “introject[s]” himself into the reality of an aesthetic world. While there is a quality of “vicariousness” in the conversation poems, insofar as Coleridge does not immediately experience the events and scenes depicted; one can hardly say that Coleridge “attributes to another what he wishes to disown,” nor can affirm that he “claims as his own what he cannot have.” In the case of “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison,” for example, Coleridge does not desire to “disown” the sentiments and ideas expressed, but rather wishes to experience alongside, and share them with, Charles Lamb. Or in “Frost At Midnight,” his attributions take the form of wishes for the future of his son. In the former poem, Coleridge “claims” not what he can never have, but only imaginatively takes possession of what he has previously enjoyed in the past, and cannot have only for the duration of his convalescence. In the view of Rajan, the state of “vicariousness” supposedly “arises from the emptiness of imaginative dispossession, and is the form taken by imitation in a period which condemns as illegitimate the deviance of presence into representation” (*Interpreter* 231). We contend conversely against Rajan’s implicit critique of the so-called *poetics of presence* that “vicariousness” is achieved precisely through “imaginative” self-possession, and as such is

¹³⁹ Tilottama Rajan, *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism* (Ithaca: Cornell U Pr., 1986) 231.

not a form of “imitation” or “representation,” nor is it a “deviance of presence,” but rather is the emergence of *presencing*. In light of this revaluation, “The shift in the latter part of the eighteenth century from an aesthetics of imitation to one of genius is” not “largely an attempt to *overcome* [emphasis mine] the representative and therefore secondary status of language” (Rajan, *Interpreter* 230-231); but instead marks emergence of the aesthetic along Heideggerian lines as the disclosive capacity of language and the projective potentiality of discourse as a mode of *Insein*.¹⁴⁰

The projective capacity of the voluntary imagination as a mode of aesthetic *Insein* provides the foundation for the ontological dynamics which play out in “This Lime-tree Bower My Prison” (1797). The events surrounding the ostensible occasion of the poem, as Coleridge writes in the “ADVERTISEMENT,” took place “in the June of 1797” during “a visit” of some long-expected friends,” when Coleridge himself “met with an accident which disabled him from walking during the whole time of their stay,” composing the poem itself “One evening, when they had left him for a few hours ... in the Garden-Bower.”¹⁴¹ The poem begins in the present tense, in the moment of real-time composition (or at least it works to convey that impression), when Coleridge informs us that his friends already “Are gone” (*PW* 1: 1). Coleridge views their departure as an abandoning which consigns him to a simulated form of incarceration, and hence writes, “here I must remain, / This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison” (*PW* 1: 1-2). The poem immediately shifts into a reflective mode, indicated by the use of the past tense, when Coleridge writes that he has “lost / Beauties and Feelings” (*PW* 1: 2-3) due to his inability to join his friends in their excursions. In spite of the occasional and obviously strained melodramatic overtones and posturings of the poem, such as portraying what he has “lost” as something “such as would have been / Most sweet to my remembrance, even when

¹⁴⁰ Rajan’s conception of “vicariousness,” however, as a state wherein “the language of a mind ... can see the forms of beauty but cannot feel them except ambiguously” (*Interpreter* 231), does in fact come into play in the period of Coleridge’s work following that of the conversation poems, as her allusion in the above quotation to “Dejection: An Ode” indicates. Yet this disconnect between “see[ing]” and “feel[ing]” does not occur as a shortcoming of “language” alone, but rather is more fundamentally a failure of projective *Insein* – an issue which we will pursue in “The Pains of the Aesthetic: The ‘Black Period’ Poems” (IV.b).

¹⁴¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, 3 vols., ed. J.C.C. Mays, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 16 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 2001) 1: 350; hereafter abbreviated as *PW* and followed the volume number and the either the relevant line number/s when referring to poems, or page number/s when citing material from sources outside the main body of the poem itself – such as prefatory notes, marginal glosses, or other editorial material.

age / Had dimmed mine eyes to blindness!” (*PW* 1: 3-5); or when Coleridge somewhat hysterically considers the possibility that he “never more may meet again” his departed “Friends” (*PW* 1: 6); this impression of loss and isolation remains central to the poem and its eventual resolution.

Yet this elegiac tone soon gives way to the effects of the voluntary imagination, when in line eight, the poem shifts back to the present tense as Coleridge pictures his “Friends” (*PW* 1: 6) as they “Wander in gladness, and wind down, perchance, / To that still roaring dell, of which I told” (*PW* 1: 8-9). At this point, Coleridge engages in reflection on past observations and speculation on possible future conditions, insofar as the scenes he conjures up images from the past which may only be occurring “perchance” in a projected present. But the mood shifts yet again when Coleridge himself intrudes upon the scene (as he says) “of which I told,” and not only details what he believes to be transpiring, but furthermore begins to actively and imaginatively order – both as structuring and commanding – the setting, the projected events, and even the participants themselves. When he writes that “there my friends / Behold the dark green file of long lank Weeds” (*PW* 1: 16-17), the verb “Behold” may be read in two different moods: first, in the present, indicative active, where the “friends” are in the act of actually beholding the setting described; and second, as an imperative, wherein Coleridge commands his “friends” to “Behold” that to which he wishes to direct their attention. The taking possession of the participants themselves is conveyed in his use of the phrase “*my* [emphasis mine] Friends” (*PW* 1: 20) and is most clearly evidenced in his numerous addresses scattered throughout the poem to Charles Lamb. When Coleridge speaks directly to “gentle-hearted Charles,” he repeatedly takes ownership of him as “*My* [emphasis mine] gentle-hearted Charles” (*PW* 1: 28; 69; 76) and as “*my* [emphasis mine] Friend” (*PW* 1: 37).

The projected travelogue of Coleridge’s “Friends” continues in the second stanza, but now the imperatives expressed by Coleridge expand in scope to actively articulate the movements of nature itself as he wishes them to play out in a projected future. In his imaginative worlding, Coleridge directs the “glorious Sun” (*PW* 1: 33) to “slowly sink / Behind the western ridge” (*PW* 1: 32-33) and orders the “purple heath-flowers” (*PW* 1: 35) to “Shine in the slant beams of the sinking orb” (*PW* 1: 34). He demands the “clouds” to “richlier burn” (*PW* 1: 35) and calls on the “distant groves” to “Live in the yellow light” (*PW* 1: 36), and concludes by charging the “blue Ocean” to “kindle” itself (*PW* 1: 37). Rzepka also

notes this process of increasing imaginative assertion: “In the first paragraph of the poem,” Coleridge “has advanced almost unnoticed from speculation to affirmation, even muted command. What was at first hypothesis – ‘perchance’ – becomes apparent fact”; and not only in the first section, but also “In the second verse paragraph the mood shifts still further in the direction of imperative, from fact to fiat” (127). By characterizing the poetic act as one of “fiat,” Rzepka implicitly parallels it to divine agency, which in the Judeo-Christian tradition initiates the creation with the subjunctive command “*fiat lux*” (“let there be light”). Yet Coleridge, however, remains something of a *deus absconditus*, since “Most of us tend to forget that the dell, the hill, the sea are all ‘realities’ conditioned by the speculative imagination of the solitary poet” (Rzepka 130). Through becoming swept up in the expression of Coleridge’s voluntary imagination the reader her/himself for all intents and purposes becomes one of Coleridge’s “Friends,” sharing in the visions which Coleridge himself desires for, and wishes on, them – which means that for both the “Friends” and the audience, Coleridge’s voluntary imagination becomes a conduit to the imaginary as *Erfahrung*.

Yet while ostensibly all this imaginative effort is expended “So” that Coleridge’s “Friend” (*PW* 1: 37), Charles Lamb, “may stand” exactly “as” Coleridge himself has “stood” (*PW* 1: 38), bringing the past together with a projected future; in the third and final stanza, Coleridge re-turns towards himself and his own situation – not reflectively as a looking-back, but as a direct experience, indicated by another temporal shift back to the present tense. This return is felt as “A delight” (*PW* 1: 44), which “Comes sudden on [his] heart” (*PW* 1: 45) and allows him to effectively (which is to say, conditionally and subjunctively) replace Charles “As [if he him] self were there” (*PW* 1: 46). Now we can see the degree to which Coleridge’s acts of imaginative assertion are multifold: not only does he utilize assertion as a mode of worlding enunciation through the application of what Heidegger terms the “*apophantical* ‘as’” (*BT* 158); but he also ultimately utilizes the voluntary imagination itself as a mode of self-assertion and self-definition. This consolidation is signaled by a tense shift back to the past tense in line 47, indicating a series of events which have reached some level of completion. When Coleridge writes that in the foregoing experience he has “mark’d / Much that has sooth’d me” (*PW* 1: 47-48), we also find the same co-operation between observation, the voluntary imagination, assertion and self-assertion: to “mark” something means, on one level, to take note of it as a bystander, a marking which subsequently permits one to make a re-mark (which itself may also be termed

an “observation”) on it, which expresses or communicates the way something has been apprehended by a given person; while on another level, to “mark” something is to make a mark on it as a form of one’s own agency or signature which is visible for an other, such as when an individual “makes one’s mark” to validate a contract. Here the parallels with Heidegger’s conception of “assertion” become even clearer. Like Coleridge’s use of “mark,” Heidegger “give[s] three significations to the term ‘assertion’”: the first and “primary signification of ‘assertion’ is ‘pointing out’ [*Aufzeigen*],” as “letting an entity be seen from itself”; second, “Assertion means no less than ‘predication,’” insofar as “We ‘assert’ a ‘predicate’ of a ‘subject’, and the ‘subject’ is *given a definite character* [*bestimmt*] by the ‘predicate’” (BT 154); and third, “‘Assertion’ means ‘communication’ [*Mitteilung*],” as a “speaking forth” which “let[s] someone see with us what we have pointed out by way of giving it a definite character” (BT 155). This “Letting someone see with us shares with [teilt ... mit] the Other that entity which has been pointed out in its definite character,” and “That which is ultimately ‘shared’ is our *Being towards* that which has been pointed out – a Being in which we see it in common” (BT 155).

In the end, the solace which has “sooth’d” Coleridge’s previous tribulations is of his own voluntary and imaginative making, which while at the same time it may be “shared” with Lamb and the reader, is still is a product of his own worlding assertions as the expression of his way of Being-towards the world. The fact that this solace has been gained even in “this bower, / This little lime-tree bower” (PW 1: 46-47), underscores the self-contained and self-sufficient nature of the voluntary imagination. As Coleridge details what he has marked in his past, as well as in his imaginatively evoked experiences, there occurs an almost imperceptible shift into the present tense in line 54 which leads us back to the “now” (PW 1: 55; 57) of the presumed present moment of the poem. But this “now” is fleeting, requiring a future to stabilize it; and hence Coleridge turns immediately towards futurity, entering back into the stream of the temporalizing of temporality and opening himself again to the possibilities of existence. Again this turning is suggested by a tense shift, when Coleridge writes, “Henceforth I shall know” (PW 60). In the end, the experience depicted in “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison” is one associated with *Erlebnis*, not only because it is an experience which Coleridge “has” due to its status as a reflex of the voluntary action of his imagination as a form of aesthetic “contemplat[ion]” (PW 1: 67), but furthermore is one which he “has” in

the sense of taking possession of it in a form of ownership, and thereby at the same time takes possession of himself. This taking possession of himself (and his self) through the volitional enjoining of the aesthetic event permits him to re-turn to his ownmost “there,” attune himself in accordance with a new form of “know[ing]” (*PW* 60), and enter into the poem’s concluding moment of vision.

In *Suggestions for J.H. Green’s Lectures on Anatomy and Surgery* (c. 1824-6), Coleridge puts forth a “Definition of Experience” (*SW&F* 1088) delineated along similar lines to the concept of the voluntary imagination as *Erlebnis*. “Experience,” on the most general level, has as “its essential condition, that of seeing *intellectually*” (*SW&F* 2: 1088). But as “an essential condition,” this “seeing *intellectually*” is “essential” only insofar as it is basic to the rudimental structuring of any specific instantiation of intellectual “seeing” performed by a particular Being as a *percipio*. As an act of perceiving, wherein “something within-the-world is encountered as such” (*BT* 150), “experience” in this sense occurs only in reference to the world of the ready-to-hand as “the very mode in which it is the essential foundation for everyday circumspective interpretation” (*BT* 150). Hence “experience” as a form of “circumspective interpretation” is structured by what Heidegger terms the *fore-structures of the understanding*: “In every case this interpretation is grounded in *something we have in advance* – in a *fore-having* [*Vorhabe*] ... in *something we see in advance* – in a *fore-sight* [*Vorsicht*],” and “*something we grasp in advance* – in a *fore-conception* [*Vorgriff*]” (*BT* 150). Coleridge also notes the centrality of these three structural prerequisites for experience: first, “There ~~must be~~ is something, it seems, which must be known and understood in order to the *seeing* itself”; second, “we do not properly see without a determinate attention to the particular object”; and third, such “*Seeing*” is able to “supply” the “ground for *judging* and *determining*” (*SW&F* 2: 1088). The processes of “interpretation” are not necessarily strictly empirical, nor the mere detached or disinterested reporting of a collection of objective facts about some thing; but also simultaneously may include an imaginative, willful component, insofar as “In such as interpretation, the way in which the entity we are interpreting is to be conceived can be drawn from the entity itself, or the interpretation can force the entity into concepts to which it is opposed in its manner of Being” (*BT* 150). Yet “In either case,” since “the interpretation has already decided for a definite way of conceiving it” (*BT* 150), experience to a lesser or greater degree structures itself in accordance with “forms in the ~~mind~~ percipient’s own Being” (*SW&F* 2:

1089). For Coleridge, therefore, “*Experience*” implies “a twofold consideration. Viz.—1. We learn all *by* experience; but 2. Not all *from* experience” (*SW&F* 2: 1089) – which is to say, “We learn ... *by*” having or gaining an experience, wherein “*by*” refers to not only a medium *through* which “learn[ing]” takes place, but at the same time implies a spatial proximity or nearness as an area under our influence or control; while the phrase “Not all *from* experience” works to limit the extent to which the results of experience are seen as being handed down from a region (at least seemingly) external to us. The first part of this “twofold consideration” is an assertion of the powers of the voluntary imagination as *Erlebnis*; while the latter qualification is put forth as a caveat against assigning an undue measure of influence to the imaginary as *Erfahrung* – a disproportion in favor of the imaginary which as we will see at times too closely affected Coleridge’s own personal existence.

The concept of the imagination as a voluntary form of *Erlebnis* is also at the root of the Romantic, post-Kantian, valorization of “the superiority of genius to any aesthetics based on rules,” which in turn opens up a free space for the play of aesthetic worlding in “the autonomy of aesthetic consciousness” (*TM* 41). In accordance with this type of genius, aesthetic form itself is conceived as a concretized projection of an *Insein* which articulates its own reality according to its own “rules” – “rules” both as guidelines for conduct and as a standard of assessing measurement. Coleridge himself articulates a version of this conception of the capacity of “Genius” in his *1812-12 Lectures in Belles Lettres*, wherein he says, “No true work of Genius dare want its appropriate Form – neither indeed is there any danger of this – as it must not, so neither can it, be lawless ... for it is even this that constitutes it Genius – the power of acting creatively under laws of its own origination” (*Lects 1808-1819* 1: 494-5). The expression of “Genius” in a specific “Form” is always “appropriate” insofar as it is the outgrowth of worlding Being which appropriates the real and trans-forms it into the form of an aesthetic world. As a self-defining reality, an aesthetic world can never be “lawless,” because it is articulated through the creative projection and self-structuring principles of Dasein’s ownmost-potentialities-for-Being. The authenticity of a given aesthetic world is dependent on genius insofar as the concept of “genius” itself presupposes Being-authentic and for its part cannot be conceived separately from the notion of authenticity, since according to this formulation any genius her/himself by definition dwells outside the narrow confines of the “they.” As “acting creatively,” genius

is a mode of attunement, a way of Being-towards the world and its self, and as such has its own disposition and trajectory, which are explicitly and most obviously realized in, and disclosed through, the domain of the aesthetic.

But is there another form of “genius” which is not defined solely by its tendencies towards creative action, but is rather a mode and product (as a *pro-ducere*) of creative openness? Is there a corollary form of Romantic genius as a genius of reception that is relevant to the audience as well as the artist? What transpires in the encounter with the imaginary; and how does it resemble, and how may it potentially bring about, a con-version? Finally, what are the after-effects of the encounter with the imaginary, and what are their implications for Dasein, both in regards to Being-its-self and Being-with-others?

ii. The Compulsory Imaginary: *Erfahrung* and Exile

1. The Influx of the Imaginary and “Fears in Solitude: Written in April 1798, During the Alarm of an Invasion” (1798)

In a letter to Thomas Poole written on “Monday Night [23 March 1801]” (*CL* 2: 708), Coleridge declares, “My opinion is this – that deep Thinking is attainable only by a man of deep Feeling, and that all Truth is a species of Revelation” (*CL* 2: 709). While on first glance Coleridge’s seeming equation of “deep Thinking” and “deep Feeling” might appear to be a reflex not only of his then current adherence to David Hartley’s Associationism, but also to expose certain leanings towards a vague sort of sentimental sensationism; on closer acquaintance, it becomes clear that while “Thinking” does indeed work on materials supplied through the sensations or “Feeling,” Coleridge is concerned not with the origin but rather with the processing of our ideas. Since this statement is made after a discussion of the contents of a pervious letter concerning “Locke’s system” (*CL* 2: 708), we find a tacit introduction of an imaginative component, insofar as it is precisely the imagination which allows us to process and recall the material attained through sensation for purposes of reflection. Reflection when conceived along broadly Lockean, Empirical lines is itself a form of the voluntary imagination, in that through a willful recollection of previous sensations or “Feeling[s]” it makes possible the activity of “Thinking.” Yet for Coleridge this is effectively a self-contained process, the concealedness and interiority of which is underscored by the repetition of the adjective “deep.” In the second half of the statement, however, we find a reversal. Here Coleridge states not only that “all truth” is visionary, or a form of envisioning; but furthermore implies that “Truth” as “a species of Revelation” is not wholly able to be evolved from within but must at least partially be disclosed *ab extra* – which means at the same time that “all Truth” as a form “of revelation” is only possible for a Being which itself not only discloses but also awaits – that is, as one who holds her/himself ready in the open, and to whom something is revealed and thereby undergoes a “revelation.”

As a disclosure of “Truth” *ab extra* to a Being who awaits, “revelation” itself provides a model of the interaction of the voluntary imagination and the compulsory imaginary. We find the same duality of the voluntary and the compulsory in Coleridge’s definition of “Imagination” from *Lecture 4* of the *1808 Lectures on Principles of Poetry*: “Imagination or the power by which one image or feeling is made to

modify many others, & by a sort of *fusion to force many into one* ... Various are the workings of this greatest faculty of the human mind ... even as Nature, the greatest of Poets, acts upon us when we open our eyes upon an extended prospect” (*Lects 1808-1819* 1: 81). The first part of the passage puts forth a conventional definition of “Imagination” as a “power” or faculty and sounding again what Wellek derisively refers to as “the old One-in-many formula”¹⁴²; but then Coleridge shifts to propose a conception of the “Imagination” not as a “power” which we possess and control, but rather as a force analogous to “Nature” and superior to us in poetic prowess insofar as it dominates and “acts upon us.” The horizon which nature presents us with as “an extended prospect” also shows itself to be a manifestation of the imaginary insofar as it works to “extend” our horizontal dimensions beyond their previous limits by providing us with a transcendent vision of the possible.

This extension of Dasein’s prospects through the encounter of the imagination with the compulsory imaginary is dramatically depicted in the conclusion to “Fears in Solitude: Written in April 1798, During the Alarm of an Invasion” (1798). In the final verse paragraph, the poem shifts into the present tense of the “now” (*PW* 204; 208) as Coleridge departs from “the green and silent spot, amid the hills, / a small and silent dell!” (*PW* 1-2) wherein he has spent the preceding rhetorical moments and climbs “the green sheep-track, up the healthy hill” (*PW* 210), intending to “wind” his “way” back “Homeward” (*PW* 211). But when he “find[s]” himself “upon the brow” (*PW* 213) or the apex of the hill, he “pause[s] / Startled!” (*PW* 213-214) as he is “recall’d / From bodings that have well nigh wearied” him (*PW* 211-212) by what he calls a “burst of prospect” (*PW* 216). The “burst of prospect” does not merely disclose the scene of a peaceful English countryside which will remain secure in spite of “the alarm of an invasion”; but as a “prospect” is also a vantage-point and an outlook surveying the future, and as such is an effect of the imaginary. Coleridge stresses his own openness to, and the compulsory nature of, this encounter. He does not willfully and with purpose of forethought ascend the hill to its peak, but rather “finds” himself there as if transported there through an external agency more or less below the threshold of consciousness. Nor does he attain this “prospect” through an active analysis of, and careful reflection on, the scene; but in language replete with violence, it “burst[s]” upon him as a force and with an intentionality all its own. Nor

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René Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England* (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1931) 113.

does Coleridge bring himself out of the turbulent “bodings” which have troubled him throughout the poem solely through his own agency, but rather he is “recalled / From” them – a recalling which as part of his assisted departure from the valley and re-ascent of the hill is also performed through some external agency and again underlines the presence of some external force.

The description of “the shadowy Main” clarifies the specific qualities of “this burst of prospect” (*PW* 216) which is disclosed through the influence of the imaginary mitigates against any view of the scene as merely an attempted representation of an objective landscape. As “shadowy” and “Dim tinted” (*PW* 217), the scene is cloaked in impressionistic tonalities, wherein the natural and artificial (i.e. that which is the result of artifice, or human making; and which as such should following Hegel be disabused of its common, pejorative connotations) intermingle and coincide, and thus under these effects, the “elmy Fields” resemble a “huge amphitheatre” which “seems like society” (*PW* 218-219). In this context, “society” – or at least the impression of “society” – precisely as the commingling of the natural and artificial is also a point of overlap between the real and reality, and thus is parallel to Iser’s category of the fictive, or our conception of an aesthetic reality. “Society” also relates to Dasein’s capacity to enjoin the imaginary, for it is precisely through this “society” that the imaginary is able to “Convers[e] with the mind, and giv[e] it / A livelier impulse and a dance of thought!” (*PW* 220-221) – a comparative increase which functions both as increase in imaginative power, as well as a sign of an emphatic accession of a previously unapprehended potentiality-for-Being. Yet since the “Convers[ation]” with the imaginary does not only bestow some benefit upon Dasein; but also as continuing (a continuance implied through the use of the comparative) of the “impulse” previous trajectory of “thought,” it calls to something already present in Dasein, which is not only receptive as one who awaits the gift, but furthermore goes forward to meet and accept it. Thus as a “Conversing with the mind,” the influence of the imaginary is ultimately dependent on a two-way interchange (a bipartisanship which is preserved at least under healthy conditions) between itself and the imagination.

After receiving absolution from his fears and emerging from the lostness attendant on them, Coleridge re-returns to his ownmost ontological situation which is conveyed by the parallel metaphor of a journey homeward. Here we can see the movement away from the feeling of not being at-home

[*Unheimlichkeit*] which dominates the first part of the poems, and which Dasein similarly undergoes in its confrontation with its thrownness and its accompanying anxiety, as well as in its fallenness away from itself and its “there” and the unsettling turbulence it feels as a consequence; and witness the return to the situation of Being at-home [*Heimlichkeit*] with its self.¹⁴³ Again we find a corresponding emphasis on the “now” (*PW* 222) in another temporal shift to the present, in order to signal the second segment of the return. Coleridge’s own promise of homecoming emerges when he “behold[s]” the “church-tower” of his “beloved Stowey” (*PW* 222-223) in the distance. At this point, the corporeal eye shows its insufficiency and begins to falter and stumble in doubt, for as Coleridge himself says, “I behold ... methinks, the four huge elms / Clustering, which mark the mansion of my friend” (*PW* 222-224); before it ultimately fails, since Coleridge’s “own lowly cottage” (*PW* 226) as the site where his homecoming will eventually take place is entirely “hidden from [his] view” (*PW* 225). Yet in both instances, Coleridge is able to overcome the absence of distance and summon both scenes to appear with imagination’s eye, calling up the physically absent “mansion” and envisioning “my babe / And my babe’s mother” (*PW* 226-227). Coleridge’s restoration strengthens through his act of his re-turning homeward, and now he “With light / And quickened footsteps thitherward ... tend[s]” (*PW* 228-229). Analogously to the return out of the encounter with the imaginary to the real and Dasein’s Being-with-others we traced as completing the aesthetic event, Coleridge similarly returns from such an experience to his home, the site of his ownmost “there,” with a corresponding change in mood and attunement, his former fears passing into “grateful[ness]” (*PW* 230), revealed to and in a “heart” which has been “soften’d, and made worthy to indulge / Love and the thoughts that yearn for human kind” (*PW* 213-233).

While conventionally grouped among the “Conversation Poems,” “Fears in Solitude” breaks from the typical pattern of this series insofar as the poem does not conclude in the same locale where it begins, but instead leads Coleridge the speaker away from the principal, apparent setting of the poem. Even though in bidding “farewell” to the “soft and silent spot” Coleridge specifies that his “Farewell” is only for “awhile” (*PW* 208-209), a stipulation which implies only a temporary departure, and hence looks towards an eventual return; it is in the act of “Remembering” the “green and silent dell” (*PW* 229) that it effectively

¹⁴³ Cf. “The Busy-ness of the World and Its Discontents: Everydayness and the ‘They’” (II.b.i).

becomes a “spirit-healing nook” (*PW* 12). As such Coleridge’s experience is more properly analogous to Wordsworth’s notion of *spots of time* – a connection strengthened by the references to Wordsworth scattered throughout the text, and specifically through Coleridge’s mentioning in the following line that “chiefly” Wordsworth “would love” (*PW* 13) this “nook.” Yet while both Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s sense of such spots of time as moments which may be willfully rejoined through re-collection of a specific manner of having-been, in order to transcend the flux of the present moment and re-collect a sense of an integrated and capable self; Coleridge, for his part, additionally builds upon the consolidation attained not only in the present but furthermore turns towards futurity as the site for new potentialities-for-Being. Here another difference between Coleridge and Wordsworth surfaces: the latter, in his looking back on his personal past, actively recalls scenes, characters, or events through the conscious application of his imagination in order to find solace from some present grief or psychic discomfort; whereas the former’s recollection specifically in the context of “Fear in Solitude” is ostensibly a private and viscerally engaged meditation on public events; ultimately it is his re-collection from his personal “fears” which occurs through the sudden and unexpected influx of the imaginary, and which in turn is what permits him to imaginatively assume a trajectory towards the future and as yet unrealized modes of Being by re-engaging his own imaginative capacities from within his reclaimed authentic ontological situation.

But what happens when the influx of the imaginary does not lead to the quietude and peace of a return homeward and instead leaves Dasein in a state of flux? What are the dynamics of conversion which may also take place through our encounters and conversations with the imaginary, and how may the aesthetic itself potentially be a form of con-version?

2. Con-versions In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798 / 1834)

In experience of “revelation,” conceived as a revealing of the imaginary, the imagination itself must perforce simultaneously (at least for the moment) hold back itself. For Coleridge, the aesthetic in general, and “Poetry” in particular, is a medium for such revelation, on the side of both the artist and the recipient – a revelation which may also precipitate a conversion. In *Lecture 3* of the *1811-1812 Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton*, Coleridge defines “Poetry” in contradistinction to even “animated Prose,” a difference attained in the former through the super-addition of

that pleasurable emotion, that peculiar state or degree of Excitement, which arises in the Poet himself, in the act of composition – & in order to understand this we must combine a more than ordinary Sympathy with the Objects, Emotions, or Incidents contemplated by the Poet in consequence of a more than common sensibility, with a more than ordinary Activity of the Mind as far as respects the Fancy & Imagination – Hence a more vivid reflection on the truths of Nature & the Human Heart united with that constant exertion of activity which modifies and corrects these truths by that sort of pleasurable Emotion, which the exertion of all our faculties give in a certain degree, but which the full play of those Powers of Mind, which are spontaneous rather than voluntary, in which the Effort required bears no proportion to the activity enjoyed ... (*Lects 1808-1819* 1: 217)

Through “the act of composition,” the “poet” worlds an aesthetic reality, which goes beyond the everyday world of the real and the habitual manners of Being practiced by the “they”; insofar as the Poet her/himself is gifted with, or has developed, “a more than common sensibility” and “a more than ordinary Activity of Mind as far as respects the Fancy & Imagination.” The recipient partakes of powers similar to those which define the poet, and thus “in order to understand” any given aesthetic world, “we” as recipients no less “must combine a more than ordinary Sympathy with the Objects, Emotions, or Incidents contemplated by the Poet.” In this way, both the poet and the recipient are enabled to attain “a more vivid reflection on the truths of Nature & the Human Heart” – which is to say, through the aesthetic we are able to gain clearer and more defined insights into ontological truths of comparatively wider scope and greater intensity than

those ordinarily available. The fact that Coleridge is concerned with distinctly aesthetic-ontological truths is made clear when he defines “the proper and immediate object of Poetry” as “the communication of immediate pleasure” in contradistinction to “The <proper & immediate> Object of Science,” which is “the acquirement or communication of “Truth” (*Lects 1808-1819* 1: 217). For both the poet and the recipient this endeavor requires a corresponding response through a “constant exertion of activity which modifies and corrects these truths by that sort of pleasurable Emotion,” or way of Being attuned not only by, but also towards, the aesthetic; and as such any “modifi[cation]” or “correct[ion]” would be effected by imagination as *Erlebnis*; yet in the end, “the exertion of all our faculties” is only able to “give” this “in a certain degree,” since “the full play of those Powers of Mind ... are spontaneous rather than voluntary.” The diminution of the determining role of the will implied by replacement of the “voluntary” by the “spontaneous” is further underscored by the fact that “the Effort required” by “the full play of those Powers of Mind” ultimately “bears no proportion to the activity enjoyed” in the scope of the sphere of influence and cumulative effect of the aesthetic.

The “spontaneous” in the framework of Romantic aesthetics is grounded on the concept of the “genius,” whose creative, poetic capacities are presumed to be inborn in the artist. This notion of the spontaneity of genius is central to, and has its most famous expression in Wordsworth’s “Preface” to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, wherein “Poetry” is defined as

the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind and in whatever degree, from various causes is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passion whatsoever,

which are voluntarily described, the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment.¹⁴⁴

While “the spontaneous overflow ... takes its origin from” acts of “recollect[ion]” and is continued and augmented through “contemplat[ion],” there is nevertheless a space preserved for the introduction of a receptive component as “a species of reaction” which intercedes in order to make the “emotion” again “actually exist in the mind.” Thus the initiation of “successful composition” depends, in the view of Wordsworth, to a lesser or greater degree on the evocation, assimilation (which at the same time is a reaction formation), and continuance of an aesthetically evolved “mood” as a state of mind. Wordsworth himself seems to grasp the essential demand for such a receptive awaiting and holding one’s self back, when he qualifies the “voluntary” quality of poetic “composition” by simultaneously conceding a constitutive role to “Nature” and placing “the Poet” in the position of a recipient, a schemata wherein “if Nature be thus cautious in preserving a state of enjoyment a being thus employed, the Poet ought to profit from the lesson held forth to him” (xxxiv).

Coleridge works towards a similar qualification of the dynamics of the imagination, the “spontaneous,” and the imaginary in the above-cited passage from *Lecture 3* of the *1811-1812 Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton*. Here we also find that since in “the full play of those Powers of Mind” (*Lects 1808-1819* 1: 217) we transcend Being in its everydayness and disclose ontological-aesthetic “truths” that outrun our previous horizons of Being, and which as such arise from the domain of the imaginary; and since we cannot gain these “truths” through willful imaginative pursuit, but must rather receive them through our encounter with the imaginary; the “spontaneous” is not something which entirely arises *from* us, but something which simultaneously happens *to* us. This conception lies at the root of the notion that genius creates *unconsciously* (although in the common view of genius, the creative power is often seen as being inherent in the artist her/himself, a view which we obviously are working to qualify); and therefore, the concept of genius at the same time necessarily entails a *genius of reception* wherein genius not only goes forth to meet, but also undergoes, the influx of the imaginary as *Erfahrung*. Coleridge himself, in a Notebook entry from 1804, puts forth the notion of a distinctly receptive form of genius,

¹⁴⁴ William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, 2nd ed. (London 1800) xxxiii-xxxiv.

insofar as “receptivity ... evinces as great Genius as” the “retentiveness” customarily associated with such a status (CN 1: 1834). In the same notebook entry, Coleridge also speaks of “The dignity of passiveness to worthy Activity when men shall be as proud within themselves of having remained an hour in a state of deep tranquil Emotion” be it in a form of overtly Being-towards the aesthetic such as “reading or” more general ways of Being-towards-the-world such as “hearing or ... looking” (CN 1: 1834).¹⁴⁵ In both these passages, we find Coleridge providing a basis for circumventing the notion of a voluntary imagination such as that often evidenced in his earlier poems, and instead deliberately integrating it with a conception of interplay of the imagination and imaginary predicated on a conception of aesthetic experience as *Erfahrung*.

In the ontological dynamics of the imaginary as *Erfahrung*, Dasein must hold itself back and to a lesser or greater degree give itself up to the imaginary, and hence it undergoes varieties of conversion in a multifold sense which plays out across all moments of the aesthetic equation: first, the artist enacts a conversion from the world of the real into an aesthetic reality, which in turn takes on shape as a gestalt of the imaginary; second, recipients undergo a process of conversion as a turning-towards wherein they come to share an aesthetic reality through giving themselves up to the experience of aesthetic alienation; third, the aesthetic work itself undergoes a form of conversion insofar as the recipient does not merely share in the aesthetic world of the work, but simultaneously helps to determine and shape its contours; and fourth, if the cycle of the aesthetic event has been effectively completed, a recipient will return to her/his lived existences in the real having undergone a process of conversion in the sense of possessing altered, supplemented, or amended ways of both Being-towards-the-world and Being-towards her/his own self. Ultimately the artist, the recipient, and even the artwork itself all undergo forms of conversion which are determined and structured by the interplay of all three moments of the aesthetic equation in a shared vision as a *conversation*, which itself is both an arena for, as well as a form of, *con-version*.

¹⁴⁵ These ways of Being-towards which are grounded in forms of “passiveness” are at the same time ways of Being-authentic, and hence are explicitly contradistinguished from the mere pastimes of the “they” wherein temporality is “figured away” (CN 1: 1834).

*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*¹⁴⁶ since it has the form of a “conversion narrative” (Haney 106) can be read as an allegory of the aesthetic event insofar as it structured by, and directed towards, a threefold series of con-versions which are the result of the encounter with the imaginary as *Erfahrung*. This encounter discloses previously unknown potentialities-for-Being: first, in regards to the Mariner’s own experiences, secondly, in relation to the experience of the Wedding-Guest as the front-and-center recipient of the Mariner’s tale; and third, in connection with the reader as the implied recipient. The concern of the poem with the dynamics of the aesthetic as *Erfahrung* is announced in the poem’s twice-mentioned subtitle “A POET’S REVERIE” (Wordsworth 46, 47) in the version printed in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800),¹⁴⁷ which works to locate the poem in both the poet’s consciousness and simultaneously outside and beyond it, insofar as the notion of “reverie” itself implies an interplay between the imagination and the imaginary, between active projection *ab intra* and receptive openness to influences *ab extra* – the dreamer in a state of reverie both enters into, and gives her/himself up to, such a state.

The poem’s implicit orientation towards the aesthetic issue of the disclosure of potential modes of Being and their relation to the imaginary is immediately announced in the text by the epigraph taken from Thomas “Burnet’s *Archaeologicae Philosophicae* (1692 ed)” (*PW* 1: 371).¹⁴⁸ Through a series of strategic omissions, Coleridge co-opts Burnet’s words and effectively restructures them, so that the “I” of Burnet and his own voice become conflated. Yet this strategy also allows Coleridge to preserve the entirety of Burnet’s original passage as a background and tacit context, while simultaneously utilizing both the included and excluded material as a means to look forward towards the territory mapped out in the poem itself as both a preview and a warning.

¹⁴⁶ We will be using the text of the 1834 version, since it includes all the revisions and additions made by Coleridge from 1800-1834, which most notably include the addition of the quotation from Thomas Burnet’s *Archaeologicae Philosophicae* as an addendum to the “ARGUMENT” and the marginal gloss.

¹⁴⁷ Strangely the subtitle does not appear in the first printing of the poem in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), nor does J.C.C. Mays mention it in his edition of the poem in the *Poetical Works* for *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*.

¹⁴⁸ Citations from the verse stanzas of *The Ancient Mariner* will follow the same convention we established earlier and will give the volume number of the *Poetical Works* followed by a colon and the relevant line number/s for verse quotations; whereas in cases where the epigraph or marginal gloss is cited, the parenthetical citation will instead cite the relevant page number/s.

The excerpt begins with Burnet stating that he “can easily believe, that there are more Invisible than Visible Beings in the Universe” (*PW* 1: 371). While Burnet primarily has in mind the Christian conception of “Invisible Beings” as exemplified (for example) by the “*Orders of Angels*,” this part of the passage is omitted by Coleridge, so that the question “But who will declare to us the Family of all these, and acquaint us with the Agreements, Differences, and peculiar Talents which are to be found among them?” (*PW* 1: 371) no longer refers directly to the species of the “*Orders of Angels*,” but now rather looks back to the genus of “Invisible Beings.” Here Coleridge consciously moves away from a specifically Christian context, in order to consider the issue of “Invisible Beings” as a general concept. Burnet himself also supplements his own viewpoint with figures outside the Christian tradition by including “the Heathen Divines” who also “have very much philosophized about the invisible World of Souls,” “Minds,” and “Heroes,” which “we may see ... “everywhere in the *Platonic* authors” (*PW* 1: 371). Here Burnet shifts the focus away from “Beings” alone to “the invisible World” they are said to inhabit, and in so doing can be read as implying (albeit without conscious intent) the connection we have repeatedly established between Being and worldhood as an ontological reality. Nor is he any longer exclusively concerned with the more obviously religious contexts of either Christian or “Heathen divines,” but expands his scope to include a more explicitly philosophical concern with “Souls” and “Minds” such as are found “everywhere in the *Platonic* authors,” as well as evidencing an interest in the mythological-aesthetic domain of “Heroes.” All of these spheres, be it the forms of Plato or mythological personages, exist in a space not only beyond the everyday, but which reaches out towards the imaginary. Even though Coleridge himself leaves out this particular section from the material chosen for the epigraph itself, the whole of the passage remains nevertheless as a background not only for those who seek it out or are made aware of it thanks to the efforts of conscientious editors, but more importantly the entirety of the original was known to Coleridge himself, who as an appropriator and editor would necessarily have to be aware of it. Later in the epigraph, Coleridge again omits Burnet’s specifically Christian referential context and again shifts the emphasis towards a more general level of speculation. Burnet here cites the writings of “*St. Paul*,” who also

speaks of the Angelic World, and has taken notice of many Orders and Distinctions among them; but this is in general only; he does not philosophize about them ... nay, on

the contrary, he reproves those as puffed up with vain Science, who rashly thrust themselves forwards to seek into these unknown and unsearchable Things. (*PW* 1: 371)

Through this exclusion, Coleridge for his part rejects the above proscription against those “who rashly thrust themselves forward to seek into ... unknown and unsearchable things,” which is at the same time a rejection of a proscription against the exploration of the imaginary insofar as it is first and foremost the domain of “unknown and unsearchable Things.” Nor does Coleridge automatically see it as “vain Science,” either as being without a reachable goal, or as a sign of vanity. The advocacy of an orientation towards the imaginary and the potentialities-for-Being which are disclosed through the encounter with it becomes more explicit as the passage continues:

I will own that it is very profitable, sometimes to contemplate in the Mind, as in a Draught, the Image of a greater and better World; lest the Soul being accustomed to the Trifles of this Present Life, should contract itself too much, and altogether rest in mean Cogitations ... (*PW* 1: 371)

While this “contemplating in the Mind” is a way of Being-towards “the Image of a greater and better World,” the conventional reference, on one hand, is to the “greater and better World” promised in the Christian afterlife in Heaven; on the other hand, it also has an aesthetic context insofar as the “contemplating” regards an “Image,” which is comparatively “greater and better” than the “World” of the real, and hence at the same time looks into the imaginary. The “profitabil[ity]” of such “contemplating” is that it prevents “the Soul” – or Being as the integrated totality of a diversity of powers and activities – from wholly succumbing to the habitual or customary, and thus (as we have seen) works against inauthentic, manners of Being. An excessive concentration on “the Trifles of the Present Life” averts us from the authentic concerns of Being which can be taken up neither in the debased forms of Being-towards associated with Dasein’s fallenness, nor solely in the constricted and transient scope of “the Present Life,” but can only be disclosed in the light of futurity. To aver from Being-towards one’s ownmost potentialities-for-Being is to “rest in” the “mean Cogitations” which define and limit the “they,” and which as merely psychological “Cogitations” are by definition diametrically opposed to the contemplations of authentic Being.

Yet the path of the question as a “contemplating” oriented by and towards the imaginary is not without its dangers. For this reason, Coleridge closes the epigraph with a caveat, warning us that “in the mean Time, we must take care to keep to the Truth, and observe Moderation, that we may distinguish certain from uncertain Things, and Day from Night” (*PW* 1: 371). The principal hazard one encounters in confronting the imaginary is the separating of “Truth” from falsehood precisely because the imaginary itself as the presencing of what has not yet been through the medium of the aesthetic dwells along the borderlands of the actual and non-actual, and hence partakes of both. The passage, therefore, recommends, the middle way of “Moderation,” so that “we may distinguish” what can be depended on as a sure foothold from hazardous, shifting terrain, and thus will hopefully enable us to go forth without faltering. The poignancy of the caveat becomes more pressing as an introduction to the poem itself as a means of preparing the reader for the strangeness of what follows, since so much of the action of the poem takes place in these borderlands in the midst of “certain” and “uncertain Things,” on the frontier between “Day” and “Night.” In fact, the poem itself thematizes such boundaries as sites wherein not only one side is converted through a turning-towards its opposite, but also where the oppositions themselves eventually come to share the same space as a con-version of reality.

The central moment of conversion in the poem occurs when the Ancient Mariner bestows his benediction upon “the water snakes” (*PW* 1: 273). Yet his act of blessing itself is compelled *ab extra* and is only made possible after a shift from a reliance on a predominantly voluntary imagination towards an orientation characterized by an openness to the influence of the imaginary as *Erfahrung*.

Initially, the water snakes as “the creatures of the calm” are “despise[d]” (*PW* 1: 391) by the Mariner, and he describes them as “slimy things” (*PW* 1: 239). At this point, these “creatures” are inseparable from the reality of the Mariner’s own world, wherein both the “sea” and metonymically the ship as a whole are “rotting” (*PW* 240; 242) and are infected by the general contagion – an infection resulting from the Mariner’s own ontological situation and transmitted through his way of Being-towards them as revealed through his aesthetic descriptions. In this situation, the Mariner attempts “to pray” (*PW* 244), but fails. The “prayer” which the Mariner prepares to enunciate, but cannot deliver, is something that he posits will “gush” from him through the action of praying itself (*PW* 1: 245). When the Mariner

eventually does come to “bless ...” the water snakes, he does so “unaware” (*PW* 1: 285; 287); and hence his blessing, which itself is a species of prayer, cannot be an act of will and is rather a reflex of his encounter with the imaginary as *Erfahrung*. Only by submitting to the compulsion conveyed by an external force is the “spring of love” residing in the Mariner’s “heart” permitted and made free to “gush ...” forth (*PW* 1: 284).

But what has made the Mariner’s conversion possible? While the Mariner attributes it to his “kind saint” who “took pity on” him (*PW* 1: 286), we must look at the events leading up to the moment of conversion in order to determine more precisely the dynamics underlying it – dynamics which parallel the processes we have posited as underlying aesthetic reception. Both in the happenings leading up to his failed attempt to pray, as well as in the events leading up to the moment of conversion, the Mariner is engaged in a detailed, aesthetic description of the scene and the “Water snakes.” Yet in the former section, the Mariner repeatedly says he “looked” (*PW* 1: 240; 242; 244) at the scene and the events occurring therein; whereas in the description leading right up to the moment of conversion itself, he instead says he “watched” (*PW* 1: 273; 278) the scene around him. “To look” is to actively direct oneself towards that which is scrutinized, whereas “to watch” is to hold oneself back and allow things to show themselves. In the latter passages, the description is longer, more detailed and concentrates not on his own, personal psychological and considered reaction to the environment as in the earlier section, but now rather focuses on the ways in which the elements of the scene show themselves as a shining-forth¹⁴⁹; yet without sacrificing the affective dimension of his own reactions, since this showing is a shining-forth for-another. The sea where “The moving Moon” (*PW* 1: 263) casts its “beams” on “the sultry main” (*PW* 1: 267) is “Like April hoar-frost spread” (*PW* 1: 268); whereas the portion of the sea which “lay[s]” within the compass of “the ship’s huge shadow” (*PW* 1: 269) becomes a “charmed water” (*PW* 1: 270) which “burnt always / A still and awful red” (*PW* 1: 270-271). Similarly, “the water snakes” are defined in terms of light and effulgence, insofar as “They moved in tracks of shining white, / And when they reared, the elfish light / Fell off in hoary flakes” (*PW* 1: 274-276) and “every track / Was a flash of golden fire” (*PW* 1: 280-281).

¹⁴⁹ For a detailed analysis of the relation between the aesthetic and “shining-forth” [*die Einleuchtende*], please consult “Aesthetic Phenomenology: A Critical Encounter” (I).

At this point, poised on the verge of the moment of conversion, the Mariner's descriptive abilities break down, for "no tongue / Their beauty might declare" (*PW* 1; 282-283). This failure completes the Mariner's overwhelming by the experience of the imaginary as *Erfahrung*: no longer is he able to respond to the events he undergoes through an imaginative articulation, but must now be content to wholly submit to the influence of the imaginary.

It is the Mariner's giving up of himself to the imaginary in the moment of conversion that eventually permits him to respond to the experience he has undergone. As the Mariner himself says, it was in "The selfsame moment" (*PW* 1: 288) when he "blessed [the water snakes] unaware" (*PW* 289) that he again "could pray" (*PW* 1: 288). The "moment" is "selfsame" both in the sense of a simultaneity of events, as well as marking the instant when he returns to a conscious identification with his ownmost self. The Mariner's act of prayer is analogous to the aesthetic response we previously posited as resulting from the recipient's successive emergence from the aesthetic event back into her/his own lived existence in the real. The Mariner, like the recipient of an aesthetic work, must appropriate and take up what he has learned through the encounter with the imaginary as *Erfahrung* and apply it to and in his own existence.

The second form of conversion undergone by the Mariner occurs when he returns to his "own countree" (*PW* 1: 467) and stands again "on the firm land" (*PW* 1: 571), whereupon "the penance of life falls on him" (*PW* 1: 417) – a "penance" which itself an obsessive form of aesthetic *Erfahrung*. This second conversion grows out of the first and moves us more decidedly into the realm of the aesthetic insofar as through this conversion the Mariner himself as a teller of tales is both an artist in his own right (or rite), as well as constituting a paradigm for the role of the artist in general.

The Mariner returns as one visibly changed by his encounter with the imaginary.¹⁵⁰ Even "the Hermit" (*PW* 1: 509) – whom we may infer the Mariner had known before his *night sea journey*, since he not only recognizes the Hermit by sight but also by voice (*PW* 1: 508), and furthermore he is acquainted with the Hermit's habits and living conditions (*PW* 1: 514-522) – does not recognize him and even goes so

¹⁵⁰ The alteration in the Mariner's appearance and the reaction of those he meets after his return are analogous to the experiences of the poet as disclosed in the poem "Kubla Khan" (cf. "The Experience of the Imaginary As Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: 'Kubla Khan, or a Vision in a Dream' (1797-1799?)" [IV.a.ii.3]).

far as to enact the protective gesture of “cross[ing] his brow” (*PW* 1: 575) when he directly encounters the Mariner again for the first time. The change in the Mariner is also made clear by “The Pilot” (*PW* 1: 504) who refers to the Mariner not with a masculine pronoun, but rather as a neuter “it” like a thing, and ascribes to “it ... a fiendish look” (*PW* 1: 538) – a surmise echoed by “the Pilot’s boy” (*PW* 504), who for his part sees the Mariner as “The Devil” (*PW* 1: 569) himself. When the Mariner “moved” his “lips” (presumably as a prelude to speech, although we are not told he actually says anything), the others will not or cannot listen. Instead of responding verbally, each adopts another form of discourse and retreats into himself: the Pilot, after letting out a non-verbal “shriek ...” (*PW* 1: 560), next “fell down in a fit” (*PW* 1: 561); the Hermit turns away from the Mariner, “raised his eyes, / And prayed where he did sit” (*PW* 1: 562-563) as an alternative rhetorical act defined in terms of a more or less conventional religious discourse; and finally the Pilot’s Boy crawls up inside his own mind and goes “crazy” (*PW* 1: 565), while also non-verbally responding with protracted “Laugh[ter]” (*PW* 1: 566).

While the Mariner’s future “penance” (*PW* 1: 411) is foretold in the earlier conversation between “two of” “The Polar Spirit’s fellow dæmons” (*PW* 1: 403), it is only after the Hermit asks him to “Say quick ... I bid thee say – / What manner of man art thou?” (*PW* 1: 576-577) that the Mariner’s “frame was wrenched / With a woeful agony” (*PW* 1: 578-579) and he is “forced to begin” telling his “tale” (*PW* 1: 580). When the Mariner finishes recounting his story, he is “left free” (*PW* 1: 581). Yet the agency of this letting free is attributed only to a somewhat vague “it” (*PW* 1: 581), which could through the unclear antecedent refer to any one, or some combination, of three referents: the “woeful agony,” the “tale” itself, or the act of telling his tale. What is clear is that this situation reveals the influence of the imaginary as *Erfahrung*. The Mariner does not choose to recount his story, but is “forced” to do it; nor does he free himself through the telling, but is rather “left free” in the sense of being left behind or abandoned, which makes him not an agent but a mere object of the action.

While our reading does not dispute “the sin/redemption movement that all modern critics have admitted to be the heart of the poem”¹⁵¹, we must, however, call into question the nature of the “redemption” itself, and ask if it is not at the same time a brand of damnation, insofar as the Mariner is

¹⁵¹ J. Robert Barth, *The Symbolic Imagination* 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham U Pr., 2001) 111.

forced by powers beyond his control to wander like Ahasuerus until doomsday telling and retelling his tale. We are told in the marginal gloss that “ever and anon throughout” the Mariner’s “future life an agony constraineth him to travel from land to land” (*PW* 1: 417), while he waits for some “uncertain hour” (*PW* 1: 582), when “That agony returns” (*PW* 1: 583) and “force[s]” him to again recount his tale. For the Mariner, who himself is (in the words of Harold Bloom) “compulsive,”¹⁵² the aesthetic event becomes akin to an obsessive-compulsive disorder (which itself is comparable to *Erfahrung*), insofar as until his “ghastly tale is told” (*PW* 584), his “heart within [him] burns” (*PW* 1: 585) – only in the case of the Mariner, the disorder does not begin with an obsession which gives rise to a compulsion intended to break the hold of the initial obsession, but rather is initiated by the compulsion of the imaginary as *Erfahrung* which subsequently gives rise to an obsession revealed as the “burn[ing]” of his “heart,” and which in turn eventuates another specifically aesthetic compulsion in the form of the overwhelming need to tell his story.¹⁵³

The second primary form of conversion through the aesthetic encounter with the imaginary as *Erfahrung* is undergone by “The wedding-guest” (*PW* 1: 14) himself, who as the auditor of the Mariner’s tale is a character in his own right, as well as providing a surrogate for the reader. Yet the recipient of the Mariner’s tale must be predisposed towards the tale itself in an attunement as a readiness for hearing – Although what constitutes the quality of this predisposition is left vague, it is clear that such a predisposition can only be recognized by the Mariner himself *ab extra*. As the Mariner himself says, “That moment his face I see, / I know the man that must hear me: / To him my tale I teach” (*PW* 1: 588-590). What is certain, however, is the fact that the recipient “must hear” the “tale,” and the Mariner after finding a suitable recipient takes on the role of a “teach[er].” At the same time, we can also infer that since the recipient “must hear” the “tale,” the recipient her/himself not only has the capacity to take it in, but furthermore as a student must be able to respond to the lessons imparted by the tutor. The dynamics of this process also resemble those of Heidegger’s conception of the *call of conscience* and the *hearing* associated

¹⁵² Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (Ithaca: Cornell U Pr., 1971) 207.

¹⁵³ We will investigate in more detail the relation between the aesthetic, the imaginary, and obsessive-compulsive disorders in the next section: “‘Kubla Khan, or a Vision in a Dream’ (1797-1799?) as Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder” (IV.a.ii.3).

with it, in that “The ‘voice’” of the call “is taken rather as a giving-to-understand” – insofar as therein “lies the momentum of a push – of an abrupt arousal” (*BT* 271) and the feeling that “The call comes *from* me and yet *from beyond me and over me*” (*BT* 275).¹⁵⁴ Additionally, while “The call” arises seemingly from nowhere and appears to come “from afar unto afar” (*BT* 271); at the same time, the call “reaches” only the Dasein which “wants to be brought back” (*BT* 271) to its “there” out of its fallenness, and hence the call demands readiness on behalf of the one called. This “beyond” at the same time takes us into the region of the imaginary. The Mariner’s tale, whose instructive “function” Bloom characterizes as “monitory” (207), achieves its ends through what the Mariner terms his “strange power of speech” (*PW* 587), which insofar as it is spoken “by a lurker at the threshold” (Bloom 207), and through its very quality of “strange[ness],” is a form of discourse opposed to the everyday and draws its “power” from the imaginary. Richard Haven also notes the medial position of the Mariner between the world of the everyday and an ontological-aesthetic reality, who “By his physical presence ... stands as a bridge between the familiar and the unfamiliar, between the commonplace reality of the outer, public world and the extraordinary reality of the inner world of consciousness”¹⁵⁵ – here reading “consciousness” as analogous to state of Being or an ontological situation. As “strange” it is at the same time estranging and is both a sign of, and makes possible, the forms of alienation underlying the aesthetic.¹⁵⁶

Even though the Wedding-Guest is in a party of “three gallants” (*PW* 1: 373), he is the only “one” whom the Mariner “stoppeth” (*PW* 2), detaining him at the threshold of the “wedding-feast” (*PW* 1: 373), and hence brings him into the same medial space which the Mariner himself inhabits. At first, the Wedding-Guest protests his being stopped, and boldly asserts himself by asking the Mariner, “Now wherefore stopp’st thou me?” (*PW* 1: 4), but he receives no response, nor does he any further pursue the matter. When the Mariner “holds him with his skinny hand” (*PW* 1: 9) and begins to recite his tale, the Wedding-Guest again asserts himself by reprimanding the Mariner, and orders him to “Hold off! Unhand

¹⁵⁴ For our discussion of the role of alienation in the aesthetic please see “The Aesthetic as *Erfahrung*: The Call and the Moment of Vision” (II.b.ii).

¹⁵⁵ Richard Haven, *Patterns of Consciousness: An Essay on Coleridge* (Amherst: U Massachusetts Pr., 1969) 20.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. “The Busy-ness of the World and Its Discontents: Everydayness and the ‘They’” (II.b.i).

me, grey-beard loon!” (*PW* 1: 12), and this time the Mariner does respond (albeit nonverbally), and “Eftsoons his hand dropt he” (*PW* 1: 12). Yet by this point the Mariner has already entranced the “spell-bound” (*PW* 1: 373) Wedding-Guest, and hence no longer needs to physically restrain him, for the Mariner now “holds him with his glittering eye” (*PW* 1: 13). The physical condition of the Mariner’s body does not matter, and his sparse physical description only emphasizes the Mariner’s age by mentioning his “long grey beard” (*PW* 3) and assigning to him the epithet “ancient” (*PW* 1: 19). The minimal description we do get instead works to de-emphasize his actual bodily presence through his ostensible lack of physical presence as metonymically indicated by “his skinny hand” (*PW* 1: 9). The one salient feature of the Mariner is his “glittering eye” (*PW* 1: 3; 13), and he is later described as “bright-eyed” (*PW* 1: 20). What is emphasized is not the Mariner’s physical eyes, but rather the force and visionary and mysterious quality they possess, for in the first two references to them only one eye is mentioned (although we must assume he does indeed have two eyes, since no mention is made of any kind of ocular deformity), and we learn nothing about their color or shape; but rather what is central to the Mariner’s “eye” is the effect it has for and on those upon whom it is trained. The “glittering” can only be noticed by another, and it is the “glittering eye” itself which is assigned agency of “hold[ing]” the Wedding-Guest and making him “st[and] still” (*PW* 1: 14), in spite of his earlier attempts to withdraw into “the merry din” (*PW* 1: 8) of the wedding-feast. At this point, the Wedding-Guest succumbs not only to the Mariner himself, but more importantly gives himself up to the tale, and “listens like a three years child” (*PW* 1: 15) – not only innocently, but also with a young child’s lack of power and inability to effectively assert himself. In telling his tale, “The Mainer hath his will” (*PW* 1: 16); and for his part, the Wedding-Guest “cannot chose but hear” (*PW* 1: 18) and is reduced to a nearly complete passiveness.”¹⁵⁷ Here the Mariner’s tale is emblematic of the power of the aesthetic in general to compel the recipient without conscious assent and to impose itself upon her/him as a form of *Erfahrung* wherein the recipient is assumed into the aesthetic event. Here we also see the first signs of the Wedding-Guest’s ongoing, precipitating conversion as a turning-with wherein he enters into the Mariner’s reality and begins to assume his line of sight as an attunement and manner of Being-towards the world.

¹⁵⁷ Ward Pafford, “Coleridge’s Wedding-Guest,” *Studies in Philology* 60 (1963) 621.

Yet neither the Mariner himself, nor his tale, are immune to forms of con-version imposed by his audience and necessitated by the dynamic character of the aesthetic event. The poem itself is a conversation, even if the Wedding-Guest remains by and large a tacit interlocutor. While “the Mariner’s narrative ... constitutes nearly all of the poem,” it “is actually a part of the dialogue between the Mariner and the Wedding-Guest; and the dialogue in turn is part of a narrative of encounter.”¹⁵⁸ Yet many critics, spellbound by “the Mariner’s narrative,” bypass the dialogic “structure of the poem as a whole” (Owen 261). Ward Pafford similarly notes the short script given to the Wedding-Guest, finding that in general “The accumulated critical scholarship bearing upon ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ discloses comparatively small interest in the Mariner’s hapless auditor” (Pafford 618). The “dialogue” which structures the poem, however, does not only consist of the two terms of the Mariner and the Wedding-Guest, but must be expanded to include the third factor of the narrative itself, which is shaped through the process of the conversation. Here we can see that these three factors parallel those of the aesthetic equation, and thus provide a working example of the dynamics of the aesthetic event.

During the course of the narrative, the Wedding-Guest interrupts the Mariner three times: first at the end of “PART I”; second, at the beginning of “PART IV” (*PW* 1: 389); and for the third time, about halfway through “PART V” (*PW* 1: 395) at line 345. It is at these points of intersection which mark acts of assertion on the part of the Wedding-Guest / recipient that the dynamics of the aesthetic event are most clearly revealed.

In the first interruption, the Wedding-Guest cries out “‘God save thee, ancient Mariner! / From fiends that plague thee thus! – / Why look’st thou so?’” (*PW* 1: 79-81). This interjection occurs just before the Mariner confesses his actual crime, and apart from its obvious dramatic purpose as serving to heighten the tension surrounding the disclosure through strategic delay, and at the same time encouraging audience participation through holding forth an opening (or what Iser terms a “gap”) to directly enjoin the narrative through the act of questioning by the recipient’s stand-in; it further works to show not only the Wedding-Guest’s growing concern for the Mariner, but also his increasing personal and affective involvement in the narrative itself. The interjection permits the Wedding-Guest to assert himself while simultaneously

¹⁵⁸ Charles A. Owen, Jr., “Structure in *The Ancient Mariner*,” *College English* 23 (1962) 261.

inserting himself into the narrative. Along these lines, Pafford sees this exclamation as showing how the Wedding-Guest's "passiveness is modified by an active sensitivity to the Mariner's condition" (621). Here we can see how the recipient crosses over into and enjoins the world of the artwork. The reality of the reader merges with the world of the Mariner's narrative, a process wherein "the reader himself operates the 'fusion of the horizons'" between her/himself and the text, "with the result that he produces an experience of reality which is real in its most basic sense insofar as it happens as an actual occurrence" (P 26). The other interruptions serve to further this process, insofar as they "testify to his complete acceptance of the narrative" (Owen 263). This "complete acceptance" is what allows the Wedding-Guest / recipient to help shape the Mariner's tale. Since "The work of art is the expression of a truth that cannot be reduced to what its creator actually thought in it" (PH 95-96), its range of potential meanings must be located beyond the author. Without a moment of reception, the work remains inert as a mere conglomeration of potentialities slumbering statically *in potentia*. For this reason, the work of art "is something that only manifests and displays itself when it is constituted in the viewer" (RB 126). Thus in the case of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the Mariner "requires the sympathetic response of his listener to release his full confession" (Owen 263).

This "sympathetic response," however, is not only the providing of a friendly ear, but is also a constitutive influence, and hence as Raimonda Modiano notes, the Mariner's "dependence on the Wedding Guest's continuous attention will significantly influence the very way in which he shapes his narrative."¹⁵⁹ The Wedding-Guest's interruption at the beginning of "PART IV" is no less an affective response, only this time instead of indicating a growing identification with the plight of the Mariner, it is an expression of "fear":

"I fear thee, Ancient Mariner!
I fear thy skinny hand!
And thou art long, and lank, and brown,

¹⁵⁹ Raimonda Modiano, "Word and 'Languageless' Meaning," *Romantic Poetry: Recent Revisionary Criticism*, ed. Karl Kroeber and Gene W. Ruoff (New Brunswick: Rutgers U Pr., 1993) 225.

As is the ribbed sea sand.

I fear thee and thy glittering eye,

And thy skinny hand, so brown.” (*PW* 224-229)

The same chord of “fear” provides the keynote of the third interruption in “PART V”: “I fear thee, ancient Mariner!” (*PW* 1: 345). Yet these expressions of “fear” are no less forms of “sympathetic response,” only this time they show the Wedding-Guests sympathy to be an affective identification not solely with the Mariner, but also with the narrative itself, and in this way the recipient begins to influence the course of the narrative. Here the character of the poem as a conversation becomes clear.

As a conversation, the narrative demands a subsequent response to the Wedding-Guest from the Mariner himself – a response which shows the fluid, give-and-take quality of the aesthetic. Modiano posits that “the Wedding Guest’s intervention in Parts IV and V of the poem occasions a sudden shift of narrative perspective in the Mariner’s tale which ameliorates the horror of previous scenes” and serves to “show ... that the mariner’s story is a composite of his past and present, of the time of his voyage and the time of dialogue about it” (228). This process is analogous to that of the recipient’s development of reading as a process which continually builds-up a vision of reality through re-visioning a specific aesthetic reality, wherein “what has just been read modifies what has been read before” (*P* 26). Owen notes this cumulative effect, when he writes,

The events of the voyage, for which Coleridge was seeking ‘a suspension of disbelief for the moment’ ... come to us refracted not only by the Mariner’s awareness at the time, by his memory of them and his effort to account for them subsequently, but also by the experience of the effect his narrating them has had on many previous listeners. (262)

From this perspective, the Mariner himself is both the artist behind, and recipient of, his own narrative. Based on the structure of the work as a co-present (although continually metamorphosing) whole, this process is simultaneously diachronic and synchronic, for retelling or rereading (or accumulative tellings

and readings) continues the processes of inter-modification. Thus the conversations between the artist, the recipient, and the artwork itself are enabled to lead ultimately to a con-version.

Now we must ask: how do the conversions which structure the poem ultimately play out, and where is the Wedding-Guest / recipient left? In the case of the call of conscience, when Dasein has truly heard the call by being called back towards its “there,” it becomes *resolute* [*entschlossen*], and concomitantly “*resoluteness* [*Entschlossenheit*] is our name for authentic existence” (BPP 287). In regards to the aesthetic, becoming resolute means that Dasein re-turns towards its “there” through the intermediary of the aesthetic event. Yet in the case of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, does the Wedding-Guest, and do we as his companions in the narrative adventure of the tale itself, finally become resolute; or do we not instead enjoin the Mariner’s wanderings, subject to the same obsessions and compulsions? Barth appropriately summarizes the dynamics of the aesthetic event and the way in which they engage the recipient as they are revealed in the poem without falling back on formulaic schematizations dependent on predigested forms of limited psychological phenomena:

What happens in the poem, for most of us, is what happens in any truly symbolic poetry, any ‘poetry of encounter’: we are drawn into the experience. Like the Wedding-Guest, we are caught and held fast by the Mariner’s glittering eye. We are brought into what seems a dream but, as in a dream, its experiences – of sin and redemption, of alienation and communion, of darkness and light – become startlingly real. (115)

Thereby, “Through symbolic vision” – which is to say “vision” constituted by the aesthetic – “we are brought to see, if not to comprehend, new worlds, new possibilities, new – and yet ancient – mysteries” (Barth 115). The use of the passive verbs “drawn,” “caught,” “held,” and “brought” all underscore Barth’s unspoken conception of undergoing an aesthetic experience as *Erfahrung*. Here too Barth characterizes the aesthetic event as a “poetry of encounter” driven by ontological concerns as projecting “new worlds” and disclosing the “new possibilities” as potentialities-for-Being. Thus through the conversations which structure the interactions within the poem itself, as well as between the poem and its recipient, a con-version takes place which further initiates us to the “mysteries” of Being and the imaginary. While we agree with David G. Riede that “‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ is a disturbing parable of poetic

authority,”¹⁶⁰ we do not think it results in a “disturbing” effect “because it suggests that the kind of vision ... that would compel another’s assent may itself be compulsive,” insofar as such a disturbance is essential to the action and power of the imaginary and the aesthetic as forms of *Erfahrung*. While we again concur with Riede, “what is transferred may not be harmless pieties, or even wisdom, but only a repetition-compulsion” (171); we must ask to what extent is this “repetition-compulsion” a rote program, and how much space does it allow for variations on its underlying themes?

While “Discussion of ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ traditionally begins with Coleridge’s famous conversation with that lady of ‘fine taste,’ Mrs. Barbauld” (Barth 105); we will depart from the conventional manner of proceeding and instead conclude our discussion of the poem with it. Whereas “Barbauld had complained (as Coleridge reports in a conversation in *Table Talk*) of the want of a moral” (Barth 105), Coleridge on the other hand saw “the chief fault of the poem was that it had too much moral, and that too openly obtruded on the reader.”¹⁶¹ We agree with Barth that this is “Surely not” a “den[ial] that the poem has ‘meaning,’ moral or otherwise”; but rather only voices a concern that “the Mariner’s ‘moral’ at the end of the poem (‘He prayeth best, who loveth best ...’)” may in fact “intrud[e] too obviously on the tale, with the danger of limiting its meaning in the reader’s mind” (105). By limiting the recipient’s participation by closing down the gaps whereby the reader enters enjoins the text, such rigid “moral[s]” forestalls the full play of the aesthetic event. Ultimately in order to be successful, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (like the aesthetic in general) must confront the reader with a number of indeterminacies; and in our search for coherence and meaning, we should remember (unlike Barbauld) “We need not try to make the chain of events seem more reasonable, more immediately explicable and clear-cut” (Bate, *Coleridge* 60). Indeterminacies, as Bate himself implicitly understands, and “Coleridge understood so well,” are the site of inter-action; and therefore, “When things are left indistinct ... the mind is more likely to continue to return to them and to find further meanings” (*Coleridge* 60).¹⁶² Insofar as meanings

¹⁶⁰ David G. Riede, *Oracles and Hierophants: Constructions of Romantic Authority* (Ithaca: Cornell U Pr., 1991) 170-171.

¹⁶¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk*, ed. Carl Woodring, 2 vols., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 14 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1990) 1: 272-273; hereafter *TT*.

¹⁶² Cf. Our foregoing treatment of the *aesthetics of hinting* in “The Imagination and the Imaginary” (II.b.iii).

are evolved through the recipient's repeated encounters with an artwork, indeterminacies are potentially pro-ductive. In fact, indeterminacy itself is constitutive for the aesthetic. Instead of making meaning a constant prolongation of one indeterminacy ceaselessly heaped upon another indeterminacy in the never-ending slippage of ongoing, dizzying supplementation; indeterminacy is precisely what makes the evolution of a distinctly aesthetic meaning possible. "The indeterminate" is "in no way to be regarded as a defect; on the contrary," it is a basic element for the aesthetic response" (P 9), since "indeterminacy is the fundamental precondition for reader participation" (P 10).

Aesthetic participation as a medium for conversion involves the encounter of the imagination as the faculty of projection with the imaginary as the sphere of the possible in general and potentialities-for-Being in particular, whose sites for disclosure are opened up in the fissures of indeterminacy which also serve to structure the aesthetic work itself. As sites for the emergence of the imaginary, points of indeterminacy provide a clearing wherein the imagination not only as projecting, but also as receptive openness is enabled to encounter the imaginary. Thus the principal "fault" of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, in Coleridge's own assessment, "consists in making the moral sentiment too apparent and bringing it too much as a principle or cause in a work of such pure imagination" (TT 1: 149), and thereby effectively closing down and too neatly tying off an expansive range of potential interpretive and existential threads. This interpretation is supported by Henry Nelson Coleridge, for whom (as Carl Woodring informs us in a footnote) C[oleridge]'s distinction is between unencumbered imagination and inculcated moral" (TT 1: 273 n.7). Woodring also notes that "Lowes based his interpretation of *A[ncient] M[ariner]* as a work of 'pure imagination' upon the T[able] T[alk] entry"¹⁶³ which we previously cited. For John Livingston Lowes, the poem is "a work of pure imagination" precisely because it provides a portal for the emergence of the imaginary and the constitution of an ontological "reality." Thus "the fallacy of such criticism" as that proffered by Barbauld "lies in its failure to reckon with the very *donnée* of the poem" (and of the aesthetic in general), which Lowes describes in words borrowed from Henri Frédéric Amiel's *Journal*

¹⁶³ Carl Woodring ed., *Table Talk*, 2 vols., by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 14 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1990): TT 1: 273 n. 7.

Intime as ““that poetical and artistic illusion which does not aim at being confounded with reality itself””¹⁶⁴ – or in our terms, with *the real* itself. An aesthetic reality as a form of *Erfahrung* imposes its own rules and determinations, while at the same time as a gestalt of the imaginary it discloses a range of previously unforeseen potentialities-for-Being that the recipient may in turn enjoin.

The recipient must cross back over from the experience of an alien aesthetic reality and translate that experience back into the real if the aesthetic cycle is to be completed; and thus the final conversion is enacted by both the Wedding-Guest and the recipient, when the con-version which has been evolved through the aesthetic encounter emerges into, and merges with, lived existence. In the poem itself, this final conversion is given only a cursory treatment. Once the Mariner has “gone” (*PW* 620), we are told in the poem’s closing lines:

... the Wedding-Guest
Turned from the bridegroom’s door.

He went like one that hath been stunned,
And is of sense forlorn:
A sadder and a wiser man,
He rose the morrow morn. (*PW* 620-625)

By turning away from the wedding-feast, the Wedding-Guest takes an alternate path to the everyday thoroughfare of the “they,” as well as the one on which he was previously bent. While we can speculate in any number of ways about what this gesture may or may not mean, and extrapolate the significance of what the wedding entails based on whatever reading we choose, what is central to any valid reading must include the Wedding-Guest’s taking up of a new direction. In fact, in his similarity to “one that hath been stunned, / And is of sense forlorn,” the Wedding-Guest himself (at least at first) has no clear or distinct ideas concerning the results of the foregoing encounter. The poem itself suggests that it takes the Wedding-Guest some time to process the experience, since it is not until “the morrow morn” that the change wrought

¹⁶⁴ John Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1986) 276.

within him is registered. In the Wedding-Guest's difficulties in coming to terms with the experience, and in its lingering after-effects, the traces of the aesthetic as *Erfahrung* remain vital. Insofar as the Wedding-Guest rises the next day "A sadder and a wiser man," he is indeed changed, but not utterly changed. The use of the comparative forms "sadder" and "wiser" indicate a difference (to employ one of Coleridge's favorite distinctions) not in *kind*, but in *degree*. Some basic qualities or characteristics of the Wedding-Guest's own self remain in the forms of a previous mood or fundamental attunement, only now in an accentuated manner – which is to say, the Wedding-Guest was already sad and wise (qualities which may have contributed to his being the target of the Mariner's attention), he is now "sadder" and "wiser." Yet what this underlying sadness and wisdom is concerned with is never specified; and even though we can read back into the poem in an attempt to discover its source and purview, no answer we can propose will ever be definitive. But that does not mean that it is entirely impossible to evolve a coherent reading of the poem, but only that the poem offers us (just as it presents to the Wedding-Guest) considerable latitude in our interpretive efforts (as the dizzying array of previous readings of the poem testify) – a latitude built into the form of the poem itself not only through its arcane symbolism, but additionally strengthened by its structure as a series of con-versions. In Haney's reading of the final conversion, the ontological nature of the change in the Wedding-Guest is highlighted. The Mariner "pulls the Wedding Guest out of the world of marriage-feasts to redefine his 'is,'" and thereby he becomes "'A sadder and a wiser man' (670) [sic] – based on the emphatic 'ought' of the Mariner's story" (Haney 106) – yet this "redefin[ition]" is only "*based on* [emphasis mine] the emphatic 'ought' of the Mariner's story," and not thereby rigidly determined. While Haney correctly emphasizes the ontological character of the conversion, in his over-riding concern with "the other," he fails to acknowledge that any imperative imparted through the aesthetic must not only be appropriated, but subsequently applied in one's own context. Here again we return to Riede's notion of the poem as a "transfer[ence]" of "a repetition-compulsion" (171) – but while it is indeed a form of "repetition-compulsion," it is a brand of repetition that allows for a substantial range of variations on the keynotes of the theme.

Now the character of aesthetic revelation and conversion become clearer: something is revealed to us, but it is not imposed. The aesthetic event, even as a form of the compulsory imaginary as *Erfahrung*,

does not convert the recipient into a duplicate of itself, but rather opens up a site wherein we may both go beyond our current state of Being through a conversion; as well as re-turn towards our own existential situation, which through the appropriation and application of the aesthetic event, becomes a con-version. This could be the reason why Coleridge worried that the poem's "chief fault ... was that it had too much moral, and that too openly obtruded on the reader" (*TT* 1: 272-273), and suggests why he left the specific nature of the Wedding-Guest's final conversion more or less undefined. Here the aesthetic directly merges with "life," which Coleridge defines in his *Hints towards the Formation of a More Comprehensive Theory of Life* (1816) "as the principle of individuation, or the power which unites a given *all* into a *whole* that is presupposed by all its parts" (*SW&F* 1: 510). This unification is based on "the principle of unity in *multeity*, as far as the former, the unity to wit, is produced *ab intra*" (*SW&F* 1: 510). In this way, the self which has undergone an aesthetic conversion is not a mere reflex as "a product of mechanism" as something "organized from without," but is rather "a product of organization" as something "mechanised from within" (*SW&F* 1: 511). For this reason, the alteration in the Wedding-Guest cannot take place until an intervening period of reflection has transpired. While the encounter with the Mariner leaves him shaken, "stunned," and devoid of "sense," no authentic change in Dasein's ontological situation can be forced upon it *ab extra*; but must instead result from an alteration in Dasein's attunement registered as a specific change in its way of Being-towards the world or itself, and hence an aesthetic experience cannot only be appropriated, but it must also be digested and applied.

But what happens when Dasein becomes confounded in the echoes of the imaginary and cannot re-turn to itself, but instead seeks only to dissolve through its own agency all boundaries and bring the imaginary into the sphere of the real? What occurs when the compulsory quality of the imaginary as *Erfahrung* gives rise to obsession, and hence gives birth to a second compulsion intended to release the hold of the original obsession – in other words, how may the experience of the aesthetic and the imaginary potentially be analogous to, and condition a brand of, obsessive-compulsive disorder? How does the encounter with the imaginary alter one's Being-with others, and how do "they" regard the one who has returned?

3. The Experience of the Imaginary As Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: “Kubla Khan, or a Vision in a Dream” (1797-1799?)

In “Kubla Khan, or a Vision in a Dream,” the imaginary registers throughout the poem, enveloping it in a pervasive sense of mystery, which exerts a peculiar fascination upon readers. J.C.C. Mays calls the work “a poem about creativity”¹⁶⁵ (*PW* 1: 510) – which concomitantly means that it perforce must at the same time deal (however implicitly) with the experience of encountering the imaginary. J.C.C. Mays notes that even though the poem itself was “put together” with “evident care,” and in spite of “the clarity of its structural relations,” the poem nevertheless is surrounded by a miasma of “uncertainty” (*PW* 1: 510). This “uncertainty” also extends to “The role of the main characters,” in that it “is ambivalent in a similar way” – an ambivalence which causes them “to lose all but the shadow of their moral and political urgency” (Mays *PW* 1: 510) as they are translated into emissaries and denizens of the imaginary. Insofar as through the course of the poem, “The protagonist undergoes metamorphosis in the course of composition” (Mays *PW* 1: 510), and more specifically “undergoes metamorphosis” through the encounter with the imaginary as *Erfahrung*, and “emerge[s] as a type of the creator-poet” (Mays *PW* 1: 510), “Kubla Khan” has to be read as “a poem of self-recognition, in which the figure of the youth as virile poet is finally identified with the poem’s speaker” (Bloom 217), and which (to return to the view of Mays) ends by “bringing order rather than loosing destruction” (Mays *PW* 1: 510). Edward Kessler interprets the poem along similar lines, seeing “the conflict between Phantom dream associations and willed poetic form” as finally in concord and “reach[ing] a point of reconciliation.”¹⁶⁶ Yet conversely, the poem can also be read as presenting an encounter with the imaginary that ends in *self-alienation* and *fragmentation*. All these critics make somewhat extravagant claims for the efficacy of the “virile poet” and “willed poetic form” to rhetorically or otherwise contain, and thereby essentially nullify and gain control over the experience of the imaginary. Nor do these critics fully address the situation of the poet at the poem’s conclusion. What Coleridge refers to as the “vision” (*PW* 1: 512) presented in the first part of the poem is itself the residue of

¹⁶⁵ J.C.C. Mays ed., *Poetical Works*, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 3 vols., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 16 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 2001) 1: 150.

¹⁶⁶ Edward Kessler, *Coleridge’s Metaphors of Being*, (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1979) 60.

the encounter with the imaginary, which subsequently gives rise to the speaker's desire expressed in what Coleridge terms the "annexed ... fragment" (*PW* 1: 512) of the second part of the poem to reconstruct the initial "vision," and thereby provide a site wherein he hopes to transcend his fragmented situation by willfully crossing back over into the imaginary – and which in the end leads ironically to only greater fragmentation. Thus in "Kubla Khan" we see not only the compulsory quality of the creative encounter with the imaginary as *Erfahrung*, but furthermore witness the transition to an obsessive-compulsive manner of Being-towards the imaginary.

J. Robert Barth's reading of the poem in *The Symbolic Imagination* is a forerunner to our vision of the poem as an interplay of the divergent domains of the real and the imaginary, although Barth structures his analysis not in accordance with the terminology of aesthetic phenomenology, but rather draws on terms and concepts from German Idealism. Barth posits that "Kubla Kahn" in its entirety is in fact a "dual vision," wherein "the first part ('In Xanadu did Kubla Kahn')" is "presented as a vision of a certain reality"; whereas "the second ('A damsel with a dulcimer')" for its part is "a vision of the ideal of this same reality" (Barth 116). If "The other part of the vision projects an ideal world," Barth speculates that herein "the reality of Kubla's world would owe its being to the poet's gift. It would be of his own making"; and thus ultimately "This vision ... reconciles ... disparate realities" – a reconciliation whose "source of unity is inward" and resides in "the poet's imagination" (116). While these insights are doubtlessly true in regards to an Idealist dialectic predicated on the interplay between the "world[s]" of "the real and the ideal" enacted by and through "subjective envisioning" (Barth 116), a view which is in keeping with the conventional reading of the poem as a symbolic rendering of the creative process (which it undoubtedly is); at the same time, the terms are no less applicable to the ontological dynamics of the real and imaginary brought into play through the force of aesthetic *Insein* as "project[ion]" which we have outlined as one of the principal structural components of an aesthetic phenomenology. Yet here we must ask: are both these visions indeed wholly the outgrowth of "the poet's gift," or do they not also reveal the poet's *curse*? While the poet "projects an ideal world," how far is this world realized, and how much does it remain only a hope (the last of the evils left in Pandora's box)? What happens to our schematization of the dynamics of the interactions between the poet and these worlds when the self-sufficiency of "the poet's imagination" is called into

question through the introduction of the concept of the imaginary as *Erfahrung*? Ultimately, does the poem enact a “reconcil[iation],” or does it not also end in obsessive attempts to access the imaginary which only again reinforce the fragmentation of the real?

Coleridge’s preface “OF THE FRAGMENT OF KUBLA KHAN” (*PW* 1: 511) has often occasioned considerable suspicion on the part of critics of Coleridge. In our reading of the introductory note, we will be taking Coleridge at his word in an act of good critical faith, even if it “may” have been (or more likely decidedly was) “embellished for the occasion” (Bate, *Coleridge* 75); rather than seeking to debunk its details, or dispute the integrity of its author. This latter attitude, which puts Coleridge himself and not the poem before the bar of critical adjudication, is hardly uncommon (not only in relation to “Kubla Khan,” but in regards to criticism of Coleridge in general) and is expressed early and representatively by Thomas Love Peacock, who writes, “it is extremely probable that Mr. Coleridge, being a very visionary gentleman, has somewhat deceived himself respecting the origin of *Kubla Khan*; and as the story of its having been composed in sleep must necessarily, by all who are acquainted with his narrating matter of fact, be received with a certain degree of skepticism.”¹⁶⁷ While the prefatory note, on one level, appears merely to detail the occurrences surrounding the actual composition of the poem, treating even fantastic elements in a matter-of-fact manner, while also serving to offer an *apologia* for the publication of what Coleridge himself dubs an unfinished “fragment” (*PW* 1: 511). Yet on another level, the preface works to set up the division between the two principal parts of the poem (in accordance with Barth’s division of the poem into “two visions, the first section is presented in lines 1-36, while the second section occupies lines 37-54); while at the same time introducing the interrelation between the imagination and the imaginary which we will see plays out in and structures the poem itself. After a gesture of excusatory name-dropping, Coleridge balks at affirming “any supposed *poetic* merits” in the piece at hand, seeing its value “rather as a psychological curiosity” (*PW* 1: 511). By referring to the poem as a “psychological curiosity,” a condition which in Coleridge’s implicit view diminishes, or at least calls into question, its “*poetic* merits”; he not only makes preemptive excuses for any criticisms which he fears may be leveled at the poem, but also redirects the recipient’s attention towards the “psychological” ramifications of the poem – ramifications

¹⁶⁷ *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, 10 vols. (London: Constable & Co., 1934) 8: 290.

which due to their more fundamental dependence on the structure of human Being and the encounter with the imaginary are more properly *ontological* and *aesthetic*.

The exact natures of the “slight indisposition,” or the unnamed “anodyne” which “had been prescribed” (*PW* 1: 511) to ameliorate it (no matter what draw they may hold for those who are more exclusively interested in Coleridge’s biography, his writing of disease, or his pharmaceutical proclivities) are of no direct concern to us; yet the resulting “profound sleep, at least of the external senses” (*PW* 1: 511) provides us with a paradigm of the experience of the imaginary as *Erfahrung*. The “sleep” into which Coleridge describes himself as falling is “profound” in that it not only refers to “a subject of thought” as being “Deep in meaning”; but is also spatial as indicating a state “of great depth,” or the quality of being “deep”; and hence signals an entrance into a concealed world opposed to the real as the field “of the external senses” – a world which takes aesthetic shape through the influence of the imaginary. As “profound,” Coleridge’s “sleep” could also be read as indicating that it has emerged like the imaginary from some hidden space and carries one away, insofar as “profound” may also indicate an “Originating in, or coming from, a depth”; while at the same time as referring to that which is “deeply drawn, deep-fetched (as a sigh); carried far down or very low (as a bow or inclination of the body),” the “profound” calls up something from deep within us and inclines us towards it. Finally, “profound” carries the resonance of “reverence, submission, or the like”¹⁶⁸; and therefore, is related to the receptive openness we have seen is associated with the experience of the imaginary.

In Coleridge’s encounter with the imaginary, since it occurs “without any sensation or consciousness of effort” (*PW* 1: 511), he does not actively and willfully engage his imagination, but rather becomes a vessel of the imaginary. The influence of the imaginary reveals itself not only in Coleridge’s “sleep,” but more importantly comes to light through the medium of the aesthetic in process of “composition” which the “dream” initiates, wherein “all the images rose up before him as *things*, with a parallel production of correspondent expressions” (*PW* 1: 511). Thus the first section of the poem which directly results from this encounter should more properly be termed an aesthetic “creation” – a concept which must be distinguished from a “work,” defined as an activity or series of activities which *work on*

¹⁶⁸ “Profound,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, New Ed.

certain elements or *works towards* a formal arrangement of them. As a “creation,” it “is not something that we can imagine being deliberately made by someone (an idea that is still implied in the concept of the work)” (*RB* 33); but which as a “work” is conceived rather as an event which seems to occur more or less spontaneously as if driven by forces emanating from, and residing within, Dasein itself. For this reason, in cases of aesthetic “creation,” the artist is as much a recipient as a creator *per se*; and therefore, “Someone who has produced a work of art stands before the creation of his hands in just the same way that anyone else does” (*RB* 33). This condition explains the travelogue quality of the first section of the poem, wherein the voice of the poet is controlled and subsumed by the event of the imaginary, and hence is (relatively speaking) “out of the picture” (Lowes 372-373).

Here we find ourselves on the outskirts of the unconscious,¹⁶⁹ a territory which is inhabited by the genius (that favorite child of the Romantics), and which is attuned towards and by the imaginary, and hence demands a form of hermeneutic response not as an active projecting, but as a translating. Gadamer calls our attention to the connection between “unconscious” and “genius,” since “Even the concept of genius, upon which the modern philosophy of art has been founded since Kant, contained unconsciousness as an essential ingredient” (*PH* 208). Not as the writer, but as the reader of his “vision in a dream,” Coleridge performs what is essentially a hermeneutic act which can be labeled “romantic” insofar as “romantic hermeneutics was based on one of the fundamental concepts of Kantian aesthetics, namely, the concept of the genius who, like nature itself, creates the exemplary work ‘unconsciously’ – without consciously applying rules or merely imitating models” (*PH* 45). The centrality of an unconscious, hermeneutic receptivity in encounters with the imaginary holds true even when the creation may at first appear to be the active projection of the imagination. While “the genius, who, like a favorite of nature, creates what is exemplary unconsciously and without the application of rules,” nevertheless “It is a necessary result of this account that the artist’s self-interpretation is deprived of its legitimation” (*PH* 208), and thus

¹⁶⁹ A note of caution: here we are using “unconscious” as a mode of Being wherein it is disposed “unconsciously” as “unconsciousness”; and therefore, we do not mean to imply any exclusive relation to a Psychoanalytic “unconscious” – although our conception of the unconscious would be more amenable to a Jungian notion of the unconscious than able to get in line behind Freud’s “subconscious” insofar as it is constitutive for the former, while remaining constitutionally opposed to the latter.

When such interpretive declarations by the artist do arise, they are the product of subsequent reflection, in which the artist has no particular privilege over against anyone else who confronts his work. Such declarations of the artist are indeed documents, and in certain circumstances constitute points of departure for subsequent interpretation. But they do not have a canonical status. (*PH* 208)

The “artist” comes to occupy the position of a recipient even in regards to her/his own ostensible creations. In the first section of the poem, Coleridge himself seems to recognize the futility of making “interpretive declarations,” and instead allows the poem to speak for itself. Nowhere does the voice of the artist overtly intrude as an “I” or a “me,” nor does any of the background explained in the preface overtly enter into the verse, save the tacit part of attempting to explain a supposed source of some of the specifics of the poem’s imagery.

By adding the introductory note, Coleridge offers a “document” which not only provides us with “points of departure for subsequent interpretation” (*PH* 208) – a “document” which can also be read as Coleridge’s attempt to assert himself. Coleridge hopes such an assertion will permit him to come to terms with both unconscious creation and the pernicious influence of the imaginary, which he sees as a debilitating “dream of pain and disease” – a “dream” which is “describ[ed] with equal fidelity” in both divisions of the poem (*PW* 1: 512). While at the same time we must continue to remember the “declarations” he espouses “do not have a canonical status” (*PH* 208), they nevertheless present a way to schematize Coleridge’s own relation to the preface and “Kubla Khan” itself. The same “uncertainty” with which we saw the imaginary imbues the poem also troubled Coleridge, and thus Mays posits that “The nature of C[oleridge]’s involvement with the poem is commensurate with its mystery, openness and depth – qualities which he feared might disguise a moral abyss” (*PW* 1: 510) – a disconcertion which is revealed in the rift between the poem’s two principal divisions and leads to the addition of the introductory note. Mays speculates that in order to combat and bestow some structure on this cauldron of the imaginary as a threatening “moral abyss,” Coleridge added “the Preface,” which “complements the poem in the same way that the gloss does in the *Ancient Mariner*, linking the poem to the rest of C[oleridge]’s concerns with the help of prosaic details almost certainly invented for the occasion” (*PW* 1: 510). Here Mays calls our

attention to character of the preface as an addendum or after-thought which permits him to bring the poem into line with his wider concerns – a move which at the same time allows him to bring these concerns into play in our reading of the poem itself.

Yet while the Preface, on one level, provides a means of rhetorical containment, it simultaneously works to reveal the disruptive influx of the imaginary as *Erfahrung*, since it is here (both in the title and the body of the text itself) that Coleridge explicitly refers to the poem as a “fragment” (*PW* 1: 511), thereby introducing a notion of incompleteness which remains as a background to any subsequent readings of the poem. In fact, it is only through this gesture that we think of the poem as fragmentary at all, since “As Humphrey House pointed out, we would probably never have considered the poem a fragment without the poet’s note warning us in advance that our expectations would not be fulfilled” (Kessler 60). In the introduction, Coleridge also gives us a narrative of the events which opened up the rift in the poem between the second and third stanzas. This discontinuity is conveniently blamed on the hapless “person on business from Porlock” (*PW* 1: 512), after whose interruption Coleridge found that the flood of “images” and “expressions” (*PW* 1: 511) had subsided; and “though he still retained some vague and dim recollection of the general purpose of the vision ... all the rest had passed away, like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast, but, alas! without the restoration of the latter” (*PW* 1: 512). Not only is the first part of the poem fragmented due to the fading away of “the general purpose of the vision”; but the poet (who here is clearly identified with Coleridge himself – although later we shall see there is some slippage in this direct, personal identification, especially in the second section of the poem) is equally fragmented. It is not only “the general purpose of the vision” which fades into inaccessibility, but the attempts at “recollection” similarly “pass ... away.” From this perspective “the surface of a stream” is analogous to the poet’s reflecting mind, which after the disruptive influence of the “stone” of the imaginary cannot experience “restoration.”

Thus we find that “Kubla Khan” itself ultimately enacts a critique of unconscious creation and offers an analysis of the disruptive, fragmenting effects of the encounter with the imaginary precisely through its presentation of “dual vision[s]” (Barth 116). The details of the first “vision,” for all their poetic merit and symbolic force as abstraction which seem to cry out for interpretive interventions, are of no

interest to us *per se*, but are relevant to our current investigation only to the extent that they evidence the direct influence of the imaginary – a conclusion which cannot be drawn from the first vision itself, but which must (as we have seen) be inferred from the appended introduction. Our principal concern now is rather with the second “vision” and the way in which it bears a fragmentary relation to its precursor and at the same time reveals the fragmentation of the speaker. In accordance with our schemata, the third stanza presents the poet’s incapacity to again realize the initial vision through his own unaided agency – a vision in the echoes of which the disconcerting after-effects of the encounter with the imaginary as *Erfahrung* resound.

The second section begins with a recollection of another “vision” (*PW* 38), which although it is distinct from the first vision, is not unrelated to it. Lowes describes this transition as one occurring “without an instant’s warning,” wherein “the whole setting of the vision abruptly shifts” (372). Yet insofar as it looks back towards the first vision, it is still a “new stage of the dream” (Lowes 373). The second vision begins with the recollection of “A damsel with a dulcimer” (*PW* 1: 37), which the speaker avers to have seen for himself (*PW* 1: 38). The “damsel” is further described as “an Abyssinian maid,” who “on her dulcimer ... play’d / Singing of Mount Abora” (*PW* 1: 39-41). As providing the poet with “indirect contact with the source of inspiration” (Bate, *Coleridge* 84), the “Abyssinian maid” is a scion of the sisterhood of the muses, who are conventionally pictured carrying a lyre (or some other portable stringed instrument such as a cithara) and cavorting on mountains. In her proximity to “the source of inspiration,” the “damsel” inhabits not only the precincts of the aesthetic, but also resides in the demesne of the imaginary as its envoy. For this reason, she “usurp[s]” the poet’s “own habitual role” (Bate, *Coleridge* 84) defined by its reliance on the self-sufficiency of Romantic genius and the imagination as *Erlebnis* (as we saw in our discussion of the “Conversation Poems”) and replaces it with a dialectical model based on the imaginary as *Erfahrung*.

The poem then shifts from a reflective mode of memory indicated by the past tense to a series of subjunctives giving voice to the speaker’s projected desires, which Lowes appropriately describes as “the desire on waking out of sleep to live again the lost delights” (331) of the faded dream, and hence of the fugitive imaginary. Coleridge’s use of the subjunctive, at the same time, places him in an implied

conditional relation to these desires. So what he is really saying is *If* “I” through my own agency “Could... revive within me / her symphony and song” (*PW* 1: 42-43), *then*

To such a deep delight ‘twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! Those caves of ice! (*PW* 1: 44-47)

By “revivify[ing]” – or in other words, by again giving life and vital force to – the “symphony and song” of the “damsel” as a muse figure and emissary of the imaginary, the speaker hopes to be able to claim and wield such power for himself in order to reconstruct the world of the first vision. In this context, the recurrent musical images can be read as expressing both a vision of, and a desire for, orchestration and harmony – a “symphony” predicated on sympathetic identification and a striving for reharmonization not only of the two visions, but of the poet (and by implication Coleridge himself) with not only the visions themselves, but also the originary dream and the influence of the imaginary which it discloses. The fact that the speaker posits his “music” as that which will “build” again the imaginary of the first vision, explicitly indicates that the means for the proposed reconstruction are aesthetic; and since these means are to be brought to bear through his own agency, we can conclude that the speaker assumes the work of reconstruction will be performed by the voluntary imagination. The second vision, therefore, although it is distinct from the first vision, is not unrelated to it, insofar as it is viewed as a means of aesthetically and imaginatively re-accessing and recreating the first vision. Yet as conditional, it is only supposed to be possible if the given conditions are indeed met – and in the space of the poem, they have not yet been met, nor is it made clear if they can ever be met.

The poet’s relation to both the first and second visions can be read as a form of obsession, both occasioned by, and directed towards, the imaginary, which “the poet hopes to reach or transcend” (Bate, *Coleridge* 78) through his own agency. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th edition) defines “*Obsessions*” as “persistent ideas, thoughts, impulses, or images that are experienced as

intrusive and inappropriate and that cause marked anxiety or distress.”¹⁷⁰ The “anxiety and distress” attendant on these visions is referred to by Coleridge in the prefatory previously cited note where he refers to both as “dream[s] of pain and disease” (*PW* 1: 512). Like the visions themselves, such obsessions are forms of *Erfahrung* insofar as “The intrusive and inappropriate quality of the obsessions” are “ego-dystonic,” which “refers to the individual’s sense that the content of the obsession is alien, not within her or his own control” (*DSM-IV* 418). Both Coleridge’s and the poet’s extreme self-consciousness concerning the originary “dream” and the subsequent visions, can further be read to indicate that like the obsessive they are “able to recognize that the obsession are the product of her or his own mind and are not imposed from without (as in thought insertion)” (*DSM-IV* 418). Yet at the same time, notably in the preface, there persists the notion that the “dream” itself is indeed a form of “thought-insertion.” This underlying ambivalence, rather than weakening the obsession, works to reinforce it, in that the imagination as a more or less self-conscious faculty seeks to break back into the imaginary on its own terms in spite of the realization that such an approach is ultimately ineffectual in regards to the imaginary.

It is this desire to realize the power of the imaginary through his attempts to “revive” it that leads to the speaker’s compulsion. According to the *DSM-IV*, “*Compulsions* are repetitive behaviors ... or mental acts ... the goal of which is to prevent or reduce anxiety or distress, not to provide pleasure of gratification. In most cases, the person feels driven to perform the compulsion to reduce the distress that accompanies an obsession or to prevent some dreaded event or situation” (418). In the context of “Kubla Khan,” the “dreaded event or situation” is the same “dream of pain and disease” (*PW* 1: 512), which we above posited as occasioning the initial obsession. But here the “pain and disease” is not only a result of the influx of the imaginary, but is now also a consequence of the speaker’s inability to “revive” it. The compulsive quality of the speaker’s desire to “revive” the “experience of the imaginary is conveyed by the acknowledgement that if the imaginary is to indeed to be revived via his own “music,” his “music” would have to be “long and loud” (*PW* 1: 45) – which is to say, it would exact an unswerving commitment for a extensive period of time and an investment of the entirety of the speaker’s projective capacities. This

¹⁷⁰ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994) 418; hereafter *DSM-IV*.

compulsive quality is further underscored by the exclamation marks in line 47, which serve no other purpose than to convey an impression of ardency and indicate the all consuming hold of the speaker's desire.

The last word is had by the indistinct "all" whose "cry" (*PW* 1: 49) comprises the last five and a half lines of the poem – yet we must recognize that these words are only the poet's supposition of what the "all" will supposedly say, and which at the same time, therefore, implies a self-conscious awareness of his situation on behalf of the speaker himself. The speaker speculates that once the work of reconstruction has been completed, the "music" of both the speaker and the "damsel" shall have been "heard" by the "all" – a hearing which will in turn permit them to "see" the vision conveyed through the dream immediately before "them there" (*PW* 1: 48). Yet their presumed response does not indicate that they have yet "heard" anything save the voice of the poet – a voice which they do not understand, and hence the unintelligible sounds emitted by the alien mouth elicit only fear and the desire for the reinforcement of their threatened security:

... Beware! Beware!

His flashing eyes, his floating hair!

Weave a circle round him thrice,

And close your eyes with holy dread:

For he on honey-dew hath fed,

And drank the milk of Paradise. (*PW* 1: 49-54)

Here the poet, whose encounter with the imaginary is testified by "His flashing eyes," is shown to be a lineal descendant of the Ancient Mariner – yet one who has seemingly gone farther than his predecessor, insofar as "his floating hair" marks him as one suspended between the two worlds of heaven and earth, or the real and the imaginary, as one whose body is not even subject to the forces of gravity. The image of "floating hair" at the same time conjures up the image of someone who has descended into liquid depths – or one who has drowned, either floating on the water's surface; or still submerged and lifeless, limbs and hair like underwater plants swaying with the motion of the currents like Willa Harper's (Shelley Winters) corpse in Charles Laughton's *The Night of the Hunter* (1955). The acts of "weav[ing] a circle round him

thrice” and “clos[ing]” their “eyes” are protective gestures which recall magic spells or folk superstitions, as well as the children’s games such as ring around the rosy. The reason for the poet’s “alienation,” which is indicated “by the frightened spectator[’s] cry” of “Beware! Beware!” (Haney 112), is a result of his experience of the imaginary in the dream – an experience which has become a vital part of him in a manner metaphorically paralleled to ingestion.

The unnamed “all” can be seen as a reference to the collective of the “they,” whose ensconced members inhabit only the daylight world of everydayness. The “there” (*PW* 1: 48) as the sought after site for the enactment of the moment of vision is posited only by the speaker; it is not a place – or in our terms, an ontological situation – wherein “they” can dwell. Here we see how the disorder brought about through the encounter with the influx of the imaginary can “significantly interfere with the individual’s ... relationships with others (*DSM-IV* 419). Therefore, “Once initiated into the mysteries of divine creation and poetic recreation, the poet stands outside the ‘all’ which he confronts,” which concomitantly means that an “opposition” is instated “between the poet and others,” and in the end “There is no place for such a man among his fellow beings” (Rzepka 107). The poet of “Kubla Khan” (just like the Ancient Mariner) is parallel to the figure of the “stranger” such as found in the poems of Georg Trakl – a figure whom Heidegger sees as one who “unfolds human nature forward into the beginning of what is yet to be borne.” Which is, at the same time, since it “is yet to be borne,” an “unborn element in the nature of mortals” (*OWL* 175), and hence still resides in the precincts of the imaginary. In this way the “stranger[’s]” state of “apartness” becomes a way of “gathering” (*OWL* 177), wherein *the hidden storehouse* (to borrow a phrase from Benjamin Péret) of primordial Being holds forth the potentialities which have been pre-pared for us. But one must nevertheless be ready to apprehend these potentialities, and thus they by and large go unrecognized. In the end, “Because his vision cannot be ratified by consensus, the poet transformed by his own vision must remain apart from the reality others share or sacrifice to it both his vision and the true self,” which we have called the authentic Being, “which beheld that vision” (Rzepka 107). We agree with Haney that the poet’s “alienation” (112) is the result of “a recognition of freedom’s violence” on the part of the speaker – a “violence” which is inherent in the aesthetic as “The ‘freedom’ to rebuild Kubla’s dome and its environs” (111) through the imagination. Therefore, this “violence” as “freedom” is not wholly

destructive, but is also potentially productive in that it opens a rift between the real and the imaginary which is constitutive for the aesthetic.

Yet we must remember that at the same time the “violence” is also turned back on the speaker himself due to the ineffable inaccessibility of the imaginary; therefore, this “freedom” is only provisional, since the vision is not realized for the speaker within the compass of the poem, but persists only as a fading residue of that which he wishes to reenact through his own imaginative projection. The speaker of “Kubla Khan” is at war with the idea that aesthetic experience as a revealing of the imaginary is not something wholly willed, but rather simultaneously imposed as compulsory. In the final analysis, therefore, we cannot agree with Edward Kessler, who writes, “In the celebrated ‘Kubla Kahn,’ the conflict between phantom dream associations and willed poetic form reaches a point of reconciliation” (60). While the prose introduction posits the first two sections of the poem as something bestowed by the imaginary itself, the speaker of the poem nevertheless harbors a hope that the lost part of the poem still can be built – voluntarily constructed out of the same materials as the first part, but shaped anew in a form which will guarantee access whenever it is desired – and it is this desire, and not only his encounter with the imaginary, which further enforces his alienation. While it is possible that Coleridge for his part “remained alert to the danger that the poem itself could become a ‘Phaenomenon,’ a phantom *ens reale* and not a medium to be seen through” (Kessler 43), clearly the speaker of the poem takes the first vision as an “*ens reale*” which he desires to reconstruct and inhabit — we can only speculate to what extent this holds true for Coleridge himself. Nevertheless it is clear that Coleridge as both the writer of the introduction as well as the potential speaker of the second section is on some level trying to come to terms with this split, not only within the context this specific poem, but also in his own existence. While the speaker of the poem does not “recognize ... that the obsessions or compulsions are excessive or unreasonable,” as is required “By definition” in cases of “Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder” (*DSM-IV* 418); Coleridge himself does appear to have at least come close to such a realization, as is testified by the addition of the introductory note. In “Kubla Khan” we see an aesthetic dramatization, as well as a polarization and engagement of the dialectics of the imagination and the imaginary – and thus at the same time discover some indications of the origins

of Coleridge's own ontological crisis, and thereby also unearth a portal into the abyss of what we will term his "Black Period."

b. The Pains of the Aesthetic: The “Black Period” Poems

Coleridge’s “Black Period”¹⁷¹ has as its keynote a crisis of Being whose first overt aesthetic expression is conventionally located in “Dejection: An Ode” (1802), a poem wherein he confronts (in the words of the poem) the “fail[ure]” of his “genial spirits” (*PW* 1: 39), which is a failure of his imagination as a means of both ontological and aesthetic projection. While Bate accurately summarizes the advent of this period in 1802 and “the next dozen years” as one wherein “almost everything was converging to produce paralysis of hope and effort” – a downturn due to the fact that “His personal habits were catching up with him, the long habits of retreat and withdrawal, of benevolence and yielding, of hypochondriacal guilt and self-blame, and, above all, the use of opium” (*Coleridge* 112); for our purposes we will be focusing on the ontological and aesthetic dimensions and effects of this period as they are revealed both through the medium of Coleridge’s poems and in certain relevant prose works. Paul Magnuson, for his part, sees the essential elements underlying the black period as being present throughout Coleridge’s poetic career. In *Coleridge’s Nightmare Poetry*, Magnuson “offer[s] readings” for a number “of his major poems that reveal an increasing awareness of his failure to create” what he refers to as “a substantial self”¹⁷² – or what we would call authentic Being. In the sphere of the aesthetic, this failure initially leads him to examine the singular status of the poet which underlies the notion of Romantic genius and its conception of the voluntary imagination as *Erlebnis* – an interrogation which in turn induces him to call into question the efficacy of the aesthetic itself as an arena wherein Dasein can encounter its self and obtain a line of sight in the moment of vision towards its ownmost potentialities-for-Being. Here we can see Coleridge moving away from the earlier Romantic faith in the powers of the imagination such as we find in Wordsworth and

¹⁷¹ I have borrowed the term “black period” from art-critics who conventionally use the term to refer to certain works of the Spanish painter Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes’s late period, which he originally emblazoned upon the walls of his own home the *Quinta del Sordo* outside Madrid (before they were eventually transferred to canvas and finally removed to the somewhat more impersonal space of the *Museo del Prado*). Goya’s guarded practice is similar to Coleridge’s own tendency to keep the majority of this period’s poems secreted in the private space of his *Notebooks*. In calling this phase Coleridge’s “black period,” we are also following an established critical tradition, which appraises the period as one primarily marked by the diminishment of light or the prevalence of shadows. Bate, for example, refers to this period as “The Dark Years” (*Coleridge* 111), while for his part Richard Holmes titled the second volume of his two-part Coleridge biography *Coleridge: Darker Reflections, 1804-1834* (1998).

¹⁷² Paul Magnuson, *Coleridge’s Nightmare Poetry* (Charlottesville: U Virginia Pr., 1974) x.

anticipating “the later Romantics, in particular Byron and Shelley,” wherein we find “a more seriously problematic relation to the Romantic ideas of the poet-as-vates and the special privileges of art.”¹⁷³ In the faltering of Romantic vision, there is a corresponding breakdown in the temporalizing of temporality, and hence Dasein remains in a suspended state, wherein it is unable to “choose itself” and its “hero” (BT 385). The void which is disclosed within Dasein in the withdrawal of its projective, imaginative capacity at the same time opens up a space for the incursions of the imaginary. In this way, “Coleridge’s later poetry ... demonstrates ... the loss of his poetic beliefs”; and thus instead of providing a demonstration and endorsement of the powers of creative genius, “Coleridge’s late imagination shapes the spirits of his nightmares” (Mc Gann 99). The void in which Coleridge finds himself is depicted and measured in “Limbo: A Fragment” (1811), while the nightmarish incursions of the imaginary are registered in “Ne Plus Ultra” (1811, or later). As an outcome of these debilitations, Coleridge is at the same time compelled to reassess his situation; and hence his “poetry after 1800” takes up a self-conscious and critical “relation” to his earlier works,” which “is more accurately described as dialogic” rather “than retrospective.”¹⁷⁴ This “dialogic” investigation and critique occurs not only between Coleridge’s later and earlier poetry, but also takes place in the implicit exchanges between two central black period poems, “Dejection: An Ode” (1802) and “Constancy to an Ideal Object” (1804 [1828]). By reading the latter against the former, we will uncover not only their direct effect upon him, but also the tensions and dilemmas underlying the black period as a whole and Coleridge’s evolving position towards them; and furthermore we will gain insight into, and a line along which to pursue further investigations of, Coleridge’s own evolving conception of the association between both the imagination and the imaginary and the aesthetic and philosophic.

The anxiety, powerlessness, and sense of emptiness which underlies Coleridge’s Being-towards the aesthetic and the imaginary which mark the black period were apprehended by him well in advance of the advent of this particular phase, for it was “Quite early in life Coleridge began suffering the anxiety that was to pervade his later poems” – an “anxiety” centered in “that doubt and ‘negative Being’” (Kessler 9).

¹⁷³ Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: Chicago U Pr., 1983) 99.

¹⁷⁴ J.C.C. Mays, “The later poetry,” *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*, ed. Lucy Newlyn (New York: Cambridge U Pr., 2002) 90.

This anxiety is parallel to the *Angst* that defines the mood of Dasein in its thrownness, and which (as we have seen) is constitutive for the turbulence which characterizes Dasein's lostness. In his "*School Exercises*" for "Jan: 19th 1791" preserved in the "*liber aureus* or 'golden book'" kept by "the Rev James Boyer, the Upper Grammar Master at Christ's Hospital" (*SW&F* 1: 3), Coleridge makes reference to "That despondency, which is able to create imaginary misfortunes" (*SW&F* 1: 10). Yet these "imaginary misfortunes" are not only something more or less "create[d]" by an overactive imagination; but are also imposed upon the one who suffers their burden, insofar as such a form of "despondency" may make its incursions in a manner akin to a virus, as for example "at the moment we *contract* [emphasis mine] a habit" (*SW&F* 1: 10). In this "contract[ing]," our own powers dwindle and we submit to the influence of the imaginary; our will lies dormant, and "we forego our free agency" (*SW&F* 1: 10). The exercise continues its speculations on the ill effects of such a "forego[ing]" of "our free agency" in terms evocative of the future themes central to Coleridge's later existence in general and the black period poems in particular:

The remainder of our life will be spent in making resolutions in the hour of dejection, and breaking them in the hour of passion. As if we were in some great sea-vortex, every moment we perceive our ruin more clearly, every moment we are impelled towards it with greater force. (*SW&F* 1: 10)

Coleridge's life, especially in regards to his intellectual projects, and also in his relationships with others, regularly alternates between "making resolutions" and "the hour of dejection" – the latter of which provides the basis for one of the central black periods poems: "Dejection: An Ode." As we have seen, becoming resolute requires a return to Dasein's ownmost "there," from whence it is able to awake to the moment of vision and realize its ownmost potentialities-for-Being – a resoluteness which at this point Coleridge himself is unable to attain. Coleridge instead continues to be swept along in his indecisiveness in the unreadiness for the de-cision, which will permit him to reclaim his Being. The feeling of being "every moment ... impelled towards" a final state of "ruin," a process wherein one's will is moot, is in keeping with the notion of the imaginary as a form of compulsory *Erfahrung* we saw as playing out in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and "Kubla Khan" – the withdrawal of which force leads to Coleridge's state of spiritual limbo as the defining mood of the black period. The breakdown in temporality which occurs in

the black period is hinted at in the repetition of “every moment,” since the failure of temporalizing restricts Dasein to either an empty present, or the past as a site of remorse.

In the image of the “great sea-vortex” from Coleridge’s “*School Exercises*” (*SW&F* 1: 10), we find the earliest example of what Kessler as a larger pattern in Coleridge’s thought, and central theme of the black period, which he refers to as “Coleridge’s ‘eddy,’” and which reoccurs throughout Coleridge’s poetic works under “such variants as ‘whirlpool,’ ‘whirlwind,’ and ‘the circle’” (15). These images, in Kessler’s opinion, indicates a symbolic pattern, revealing the poet’s desire to define Being by means of external nature” (15); yet they also relate, and in a more immediate and fundamental manner, to Dasein’s relation to its self – a relation which is predominantly negative and underlies the ontological crisis of the black period. In a notebook entry from April of 1805, Coleridge describes the motions of “the Soul” in similar terms to the image of the “vortex” as a “round & round flight forming narrower circles, till at every Gyre its wings beat against the *personal Self*” (*CN* 2: 2531). As the center of the ever-narrowing orbit of “the Soul” as a vortex, “the *personal Self*” is both an axis and the void space around which turbulent motions transpire. On one level, “the *personal Self*” is an unknown which “the Soul” cannot gain access to (like some sort of ontological *Ding an sich*), and neither can it (like Shelley’s *ineffectual angel beating its wings against the void*) overcome or break through it. In this context, “the Soul” cannot be the immutable, eternal Being at the core and circumference of our earthly body and terrestrial mind; but is rather finite and limited, both in regards to “the *personal Self*,” as well as in its own motions, both of which are subject to the leashed restrictions of each “Gyre” it is allowed to trace. Insofar as Dasein is caught up in a continuous circling, we find again the same lack of direction towards a future as the domain of as yet unrealized potentialities-for-Being. In this lack of a direction towards the future, “the poet seems as rudderless as he appears in a notebook entry when he imagines himself ‘Whirled about without a center – as in a nightmare – no gravity – a vortex without a center’ (*CN*, III, 3999)” (Kessler 32).

Coleridge also identifies this “vortex without a center” within himself – an emptiness which both closes off his capacity to project his Being into the future and disrupts the continuity and integrity of his ownmost self. This emptiness is witnessed (for example) in a letter “*To Joseph Cottle*” written on “Friday, 27 May 1814,” Coleridge writes, “I feel, with an intensity unfathomable by words, my utter nothingness,

impotence & worthlessness, in and for myself” (CL 3: 498). In an entry from the *Notebooks* written shortly after the one cited above by Kessler, Coleridge speculates on the relation of “The will to the deed, the inward principle to the outward act” as being analogous to that of “the ~~Shell to the~~ Kernel to the Shell” (CN 3: 4003). Here the generative center or substantial core as contained in, and represented by, the “will” or “the inward principle” gives expression to “the deed” or “the outward act” – which is to say, Being is expressed through its projection or modalization in specific ways of Being, which in turn give shape to Being as Being-in-the-world. Coleridge continues, reversing the previous order of causality: “but yet, 1. the Shell is necessary for the Kernel, & that by which it is commonly known; & 2 as the Shell grows comes first, & the Kernel grows gradually and hardens within it” (CN 3: 4003). Here the “inward” coherence of Being, or the self defined along lines established by Heidegger as the substratum which persists through Dasein as it “*stretches along between birth and death*” (BT 373), between its past as a having-been and its future as the not-yet, is the answer to “the question of the ‘who’ of Dasein,” which “answers itself in terms of the ‘I’ itself, the ‘subject’, the ‘Self’”. The ‘who’ is what maintains itself as something identical throughout changes in its Experiences and ways of behaviour, and which relates itself to this changing multiplicity in so doing” (BT 114). This “inward” coherence or selfhood is precipitated by its active articulation through its own “deed[s].” In the latter case, the self that grounds Being is not some kind of fixed, reified artifact, but instead “is free for specific possibilities of its own self. It is its own most peculiar able-to-be” (BPP 276); while at the same time, the self provides the ground whereon Dasein is able to reflect on itself and its ways of having-been. But when the kernel cannot be found due to the condition that the self has been foreclosed to vision or investigation, and when the shell has no longer appears to have any integrity due to the suspension of “the outward act,” only ontological disorder can result.

- i. The Measure of Stasis and the Void Within: “Limbo: A Fragment” (1811) and “Ne Plus Ultra” (1811, or later)

Coleridge’s ontological and aesthetic crisis precipitated by the failure to enact his own imagination’s projective capacities leads to a state of existential and aesthetic limbo whose topography assumes an outline in the poems “Limbo: A Fragment” (1811)¹⁷⁵ and “New Plus Ultra” (1811, or later) – poems wherein Coleridge stares into the “dead end of vision” (Bloom 232) and “explores various phases of being.”¹⁷⁶ Kathleen Coburn notes the connection of the former poem to Coleridge’s own existence, seeing “both parts of the poem” as being “related to Coleridge’s personal feelings and views”;¹⁷⁷ and hence we can see these poems as highly biographical expressions – even if in this particular case “biography” would perhaps would more accurately be termed the “secret history” of Coleridge’s ownmost “*historizing*” [*Geschehen*] (BT 375). Here Coleridge resides in a marginal territory, since Limbo itself is “a state whose very name (Latin *limbus*) means border or edge” (Bloom 233). Limbo as a place “where no judgment is possible, and non-being reigns” (Bloom 233) also lays out Coleridge’s own ontological landscape as the situation of a Dasein who has retreated from decision and hovers suspended and stagnant in his indecision. Located “on the other side of dejection,” Coleridge’s Limbo is positioned on the far side of the visionary imagination, in “a den of quietude which knows only the essence of annihilation” (Bloom 233); and hence as an inhabitant of these regions, Coleridge is only a specter of his former poetic, imaginatively defined self, for only “Ghosts dwell in Limbo” (Bloom 233). While “Limbo” is “a strange Place,” it is at the same

¹⁷⁵ We will be working with the 28 line version found in J.C.C. Mays’s edition of Coleridge’s *Poetical Works*, and hence will treat “Limbo, A Fragment” and the two other pieces “On the First Poem in Donne’s Book” and “Moles,” even though the all three of which originally occur in the same section of the *Notebooks* (CN 3: 4073-4074), as distinct poems. For a detailed history of the various published versions and excerpts of the poems, as well as a detailed analysis of their genesis and respective contexts, the interested reader should consult Morton D. Paley’s article “Coleridge’s Limbo Constellation,” *Studies in Romanticism* 34:2 (1995) 189-209.

¹⁷⁶ Morton D. Paley, “Coleridge’s Limbo Constellation,” *Studies in Romanticism* 34:2 (1995) 209.

¹⁷⁷ Kathleen Coburn ed., *Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 5 vols., by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1957-2002) 3: 4073. The fact that this connection is “more intimate ... than at first sight may be divined, maybe seen by looking at some prose counterparts, in phrasing and concept, in the last chapter in *BL*, particularly the first few and last paragraphs” (Coburn 3: 4073).

time paradoxically “not a place” (*PW* 1: 1); but is nevertheless a world, in the sense of an ontological reality as a state of Being, unto itself.

In *Coleridge’s Melancholia: An Anatomy of Limbo*, Eric G. Wilson maps the historical contours of Limbo from three vantage points: first, there is the Roman Catholic, Dantean positioning of Limbo as the anteroom to Hell proper, “where hover those souls neither saved no doomed”¹⁷⁸; second, there is the German mystic / philosopher Jacob Boehme, who conceives of it as “the infernal limbo of desultory activity, called ‘Self-Hood,’” as well as “The heavenly Limbo of unrealized potential, termed the ‘Unground’” (11); and finally comes Jean-Paul Friedrich Richter, whose notion of “hynagogia” as “the suspension between sleep and readiness” as a state wherein one wanders in “the crepuscular corridors where dreams and reality are a sham” (16). All three of these structural landmarks contribute to the landscape of Coleridge’s state of personal ontological and imaginative limbo.

First, Coleridge like some blessed pagan huddled on the threshold to Hell, is suspended between stagnation and damnation. The “Purgatory Curse” (*PW* 1: 26), refers (on one level) to Coleridge’s lingering entrapment at this threshold, a point of transition from which Coleridge can assess the conditions of both states and distinguish between them. “Hell,” which insofar as it “knows a fear far worse, / A fear, a future fate. Tis *positive Negation!*” (*PW* 1: 27-28), is distinguished from “Purgatory” as a situation even less to be desired. Unlike “Purgatory,” which as a state of stagnation as “growthless dull Privation” (*PW* 1: 25), is shut out from any line of sight towards the future; “Hell” does look towards the future, but only through the attunement of “fear.” Whereas the “fear” associated with “Purgatory” is concerned with “*Negation*” as the shutting down of Being as *Insein*; the “fear” linked with “Hell” is “far worse” because “*Negation*” as “*positive*” is herein in some sense is actively imposed. Yet when we compare the version Coleridge “copied ... under the heading ‘a Dream of Purgatory, alias Limbo’, into S[ara] C[oleridge]’s album on Oct 1827,” we find the poem “has a different ending” (Mays, *PW* 1: 882), wherein the emptiness of “Purgatory” is indeed “far worse” than “Hell,” insofar as its torments are located in *Dasein* itself. In the album-version, the “Purgatory Curse” as a decree or outgrowth of the “lurid thought” of “growthless dull

¹⁷⁸ Eric G. Wilson, *Coleridge’s Melancholia: An Anatomy of Limbo* (Gainesville: U Florida Pr., 2004) 8.

Negation” (*PW* 1: 882) is now situated within, and to a lesser or greater degree caused by, Dasein itself. For this reason, “Purgatory” is closer to “Hell” than in the earlier version insofar as “Negation” is also something “*positive*” in the domain of Purgatory itself; and more importantly for our purposes, the “Curse” is furthermore a direct threat to “rash Imagination” (*PW* 1: 882). As inimical to “Imagination,” the “Purgatory Curse” is explicitly the “Negation” of Being as *Insein* effected through the closing-off of its projective capacities, since (as we have seen) Being as *Insein* or worlding Being is for Coleridge a function of the imagination. For this reason, not only “Limbo Den,” but also Dasein itself, is “Walled round and made a Spirit-jail secure / By the mere Horror of blank Naught at all” (*PW* 1: 22-23). In our schemata, “*positive Negation*” is thus also an ontological state wherein Being is defined in contradistinction to everything which it meets as a “not.” Dasein in its immersion in the “blank Naught at all” is no longer Being-in-a-world, but is now Being-without-a-world, or Being-in-the-void. Now Dasein is self-confined and retreats back into itself, which since this forces Dasein to confront its own null basis and the unanswerable mystery of its thrownness, means at the same time Dasein is exiled from itself.

Second, in Limbo there is only the “desultory activity” of work without hope which frustrates Coleridge’s attempts to imaginatively and aesthetically define his “Self-Hood” in relation to his yet “unrealized” ontological “potential” (Wilson 11). For this reason, Limbo is a state of Being or an ontological reality “where Time & weary Space / Fetter’d from flight, with night-mair sense of Fleeing” (*PW* 1: 2-3), are merely able to “Strive for their last crepuscular Half-being” (*PW* 1: 4) in the stasis occasioned by the withdrawal of imaginative projection. Coleridge’s coupling of “Time & weary Space” “also carr[ies] a metaphysical weight, being the two Kantian categories”¹⁷⁹ of the “*transcendental aesthetic*,” which Kant himself defines as “the science of all principles of *a priori* sensibility” (*Reason* 66). The intuition of the sensible is enacted within “time and space, [which] taken together, are the pure forms of all sensible intuition” (*Reason* 80): “time” providing the “form of inner intuition” (*Reason* 76), and “space” making available “the form of all appearances of outer sense” (*Reason* 71). Through his reference to “the two Kantian categories by which the human mind normally structures reality” (Holmes 250), and which together also constitute the domain wherein reality becomes present, Coleridge calls the worlds of

¹⁷⁹ Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections, 1804-1834* (New York: Pantheon, 1999) 250.

both the real (as external sense) and reality (as internal sense) into question. In the description of “Lank Space and scytheless Time” (*PW* 1: 5) which follows, the negativity underlying them, and the emptiness which is revealed at their center, is amplified “by means of expressions, such as «unseiz’d», «soundless», «not marked», «unmeaning», «eyeless», «moveless», «growthless», thus reiterating the principal theme of absence, loss and privation.”¹⁸⁰ Subsequently, “Coleridge’s normal world dissolves into a ‘crepuscular’ half-reality,” again recalling “the limbo described by both Christian theologians and mystics like Jakob Boehme” (Holmes 250), wherein Dasein becomes de-centered and plummets into the emptiness at its own core. As a result of this de-centering, Dasein’s existence is forestalled in a suspended state permeated with anxiety and hopelessness which cannot be propitiated, wherein it is “Fetter’d from flight,” while there nevertheless persists a “night-mair sense of Fleeing.” Here we can also detect a failure in Dasein’s temporalizing of temporality, and hence its worlding projection as imaginative *Insein*; and therefore, instead of emerging into the moment of vision which discloses one’s ownmost “there” and enlightens the horizons of authentic Being, those ensnared in a state of Limbo, can only “Strive for their last crepuscular Half-being.”

Third, as a place wherein one undergoes tribulations similar to the pains of sleep and hovers suspended in a hynagogic condition between “sleep and readiness,” ensnared in the “dream” of “reality” and the “reality” of “dream[s],” Coleridge’s Limbo itself is no less a place of “crepuscular corridors where dreams and reality are a sham” (Wilson 16). In the poem, this medial position between waking and sleeping is occupied by the figure of “An Old Man with a steady Look sublime / That stops his earthly Task to watch the Skies” (*PW* 1: 10-11), who apparently emblemizes “Human Time” (*PW* 1: 9) and as such is apparently opposed to the “unmeaning” conceptions of “Time” and “Space” with which the poem opens. Since the “old Man” is related to “Human Time,” we may at first be tempted to equate him with an ontological conception of temporality, and hence also with the imagination as a means for the projection of Being. Richard Holmes notes this connection, proposing that the “Old Man,” as “stand[ing] beneath the attendant moon” in some way bears a relation to the imagination, since the moon “for Coleridge is always

¹⁸⁰ Francesca Tesserin, “«A Land of Shadows and Apparitions»: Thought and Reality in Coleridge’s Late Poetry,” *Annali di Ca’Foscari* 38:1-2 (1999) 589.

the symbol of the Imagination” (Holmes 250). Yet the often-noted central paradox which complicates such a reading of the poem is the fact that the old man “is blind” (*PW* 1: 12). While “The old man, who is introduced as «Human Time», has a «steady look sublime»,” which Tesserin speculates “is perhaps reminiscent of that glittering eye which identified Coleridge’s supernatural characters,” and hence would be an example of a visionary figure; he is at the same time “totally blind” – a “blindness” which is a “either spiritual or actual” (590), or both at once. While Holmes tentatively posits that (undercutting himself throughout with the repetition of the indistinctness of “some” and the implicitly self-questioning uncertainty implied by “seems”) “Some healing impulse, some promise of salvation, seems to pass between the two” (250); he never follows up these hypotheses and finally capitulates, quite content to leave the question of “what this might be, or how a blind man might see it” an unanswered “riddle” (250). Along these same general lines, Francesca Tesserin sees the “Old Man” as part of Coleridge’s “search for a double self, the quest for a reflection” – a “sought-for correspondence” which nevertheless “is ambiguously conveyed” (590) – and hence inconclusive. Nor are Holmes and Tesserin alone in finding this portion of the poem to be a “riddle” – and as a “riddle” it has encouraged a considerable latitude of attempted answers. Morton D. Paley notes that “The image of this blind old man presents a problem of signification different from that of scytheless Time,” for which reason “the entire passage has engendered vastly differing interpretations” (“Limbo” 199).

Yet in spite of these apparent differences, certain patterns emerge. Both the readings of “Reeve Parker,” the latter specifically “find[ing] that in this description ‘a momentary relenting of the vision of limbo becomes a triumphant encounter, the moon and the old man finding in each other a companionable form’”; and that of “James Boulger, who considers the old man ‘recognizably Coleridge himself’” (cited in Paley, “Limbo” 199); as well as the aforementioned readings of Holmes and Tesserin; all see the old man and his situation as being in some way parallel to, or a double of, Coleridge and his own situation. Even in the case of Parker’s reading, the “momentary relenting of the vision of limbo” occurs not for just the Old Man in relation to the “companionable form” of the “moon”; but such a “relenting” also occurs for Coleridge himself, both in his own relation to the moon as an equally or ironically “companionable form,” as well as through his envisioning of the Old Man. Thus we may conclude that any viable reading of the

figure of the Old Man must take into account what he means for Coleridge; and therefore, we must next determine more precisely the character of this joint vision and shared blindness.

The question now becomes: is the Old Man a double of how Coleridge presently is, what he has been, or the way he hopes to be – or some combination of all three? If the Old Man is one of “such sweet Sights” which “Limbo Den immure[s]” (*PW* 1: 21), we must conclude that the figure of the Old Man cannot be apprehended in the presumed present moment of the poem, nor can it be a parallel of Coleridge’s present situation, since he is explicitly closed off from it. Yet it is unclear, at the same time, if the vision of the Old Man is a recollection, a projection, or some amalgamation of the two. In the context of the black period, and in light of the poem’s own concerns with stagnation and the failure of imaginative vision, a failure which by definition presupposes previous possession and subsequent loss, the Old Man is simultaneously a recollection and a projection. Explicitly opposed to “Lank space, and scytheless Time” (*PW* 1: 5), and as “stop[ping] his earthly Task to watch the Skies” (*PW* 1: 10-11), the Old Man appears to open a rift in the suspended moment of the present, a stepping back from our involvement with the environment [*Umwelt*] of the at-hand, and becomes instead an emblem of “Human Time” (*PW* 1: 9) precisely through his supposed capacity to disengage himself from the static tyranny of the present.

But this does not answer the question of what significance the Old Man possesses for Coleridge himself. Here we must recall Holmes’s view of the moon as a “symbol of the Imagination” (250) and our own previous finding that the “Purgatory Curse” is a decree or outgrowth of the “lurid thought” of “growthless dull Negation” (*PW* 1: 882), which is inimical to “rash Imagination” (*PW* 1: 882). As gazing on the moon, the Old Man is not a personification of the imagination, but is rather a model of Dasein’s relation to the imagination. Whereas “initially, the Old Man appears ‘lovely’ and ‘looks like Human Time,’ alive and meaningful,” Coleridge almost immediately “corrects his first impression, the altered picture, like the ‘false’ description, commencing with ‘but.’”¹⁸¹ Paley also perceives the change in the qualities associated with the Old Man, who “is beautiful, bathed in light, and at first reassuring in his solidarity and is suggestion of an inner life” (“Limbo” 201). This change does not occur on the Old Man

¹⁸¹ Daniel P. Deneau, “Coleridge’s ‘Limbo’: A ‘Riddling Tale’?” *The Wordsworth Circle* 3:2 (1972) 102.

himself, however, but takes place in Coleridge's way of Being-towards him – a change which carries with it connotations for Coleridge's attunement towards the imagination. While before "The paradox of the blind man's vision is considered by the narrative voice as a «lovely sight»,” we cannot agree with Tesserin that it “ironically underlin[es] the distance between ... the man's undisturbed enjoyment of that strange contemplation and ... the narrator's utter loss of his poetic powers” (592); but instead we should conceive of the juxtaposition as working to call our attention to the parallels between the Old Man's “strange contemplation” and Coleridge's own “utter loss of his poetic powers” as supposed powers for accessing the imagination.

Here we return to the conception of Limbo as a hypnagogic state with which our investigation of this section of the poem began. Both the Old Man and Coleridge as doubles of one another inhabit the twilight realm of Limbo, in a state between waking and sleeping, “where dreams and reality are a sham” (Wilson 16), both becoming invalidated by the foreclosure of *Insein* and imaginative vision. As standing under the moon, the Old Man is not an embodiment of the powers of the imagination, but is rather positioned in relation to such powers; and therefore, through the figure of the Old Man, Coleridge reflects on his own relation to the imagination. In his “blind[ness],” the Old Man is equated with “a statue,” which also “hath such Eyes” (*PW* 1: 12); and later in the poem, the Old Man is again described in impersonal terms also applicable to “a statue,” as being “all moveless, Bust and Limb” (*PW* 1: 19). As “a statue,” the Old Man not only is infected with the inertia which pervades Limbo, but furthermore is only “a sham” as an approximation or impersonator of a human Being; and moreover through this equation, the Old Man is directly associated with the aesthetic, which when pessimistically viewed can be construed as the art of shamming. Even though the Old Man is apparently able to paradoxically connect with the imagination through some form of alternative (although unspecified) mode of seeing; it is only “by chance” that he “moon-ward turn'd his face” (*PW* 1: 13); and therefore, any vision possessed by the Old Man is also essentially a sham. For this reason, the other reference in the passage to the Old Man's seeing is undercut by language that immediately calls any assertion of such an ability into question. While “He gazes still, his eyeless Face all Eye” (*PW* 1: 16), this assertion is subsequently deflated by a subjunctive conditional: “As [if] twere an Organ full of silent Sight” (*PW* 1: 17). The same undercutting takes place in the description of

the Old Man's reaction to the influence of, and interrelation with, the moon, by casting doubt on their genuineness through the repeated use of the verb "seem": the Old Man's "whole Face *seemeth* [emphasis mine] to rejoice in Light" (*PW* 1: 18); and "He *seems* [emphasis mine] to gaze at that which *seems* [emphasis mine] to gaze on Him!" (*PW* 1: 20). While the closing exclamation mark which terminates this section would usually be read as conveying a certain ardency (or the trumped-up urgency associated with only the most bathos ridden examples of Romantic poetic posturing); in this particular context, and in light of our reading, one is tempted to look on it rather an indication of the narrator's own disbelief and frustrated consternation.

The implications of this lack of vision for Coleridge himself and his awareness of the counterfeit qualities of his own imaginative powers are traumatic. Coleridge, on the one hand, looks on the Old Man as though he were looking back on his own, earlier state of what can only be called imaginative grace characterized by "lovely" (*PW* 9) images and a manner of looking at the world which was "sublime" (*PW* 1: 10). In this previous state, the Old Man, and by implication Coleridge himself, were at one with the imagination, all into one another melded seamlessly. This conflation is particularly able to be observed in the line which reads, "Gazes the orb with moon-like Countenance" (*PW* 1: 14). Here the agent of the "Gaz[ing]" is imprecisely indicated, for "the orb" is given no clear antecedent, although there are three possibilities, all of which are somewhat dubious: first, it could refer to the "Old Man" who has halted his labors "to watch the Skies" (*PW* 1: 11), but to refer to him as an "orb" makes little sense; second, "the orb" could refer to one of the Old Man's "Eyes" (*PW* 1: 12), since several lines later his "eyeless Face" has become "all Eye" (*PW* 1: 16) in the singular; and third, "the orb" could refer to the moon itself, since as one reads diachronically through the poem this appears to be the logical candidate, at least until we find that "the orb" in its "gaz[ing]" has a "moon-like Countenance" and come to the more than obvious conclusion that to call the moon "moon-like" is more than slightly redundant. The only explanation for this confusion (apart from nasty snipes at Coleridge posing as "criticism" and accusations of lackadaisical habits of composition) is that it is an intentional con-fusion grounded on a sort of confraternity of the imagination. Yet on the other hand, the Old Man is also a means for Coleridge to reflect upon his own debilitated present and ungracefully aging imagination. For this reason, "the orb" or the "Countenance" (again there is

uncertainty in grammatical antecedents) is no longer described in “lovely” (*PW* 1: 9) terms, and instead it becomes a superannuated Old Man (or imagination), “With scant white hair, with fore-top bald & high” (*PW* 1: 15). No longer can Coleridge, like the Old Man truly “rejoice in” imagination’s “Light” (*PW* 1: 18); nor in the state of Limbo can he give voice to his visions, for with “Lip touching Lip, all moveless” (*PW* 1: 19), he is closed-mouthed and voiceless – wholly folded into his ineffectual, unseeing self. In the end, Limbo is a twilight landscape as “a surrealist nightmare arrested by horror and commanded by a very modern dread of nothingness,”¹⁸² which for Coleridge represents “a last gasp before an entropic collapse” (Wilson 176) of oxymoronic static chaos and self-strangling incapacity.

“Ne Plus Ultra” (1811, or later) is a companion-piece to “Limbo: A Fragment,” picking up where its predecessor leaves off, written (as Bloom surmises) due to the fact that “Positive Negation is an oxymoron requiring illustration” (235) – a demonstration which will be conducted by “envision[ing] this negative absolute” (Bate, *Coleridge* 178). Yet in the poem itself, there is very little “envisioning”; the poem reads rather like a metaphysical play-by-play account of what Coleridge undergoes in the failure of his imagination and his experience of the imaginary as *Erfahrung*. Here Coleridge details the entropic influx of the imaginary which emerges to fill the void left by Dasein’s folding into the supposed emptiness of its self as a consequence of its existential dissolution in Limbo. Wilson describes such a state for Coleridge as one wherein Being-towards both reality and the real collapses, for “Everywhere he looks, inside or outside there is pain. His interiors bereft of vital light, feel like a swamp, muddy pitch” and “His exteriors ... become ashen plains” (173). Yet we must depart from Wilson, insofar as these inscapes are not the result of mere psychological coloring, such as occurs when “The man in the mood entirely black casts his gloomy shadows over all his thoughts and perceptions”; nor is the wasteland of “His exteriors” solely the product of “his foggy projections” (Wilson 173); but these inscapes are more fundamentally the outcome of Coleridge’s withdrawal of his projective capacities and succumbing to the stasis depicted in “Limbo.” Here we move beyond the “*Negation*” (*PW* 1: 28) of “Limbo” and enter into a state of “privation.” Coleridge himself in a letter to Henry Crabb Robinson from “12 March 1811” (*CL* 3: 302)

¹⁸² George Whalley, “‘Late Autumn’s Amaranth’; Coleridge’s Late Poems.” *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* 2 (1964) 175.

makes a distinction between “nothing” and “privation,” wherein the latter “is worse than nothing,” since “it is *privative* & not merely negative” (CL 3: 304) – in other words, whereas “nothing” is mere emptiness, “privation” is to be deprived of something; and therefore, such a “privation” is felt as either the lack of something or an outright loss.

While “*Ne Plus Ultra*” (a title which “may well have been supplied by Henry Nelson Coleridge rather than the poet” [Paley, “Limbo” 205]) conventionally “means the acme, usually the highest point of perfection, further than or beyond which one cannot go”; in the specific context of Coleridge’s poem it is ironically employed and instead indicates “the lowest point of imperfection, the nadir of positive Negation, the Dragon that is Death, Chaos, Satan ... This Antagonist is the negation of all values” (Bloom 236). Here Coleridge reaches his lowest point, not only in terms of how far he has fallen from his previous state of imaginative grace, but more fundamentally it marks the lowest point of his capacity to exist through imaginative projection as Being-ahead-of-itself, which is oriented towards, and defined in relation to, the future. By foreclosing the future, “The condition of ‘ne plus ultra’” is that of “no more beyond,” which “entails being on the boundary between something and nothing, meaning and nonmeaning, or being in a void beyond things and significance” (Wilson 173). As lacking a “beyond” (not a “beyond” in a Nietzschean sense as an escapist realm inimical to life, but one which is contextualized in relation to Being-in-a-world), Dasein no longer has a horizon either to define itself in relation to, or project itself upon; and thus, the capacity for projecting itself onto its ownmost potentialities-of-Being and structuring its own reality is compromised. Since Dasein “gives itself the task of signifying how things stand with its can-be”; and since “The whole of these relations, everything which belongs to the structure of the totality with which the Dasein can in any way give itself something to be understood, to signify to itself its ability to be, we call *significance* [*Bedeutsamkeit*]” as “the structure of what we call world in the strictly ontological sense” (BPP 295-296); when a breakdown occurs wherein Dasein withdraws its projections and retreats into itself, there is simultaneously opened up a deficiency of world, and hence there is a concomitant failure of “meaning” and “significance.”

The phrase “*Ne Plus Ultra*” is “derive[d] from a tradition in antiquity that after raising the mountains Abile and Calpe on either side of the Strait of Gibraltar, Hercules inscribed there ‘Non Plus

Ultra' as a warning to navigators not to venture beyond the known world" (Paley, "Limbo" 205). As carrying us "beyond the known world" – which is to say, the world of the real and everyday – the poem transports us into the realm of the imaginary. Yet its relation to the imaginary is not only constitutive for it as an aesthetic work and reality (as we would expect of any authentic artwork), but the poem itself furthermore raises the issue of Coleridge's own relation to the shadowy side of the imaginary as the home of the mystery of the great unknown. Like Hercules's inscription, the poem is also a "warning" to the reader about the consequences of venturing too far beyond all known points of reference, and details Coleridge's own decentered and depotentiated situation in the teeth of the imaginary.

In "Ne Plus Ultra," Coleridge's imagination is in thrall to the imaginary as a "haunted imagination" (Mahoney, "We Must" 206) – "haunted" by both its remembrance of the previous extent of its powers, as well as inhabited and terrorized by the specters of the imaginary. We share Mahoney's view that "What is being dramatized ... is the condition of imaginative and emotional paralysis, an entrapment by the Demon" ("We Must" 207) – a "Demon" which in our schemata is the personification of the imaginary – and which "isolating man from the vital beauties of nature, triggers the creation of the nightmare world, a place of silent fetid, lethargy-inducing darkness that envelops its victims and leaves them without the central Coleridgean virtue of hope" (Mahoney, "We Must" 207) – which means, at the same time, that the future is foreclosed, insofar as "hope" itself is by definition directed towards the future as the site of the possible. This "nightmare world," as an incursion of the imaginary, is not strictly a "creation" in the conventional artistic sense, but is rather something set off by the "isolating" itself, and which "envelops" Dasein *ab extra*, and by closing off "hope," closes off Being-towards the future. Yet such isolating gains a foothold only insofar as Coleridge finds a void within himself through the apprehension of the failure of his projective, imaginative capacities and in succumbing to the state of "sole Despair" (*PW* 1: 14). The very notion of "haunting" itself presupposes an emptiness into which malicious influences may flow. This "Despair," therefore, is isolating in two senses: first, by calling attention to Dasein's aloneness and its loss of a significant connection to the world as something "sole"; and second, as a desolation of "soul" (in a somewhat humorless pun), which in its intense inwardness is even more isolating than the exile of singularity. The "sole Despair" is also "Of both th' Eternities in Heaven" (*PW* 1: 15), and hence is related

to the latter sense of “soul” and is another example of Dasein’s state of suspension (like that we witnessed in “Limbo”) as a hovering between the possibilities of either salvation or damnation. In facing his ultimate potentiality-for-Being, Coleridge stands in judgment before the bar of the imaginary.

The poem attempts to give a name to the demonic influx of the imaginary, to assign a designation to what heretofore has never appeared; while at the same time trying to take up a way of Being-towards it through language, in spite of the overwhelmingly apparent futility of such an endeavor. For this reason, especially in the opening lines, “The poem is mostly a list of appositive phrases, a litany of names,” not as Wilson surmises “for hell” (173), since it is the “Breath” of the “hidden one” (*PW* 1: 12) that “Gives Wind and Fuel to the fires of Hell” (*PW* 1: 13); but it rather is a roll call of conceptually defined emblems or vaguely personified abstractions of the “*positive Negation*,” which as we saw defines Limbo:

Sole Positive of Night!

Antipathist of Light!

Fate’s only Essence! Primal Scorpion Rod!

The one permitted Opposite of God!

Condensed Blackness, and Abysmal Storm

Compacted to one Sceptre

Arms the Grasp enorm,

The Interceptor!

The Substance, that still casts the Shadow, Death!

The Dragon foul and fell!

The unrevealable

And hidden one, whose Breath

Gives Wind and Fuel to the fires of Hell! (*PW* 1: 1-13)

The passage begins by laying out the light-dark dichotomy which looks back towards the sepulchral gloom of Limbo, the first line of the poem “tak[ing] its departure from ... the last line of ‘Limbo’” (Paley, “Limbo” 205), and brings us wholly into the encroaching darkness of Coleridge’s own ontological situation – a situation wherein he is unable to disclose his own world by bringing it into the light, and thus he falls

under the sway of the aberrations of the imaginary. While in the poem Coleridge has difficulty “muster[ing] verbs,” such assembling is hardly something he “cannot” accomplish (Wilson 173). As Wilson notes, since Coleridge is “Numbed by his despair” (172-173), one would hardly expect to find a preponderance of active verbs; yet there are a handful of verbs scattered throughout the poem, as well as forms related to verbs, such as past participles used as adjectives, which work to underscore the notion of having undergone the experience of the imaginary’s invasive, negative side; while at the same time serving to convey an impression of Coleridge’s own powerlessness.

But the lineage of the demonic imaginary goes beyond the limitations of the personal as a “Primal Scorpion Rod” and stretches back to the primordial roots of Being; while at the same time, as “Fate’s only Essence,” it reaches out towards the brink of the possible and the inheritance of the future. In the entry from the *Notebooks* which follows the one which contains the draft version of “Ne Plus Ultra,” Coleridge also addresses the connection between pastness and futurity in a translation from “Jean Paul’s *Geist*” (Coburn 3: 4075): “There is in every human Countenance either a History or a Prophecy which must rather sadden or at least soften every reflecting Observer” (CN 3: 4075) – only in the latter entry, it is personalized as “a History or a Prophecy” reflected in one’s “Countenance,” and hence relevant to a specific individual; it is still universal as being detectable “in every human Countenance.” Furthermore, such “a History or a Prophecy” is characterized as a tainted past or fate as a negative inheritance insofar as it makes an appeal to “every reflecting Observer” for either understanding or compassion – an appeal which is heard to the extent that each one recognizes her/his in universal kinship with the other through the act of “reflecting” on the shared situation of Being in-general. “Prophecy,” in the view of Coleridge, is additionally associated with invisible influences, “For all prophecies are the first effects of some Agent, whose presence is not yet seen” (CL 3: 303), but must be revealed through some intervening medium. Coleridge illustrates the way prophecy or the imaginary comes to “presence” through an analogy drawn from his own personal experience: “prophecies” are revealed in the same manner “as I have heard a friend calling to me by the echoes of his voice among our rocks in Cumberland, before I heard the voice itself or saw *him*” (CL 3: 303). What is essential for prophecy is not the unseen “Agent,” nor even some portion of her/him such as a “voice,” but rather the effect its resonance has on its audience. As such, prophecy can be

seen as parallel to the influence exerted by the imaginary, which similarly remains unseen, its resonances sounding in whoever apprehends it, or rather is apprehended by it; and which must be realized through the medium of the aesthetic, or the ontological appropriation of the imaginary insofar as it is constitutive for taking up a direction towards, as well as for the realization of, our potentialities-for-Being.

With a reach which extends to both past and future, the demonic imaginary potentially may exert control over the entire scope of Dasein's existence. The association of the demonic imaginary with issues of control is underscored and developed later in the passage, when (parallel to its equation with the "Scorpion Rod") it is described in regal terms as "Compacted to one Sceptre" (*PW* 1: 6), which marshals its martial force in "Arms" which "the Grasp enorm" (*PW* 1: 7). In spite of the syntactic confusion of the lines, there nevertheless emerges a sense of the paradoxically compressed power and enormous force of the imaginary – a paradoxical quality intensified by the notion of such a force as a combination of blank "Blackness" and the tempestuous emptiness of an "Abysmal storm" (*PW* 1: 5). Here again we find the notion of a force imposed from outside as a "Grasp," a condition carried into the characterization of the demon of the imaginary as "The Interceptor" (*PW* 1: 8) which concludes this specific series of appositive phrases. As an "Interceptor," the force of the demonic imaginary is also portrayed as a coming-between and an agent of division. In the draft version from the *Notebooks*, "The Interceptor" was originally preceded by "Here" (*CN* 3: 4074), which locates "The Interceptor" in the same space as Coleridge, and thus we may infer that "The Interceptor" sunders Coleridge himself and cleaves the ontological domain of his world.

The final designation of the demonic imaginary as "The Dragon foul and fell" (*PW* 1: 10) equates it with the monstrous and brings us into proximity to the realm of the fantastic and mythic. This mythic realm provides one source of the imaginary, which even though it is "unrevealable" (*PW* 1: 11) in itself, may yet be shown through its emanations and effects. Thus the "Breath" of the "hidden one" (*PW* 1: 12) is exposed insofar as it "Gives Wind and Fuel to the fires of Hell!" (*PW* 1: 13). Here the quality of the imaginary as a concealed sphere, through its description as "The unrevealable" and the "hidden one," as well as its connection to revelation, is expressed through another analogy. The mythological and its relation to revelation also dominates the concluding lines with the repetition of references to the higher

state of awareness represented by “the Lampads seven” (*PW* 1: 18), figures found in a wide a range of religious and mystical writings, including “the Cabbala, Jakob Böhme, and other mystical writers in Coleridge reading” (Coburn 3: 4074), and the *Apocalypse* of Saint John the Evangelist (*Rev.* 4.5) (Mays, *PW* 1: 885).

Just as in “Limbo,” there is no release from the state of ontological suspension in “Ne Plus Ultra.” Nor is there any rejoinder Coleridge can make within in terms of the conditions imposed by the poem itself, for the “sole Interdict” prohibits any effective response through the supplications of “all-bedewing Prayer” (*PW* 1: 16). In the repetition of “sole,” the “Interdict” recalls the “sole Despair,” which initially gave rise to the need for “Prayer” as a means of deliverance; and “Interdict” evokes the spirit of “The Interceptor,” as again marking a point of division. Only “to the Lampads seven” (*PW* 1: 18) is “The unrevealable” ever “Revealed” (*PW* 1: 19), presumably since they as “watch[ing] the Throne of Heaven” (*PW* 1: 21) are near to “The unrevealable” itself. In the course of the poem, “The unrevealable” is never “Revealed” in-itself for Coleridge, who is shut out from it, exiled in a state of ontological stasis on the far side of apocalypse. The impossibility of revelation is precisely due to Coleridge’s failure of imagination, for as we saw earlier, for Coleridge revelation itself is grounded in the imagination. While revelation itself is a species of the imaginary as *Erfahrung*, if one is not properly and receptively disposed towards it, any recognition or reflection is impossible. Unless there is a willful holding oneself back as awaiting, revelation cannot take place. Coleridge’s own hopelessness, which both creates and imprisons him within the confines of Limbo, since it depotentiates the will and forecloses any form of awaiting, is also what endlessly defers revelation. As being shut out from “Revelation” Coleridge is at the same time shut out from the “Truth” (*CL* 2: 709), and hence wanders only through seemingly endless alleyways of illusion. But if “the only truth” of Limbo (as Wilson proposes) is that “everything is illusion” (177), then in order to circumvent the state of ontological limbo which underlies the black period as a whole, we must go deeper into the dynamics which for Coleridge underlie “illusion.”

ii. Rejection, Dis-illusion, and Dissolution: Reading “Dejection: An Ode” (1802) Against “Constancy to an Ideal Object” (1804 [1828])

The ontological disorder revealed in the black period not only involves a closing down of Coleridge’s imaginative capacities, but also necessitates an alteration in his view of the imagination and a reevaluation of the imaginary as a means to become re-engaged in his own existence, insofar as the imaginary is the site wherein the “possibilities” of our “able-to-be” reside. The situation becomes all the more desperate for Coleridge, since as a poet his now problematic dependence on the imagination for the authentic projection of his ownmost Being is all the more central and overt; and hence the exile from, or loss of, his imaginative capacity and the attendant incursion of the demonic imaginary, manifests itself particularly as an ontological crisis requiring redress. This situation is parallel to Coleridge’s characterization of a state to “madness,” which in another echo of Kessler’s “eddy,” “may perhaps be defined as the circling in a stream which should be progressive and adaptive” (*Lects 1808-1819* 2: 161). In this definition, Coleridge brings together “the circling in a stream” which characterizes the vortex without and within and the attendant loss of the projective capacities of Being, “which should be progressive and adaptive” as a disclosing and open Being-towards the future and the imaginary. By including the subjunctive “should,” however, Coleridge also affirms the “ought” which primordially structures existence as its imperative – yet before he can fully affirm the “ought” of *existenz*, he must first question his previous orientation and confront the implications of “illusion” as they are revealed (for example) in his aesthetic pursuit of an imaginatively-constituted, ideal object.

“Dejection: An Ode” (1802), even though the poem was written early in the black period and marks its first overt expression, has often been read as enacting the process of Coleridge’s “writing himself out” of the depressive state which had forestalled his Romantic vision and creative powers; and therefore, retrieving his imaginative gift for aesthetic, poetic utterance by “advancing to a moment of symbolic vision” (Barth 100). Yet if we read “Dejection” against the later poem “Constancy to an Ideal Object” (1804 [1828]), no longer does the poem end neatly in a state of “calm, which is analogous to the peace at the end of a formalized tragedy” (Bloom 224); but instead the poetic solutions worked out in the context of

the earlier poem are shown to be merely provisional, and hence inevitably dissolve. Yet the two poems nevertheless share patterns of imagery and conceptual territories: on one level, both are interested in the imagination and subjective states of experience, the locating and location of a home, and Coleridge's impossible love for Sara Hutchinson; and on a more fundamental level, both are concerned with questioning the validity of a manner of Being centered in the imagination and the aesthetic, discovering the relation between imagination and illusion, and with pursuing the implications of these questions for Coleridge's own ontological situation and his future ways of Being-towards himself and the world. But while the first poem moves towards psychological and formal closure in the regaining of a defined sense of self, an anticipated homecoming, and a pervasive feeling of unity; the second dispenses with such evasions and ends in fragmentation and exile, effectively foreclosing the possibility of homecoming and opening out only on an seemingly empty world and static future.

In "Dejection" Coleridge charts the nadir of the "fail[ure]" of his creative aesthetic vision, which he terms his "genial spirits" (*PW* 1: 39), which means that the "failure" is concomitantly one of the imagination, and thus we find that "Coleridge both begins and ends in the state of imagination impaired."¹⁸³ Here we find the same state of stagnation and emptiness which defined "Limbo" and "Ne Plus Ultra" wherein Coleridge characterizes his mood as "A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear, / A stifled, drowsy, unimpassion'd grief" (*PW* 1: 21-22). Yet "Dejection" adds a overt aesthetic component (conceived generally as a mode of expression), for in this state, Coleridge "finds no natural outlet, no relief, / In word, or sigh, or tear" (*PW* 1: 23-24). In "Dejection" he attributes this "failure" to his submersion in the "abstruse research" (*PW* 1: 89) of his philosophical pursuits, centered in German Idealism, which as his primary manner of Being-towards the world, also provide the basis of his fundamental attunement. Thus underlying the poem as a whole is not only Coleridge's ambivalent attitude towards the relation between the aesthetic and philosophically-constituted *Insein*, but also his underlying uncertainty regarding the issue of his own Being. While he blames the loss of his creative powers on his Idealist investigations and orientation, he nevertheless simultaneously rejects the self-sufficiency of the objective world, which would

¹⁸³ M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton 1973) 275.

seem to be an obvious corrective to any subjective excesses, which he calls “Reality’s dark dream” (*PW* 1: 95). The objective world, since it is comprised of merely “outward forms” (*PW* 1: 45), is not sufficient in and of itself for the Romantic poet to “win / The passion and the life, whose fountains are within” (*PW* 1: 45-46). The inward life of the subject vivifies the external world, giving “life” to “nature” (*PW* 1: 48), in a manner akin to the worlding of Being as *Insein*. The “inanimate cold world” (*PW* 1: 51) must be supplemented by a “soul” (*PW* 1: 53), or authentic Being, from which “must issue forth, / A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud / Enveloping the earth” (*PW* 1: 53-55). Formerly it was precisely through Coleridge’s “abstruse research” that he hoped to realize himself by “steal[ing] / From [his] own nature all the natural Man” (*PW* 1: 89-90) – a program Coleridge apparently continued to attempt to carry out even in the face of his own dubiousness towards this plan as indicated by the verb “stealing,” which implies not only a covert, criminal activity which must conceal itself, but also a transgression of established law. This orientation towards “abstruse research” verges on the obsessive, since as Coleridge himself says, these researches were “my sole resource, my only plan” (*PW* 1: 91). Yet Coleridge does not believe the influence of such researches to be wholly debilitating, for when they are kept within proper bounds, they still “suit ... a part” (*PW* 1: 92) of him. They are only detrimental when they are allowed to hypertrophy and thereby “infect ... the whole” (*PW* 1: 92). For his part, Coleridge believes he has not entirely succumbed to the infection of Idealism, saying that the temperament of the abstruse researcher has only “*almost* [emphasis mine] grown the habit of my soul” (93). At the same time, it is precisely these researches which have been essential to Coleridge in that they opened up the subjective sphere, which is also the domain of imaginative vision, for investigation, and as such he acknowledges that they are indeed “suit[ed]” to him. These “abstruse researches” are at the same time the first intimations Coleridge receives of a possible attunement towards a philosophic imaginary, but at the time of writing “Dejection” Coleridge is not yet ready to confront the complexities of his multi-valent and shifting relation to his philosophical soul, and for the moment at least pushes back any direct confrontation.

“Dejection: An Ode” at the same time discloses the negative aspects of the imagination which grounds radical subjectivity, since in the excess of imagination which the poem portrays, “it is plain that the imagination can only too easily bestow on nature ... images of horror,” although in this particular poem,

Coleridge never admits this aspect of the imagination explicitly as he will later. In the view of Bate this reticence is characteristic for Coleridge, since in his view “Rarely in the poems and never in the later theoretical writing is there an openly acknowledged *fear* of the imagination” (*Coleridge* 109). But while we agree with the general tenor of Bate’s argument, since we agree that Coleridge never wholly abandons the imagination, his assertions nevertheless demand some degree of qualification through the introduction of the concept of the imaginary. In “Dejection” Coleridge confronts the consequences of the failure of his “genial spirits,” and hence his “imagination” is unable to “bestow” anything “on nature” or on anything anywhere else. The “images of horror” are, we would argue, rather what the imaginary imposes on Coleridge in the vacuum which has expanded in the wake of the subsiding of his imaginative powers. Thus we find that Coleridge, “like Johnson ... was so deeply divided a soul – and in so many different respects” (Bate, *Coleridge* 145), and like Johnson subject to the same devouring imaginary.

In “Dejection’s” penultimate section, the precipitating crisis is somewhat unceremoniously put aside when Coleridge orders such “viper thoughts” to go “Hence” (94), thereby assuming a posture of imaginative control. Coleridge downplays his predicament by comparing himself to “a little child” (*PW* 1: 121) who “hath lost her way,” but is nevertheless “Not far from home” (*PW* 1: 122). Thus in “Dejection” homecoming and a reconsolidation of Dasein is (at least by implication) possible. His thoughts then turn in the final section to address an absent Sara Hutchinson, to whom Coleridge allies himself through a gesture of prayer, and therein completes the movement of Dasein’s reunification through its grounding in the imagination – a process which the poem as a whole enacts. But this answer in the end is evasive, for it fails to fully address the Idealist dialectics that underlie both Coleridge’s crisis and its supposed resolution, and hence Magnuson characterizes it as having “the tone of a last poetic utterance” (*PW* 1: 107). Bate likewise dismisses the conclusion, seeing it “not” as “a development but only an exit bow in the habitual usherlike gesture of the conversation poems. Rest, security, a good conscience must be assured someone,” and while “The blessing is possible, more than possible ... it is not for him” (*Coleridge* 110). Bate also reads the conclusion as enacting Coleridge’s “headlong flight from” the “implications” of the undesired “release of ‘imagination’” (*Coleridge* 109) – a “release” which insofar as it is undesired and results in a “headlong flight” is not an effect of the voluntary imagination, but is rather a sign of the imagination turning on itself.

In “Constancy to an Ideal Object,” Coleridge again confronts both the consequences of the radical subjectivity of his German Idealist position, as well as the implications of such a radical subjectivity for the action of his imagination; but whereas in the earlier poem, there is an eventual “release of ‘imagination’” (no matter how problematic this “release” may be), here we find instead an excess of imagination. Coleridge’s confrontation with his philosophically-conditioned orientation is foregrounded in the poem’s opening address to “yearning THOUGHT” (*PW* 1: 4), which is the domain of the ideal – i.e., the realm of *ideas*, which is to say that which does not subsist in corporeal shape, but rather exists in the abstract form of thinking. Yet here the “idea” is not defined in accordance with, or limited to, a strictly Idealist terminology as a function of the reason [*Vernunft*] wherein is presented “the Universal in the Individual” (*CN* 3: 4397); but is rather an “idea” as a personal conception evolved and structured through the influence of the imagination. The imaginatively conditioned ideal is initially conceived as “The only constant in a world of change” (*PW* 1: 3), and as such is posited as being more enduring than the objective world, which consists of everything that “beat[s] about in Nature’s range” (*PW* 1: 1). Also included in “Nature’s range” is Sara herself, and thus she can no longer be maintained as the site of recuperation that she represents in “Dejection.” Therefore, Coleridge is compelled to conceptually split Sara into two beings: first, the extant, flesh-and-blood Sara, who is devalued in comparison with her counterpart; and second, Sara as an ideal image – an image which replaces the first Sara. Thus “She [i.e. the actual Sara] is not thou [i.e. the ideal image], and only thou [i.e. the ideal image] art she [i.e. the actual Sara]” (*PW* 1: 12). In this way, the ideal “representation,” in the view of James Boulger, “becomes more permanent than the thing, in this case, the person, represented.”¹⁸⁴ At this point in the poem, the imaginative and ideal is still seen as being more durable and meaningful than the objective and real – and in fact effectively trumps it.

The image of the “Brocken-spectre” which concludes the poem dramatizes the conflict between the ideal, imaginative world and the world of the real, and finally leads to a denial of the self-sufficiency and absolute value of the ideal centered in the imagination. The “fair luminous mists” (*PW* 1: 62) of “Dejection” are no longer a precondition of vision as a function of “light” (*PW* 1: 62), nor are they a function of the aesthetic as “beauty-making power” (*PW* 1: 63); but are now themselves all that remain as

¹⁸⁴ James Boulger, *Coleridge as Religious Thinker* (New Haven: Yale U Pr., 1961) 209.

constitutive of subjective reality – in the end, obfuscating and shifting, unconnected and insubstantial, and as such finally illusory. The “glory” (*PW* 1: 62), which is part of the essence of the mists of “Dejection,” becomes in “Constancy” merely the imposition of the deluded viewer. While Coleridge himself never explicitly draws such conclusions, leaving the question if Sara too is “nothing” (*PW* 1: 25) without an overt answer – the answer is nevertheless clear enough in the correlation of Sara-the-ideal-object with the “Brocken-spectre” in the concluding extended simile. As Coleridge writes in *Aids to Reflection* (1825), the Brocken-spectre as an ideal object is for “The Beholder” something “either recognize[d] ... as a projected Form of his own Being, that moves before him with a Glory round its head, or recoil[ed] from ... as from a Spectre”;¹⁸⁵ and therefore, in both cases it is no-thing in itself as a mere effusion of the projective imagination.

In the critical studies of “Constancy,” the image of the “Brocken-spectre” has been viewed in a number of different ways; yet these differences do not widely diverge and can be assembled into two general camps, which Morton D. Paley terms the “pessimistic” and the “positive.”¹⁸⁶

The representatives of the “positive” bloc see both the poem and Coleridge as unquestioningly upholding the validity of the imaginatively conceived ideal. Stephen Prickett, for example, sees the speaker’s “own act of pursuit” as “giv[ing] life to his ideal.”¹⁸⁷ Developing this line of thought, Edward Kessler sees such pursuit as a correlative to the poetic enterprise itself: “Through the ‘life-enkindling’ power of the poet’s imagination, his abstractions are reclaimed from pure thought and returned to the life that fostered them” (136). Yet these views are ultimately solipsistic, containing both their justification and end in a limited self-centered subjectivity and self-perpetuating activity – and this is precisely what Coleridge questions in the poem, later labeling it as an impious form of conduct which he terms “*Subjective Idolism*” (*AR* 399). In the final view, such so-called “positive” solutions are simply too facile in light of the dialectics presented in the poem itself.

¹⁸⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, ed. John Beer, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 9 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1993) 227; hereafter *AR*.

¹⁸⁶ Morton D. Paley, “Coleridge’s Later Poetry,” *Aligarh Critical Miscellany* 14 (2001) 76.

¹⁸⁷ Stephen Prickett, *Coleridge and Wordsworth: The Poetry of Growth* (Cambridge: Cambridge U Pr., 1970) 29

The pessimistic faction, on the other hand, sees Coleridge as interrogating the limits of the subjective pole of the imaginative ideal, but nevertheless this school persists in positing the same definitive split between the poem “Constancy to an Ideal Object” and Coleridge as the poet himself. While there is an acknowledgement of the ironies presented in the poem, these ironies are sequestered in, and contained by, the poem’s formal dynamics and are strangely isolated from the poet himself. Paley allies himself with Tilottama Rajan as examples of interpreters who emphasize “the ironic element which continues to complicate the constitutive power of imagination even at the end” (“Late Poetry” 78). Yet Rajan herself ultimately retreats from the emphasis on the irony underlying the poem and finally reads it as depicting a process wherein “gradually the poet comes to feel that the obstinate tendency of the mind to reconstruct illusions it should see through is precisely what makes man superior to brute nature” (*Interpreter* 245) – herein becoming something of a convert to the “positive” camp, or at least straddling the boundaries of the two factions. In short, the pessimistic supporters believe that somehow Coleridge is supposed to be immune or oblivious to the ironies which he himself has woven into the texture of the poem – as being somehow able to take up a stand alongside them, while at the same time still being duped by them in what can only be called a willful act of self-delusion. We conversely contend that Coleridge’s questioning goes beyond any merely “ironic” rhetoric which “complicate[s] the constitutive power of imagination”; and instead posit that he rather throws the validity of subjective, imaginative life as a whole, and not merely its poetic expression, into hazard. Coleridge’s pessimism finally regards not merely the field of rhetoric or linguistics, but bleeds into the question of existence and the issue of Being itself.

Whatever camp a particular critic inhabits, they are generally in agreement that Coleridge maintains his constancy even while the poem itself unquestionably doubts the viability of such constancy. Herein is revealed an interesting prejudice which informs much of the writing on Coleridge. This prejudice develops a picture of Coleridge as one who is constitutionally too conservative to ever take up such a radical position in regards to the imagination and the ideal – a position which presages and looks forward to modernist, or even post-modernist, perspectives. In place of such limited (and limiting) views, what is required is a perspective that embraces a dynamic Coleridge as one who actively and directly challenges his own fundamental attunement – regardless of the dangers incurred. Such a reading is initiated by I.A.

Richards, who writes, “There is something more terrible than loneliness here. It is the Ideal itself – not the actual or fancied embodiment – he is questioning.”¹⁸⁸ But we wish to take a further step and say that Coleridge is not merely questioning “the Ideal” – he is actively denying its reality as a discrete, self-sufficient existence. In “Constancy,” which Richard Hocks notes is “conduciveness ... to a starkly existentialist perspective,”¹⁸⁹ Coleridge directly confronts the yawning “nothing” (25) of the abyss or void later thematized in the 20th century, particularly by the post World War II Existentialists.¹⁹⁰

Having shown himself to be wholly aware of the illusory nature of the images he “makes” (*PW* 1: 32) not only as a poet, but moreover as a perceiving human Being, Coleridge has effectively moved out of the “shadow” (*PW* 1: 32) world of the subjective imagination. The previous foundations of Coleridge’s existence are concomitantly dissolved – foundations which are primarily represented in the poem through his love for Sara and the possibility of homecoming she represents, which at the same time is a homecoming for the poet – a homecoming out of limbo’s uncanniness, or *Unheimlichkeit*, which dominates one who is entranced by the light-infused and yet potentially suffocating mists of the imaginative ideal. What is left, as Tesserin summarizes it, is “the bitter awareness that the «ideal object», the pure essence of things which was imagined by the poet as the sole intermediary between him and the higher truths, does not definitively exist” (580). But where does this leave Coleridge?

In order to more precisely determine the consequences of this confrontation, we must read back into the poem. If Sara’s ideal image is, as we have seen, “nothing,” then all the negative consequences of being “Without thee” (*PW* 1: 22) unfold. If “Home and Thou [i.e. the ideal] are one” (19), and if the ideal is nothing, then home is also no-thing. Both Boulger and Paley see Coleridge in this section of “Constancy” as rewriting parts of poems which precede “Dejection” – notably the conclusion to the “Eolian Harp” – and hence as rewriting the view of the imagination as *Erlebnis* which (as we have seen) provides

¹⁸⁸ I.A. Richards, “Coleridge’s Minor Poems,” *A Lecture Delivered in Honor of the Fortieth Anniversary of Professor Edmund L. Freeman at Montana State University* (8 April 1960) 23.

¹⁸⁹ Richard Hocks, “‘And art thou nothing?’: Permanence and Envanishment in ‘Constancy To an Ideal Object,’” *Coleridge Bulletin* 16 (2000) 74.

¹⁹⁰ Stephen Prickett also sees the poem as depicting an “existential” experience; however, his belief that the “external appearances” supply “an answering resonance to the pattern already formed in [the speaker’s] own mind” (27) is dependent on reading the image of the “Brocken-spectre” as one of fulfillment.

the basis for these poems.¹⁹¹ In “Constancy to an Ideal Object,” the “cot” (*PW* 1: 20) which figures so prominently in “Eolian Harp” is no longer some-thing which may be taken hold of, maintained, and enjoyed – but instead, as an illusion, is not even up for grabs. From this we may conclude with Paley that “the implication” is that if such possession is “untenable,” then “the only alternative is ... Coleridge as the Ancient Mariner” (“Late Poetry” 75). In “Constancy” Coleridge accordingly figures himself as a “Helmsman on an Ocean waste and wide” (*PW* 1: 23), who “Sits mute and pale his mouldering helm beside” (24). Yet Coleridge is not even allowed the solace that the Mariner receives from repeatedly telling his tale, and finds himself in the position of the Wedding-Guest, “A sadder,” though albeit “a wiser man” (*PW* 1: 624). The tale told in “Constancy” effectively silences the motivation to tell any more Romantic, imaginative stories, since the foundation for the validity of such fables has been discredited. But what are the final results of such wisdom?

In the final view, the poem seemingly delivers not what the poem’s title promises, but rather apparently reveals Coleridge’s growing *inconstancy* – not only to his ideal object, but also to the imaginative and subjective premises underlying early-Romantic philosophies of poetic creation, as well as to futurity itself as a site of potentiality and projection. In “Constancy to an Ideal Object,” Coleridge’s disillusion finally ends in ontological dissolution. This conclusion is implicitly contained in the opening portion of the poem. To one oriented by an ultimately illusory ideal, the “HOURS” remain always at a “distance” (*PW* 1: 5). A present without a future cannot be “life-enkindling” (*PW* 1: 8), and it is this that makes one a lone “Helmsman on an Ocean waste and wide” (*PW* 1: 23) without drive or direction, since “the hope for personal and collective futurity is, for the solipsist, yet another illusion which [in the language of the poem] ‘liv’st but in the brain’” (Hocks 76).

We should, however, take a step back and reassess the appearance of seemingly inescapable finality implied by our foregoing investigations. While Coleridge, on one level, comes to discover “that the love, the knowledge, and the imagination which he believed in are chimeras”; on another level, he ultimately refuses to see them as “at best momentary defenses against the world’s ancestral voices and darkness” (McGann 99) and remains constant to his ideal object – only the direction which he takes

¹⁹¹ Cf. “The Voluntary Imagination: *Erlebnis* and the ‘Conversation Poems’” (IV.a.i).

towards it is altered. Coleridge does not merely lament the loss of his earlier ontological situation as a passive victim or one indefinitely suspended in a spiritual and aesthetic limbo; but rather “looks back in order to negotiate a way forward, not to cement a long-sought position” (Mays, “The later poetry” 90). Thus we must ultimately disagree with McGann’s assessment of “Constancy” as “finally pass[ing] a most devastating judgment upon Coleridge’s cherished belief that the realm of ideas provides a ground for reality” (106). While in “Constancy to an Ideal Object,” Coleridge eschews his ideal object and does not try to recuperate it through a reenactment of the affirmative imaginative gestures (however evasive) that he employs in “Dejection,” this does not mean that this poem represents a terminal-point for him. After rejecting his ideal object, Coleridge does not abandon his Romantic project, nor does he retreat to more supposedly certain ground and endorse some brand of materialism or positivism. We cannot agree with Tesserin that Coleridge “desired objectivity” (594) in any limited sense as an *at-hand* scientific version of the real; nor does he subsequently pursue any concrete, profit and loss economy to supplant his Idealism. At the outset of the poem, Coleridge rejects the option of inhabiting a wholly objective world since such a world as “a world of change” is similarly and excessively in-“constant” (*PW* 1: 3). Even though Coleridge himself forecloses the possibility of exclusively inhabiting the ideal at the beginning of the poem when he realizes that such “yearning THOUGHT” (*PW* 1: 4) is necessarily “Fond THOUGHT” (*PW* 1: 7), the notion of an imaginative ideal nevertheless still “haunt[s]” Coleridge no matter how thoroughly he purportedly “see[s]” (*PW* 1: 11) through it. Thus Coleridge, unable or unwilling to abandon his imaginatively-grounded premises, is finally left with no other option than to more doggedly continue to pursue his professed mode of “abstruse research” (*PW* 1: 89), which in “Dejection” he posits as having caused him to lose his way in the first place. Coleridge must instead retrace this path in order to move forward in hopes of finding a justification not only for his conception of the Ideal; but also, and more fundamentally, he must effectively find a justification upon which to base the continuation of his existence as an effective and authentic Being. Such a path is not a direct ascent, but is rather a complex nexus whose goal and home is not *an* ideal object, but looks towards THE IDEAL itself – a project which plays out in the prose works which occupy the vast majority of Coleridge’s later career.

While the black period presents a record of “Coleridge’s struggle to create an authentic poetry of Being” (Kessler 11), it also opens up a way to go beyond the narrow conception of “poetry” and the aesthetic and its dependence on the imagination as *Erlebnis* which defined the Conversation Poems, and which was called into question by the recognition of the relative autonomy of the imaginary as *Erfahrung* in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and “Kubla Khan.” John L. Mahoney, commenting on Kessler’s study in *Coleridge’s Metaphors of Being*, explicitly relates the latter’s conception of “an authentic poetry of Being” to the capacity of the aesthetic as medium through which Dasein may take up a direction towards its potentialities-for-Being, when he writes, “the late poetry is not so much the record of the poetic quest as the fulfillment of a long struggle through the metaphors of poetry to realize the potential of Being”¹⁹² – a “potential” which as we will see can yet be more fully realized. While as we particularly saw in our analysis of “Constancy to an Ideal Object,” in general “The ideal for Coleridge may seem evanescent ... it still remains a goal to be pursued and cherished, and the imagination remains an extraordinary access route” (Mahoney, “We Must” 196). In this way, Coleridge comes to embrace a more complex view of the imagination, one which recognizes not only its powers, but also its limitations, as well as acknowledges both the negative and positive sides of its encounter with the imaginary. Thus ultimately for Coleridge, “Imagination ... is not simply the faculty of triumph, of joyous unity with nature. It is also at home capturing the tragic notes of human experience, the sense of human suffering, loss, alienation. Nothing that is human can be foreign to the imagination” (Mahoney, “We Must” 198).

But in order to discover the “authentic poetry of Being,” Coleridge first had to apprehend more fully what he himself calls “the mystery of being” (*Lects 1818-1819* 1: 220) – a mystery that embraces the duality which Mahoney above posits as underlying the imagination, and (we would add) structurally has its source in the imaginary. Kessler also notes the productive quality of this duality, which Coleridge “came to see as a necessary stage in his spiritual growth. Like an organism he needed to divide in order to recreate himself. He need to experience poverty before he could know the luxury of Being” (Kessler 9). The black period is the record of the stage of division and an *envoi* to a whole-hearted (if you will, a naively

¹⁹² John L. Mahoney, “‘We Must Away’: Tragedy and the Imagination in Coleridge’s Later Poems,” *English Romantic Poetry*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2004) 189.

Wordsworthian) faith in the self-sufficiency of the aesthetic and the imagination – but as a “stage,” it is also something which must be superceded. The exploration of our ontological “mystery” demands the engagement of the whole of Being as both a positive and negative force, as an affirming and denying power. In light of such personal engagement, the pursuit of the imagination’s encounter with the imaginary requires sincerity, or what Coleridge terms “earnestness,” for “nothing great, either for good or for evil, or for evil or for good, can ever be done without earnestness. A man must employ the whole of his being to do aught effectually” (*Lect 1818-1819* 1: 448). In “Dejection, an Ode” and “Constancy to an Ideal Object,” we can see Coleridge as earnestly working out a stage in the process of coming to terms with the apparently divergent facets of his Being in an effort to close the corresponding division within himself. Now we must turn towards an investigation of Coleridge’s philosophic soul and the emergence of a *philosophic imaginary*.

c. The Philosophic Imaginary

In the prose works that occupy the vast majority of Coleridge's later career, he turns directly towards an explication of the question of "the mystery of being" (*Lects 1818-1819* 1: 220) through instigating an investigation of the parameters of Being and the imaginary conducted along aesthetic-philosophic lines. In this quest, Coleridge shows himself as looking forward towards an existential-phenomenological orientation insofar as "Heidegger and Coleridge were both concerned with confronting the Mystery of Being, the hidden reality that may find its temporary accommodation in language, which Heidegger called 'Being's House'" (Kessler 6-7). Yet in turning more decisively towards his philosophical pursuits, Coleridge concomitantly had to some degree sacrifice, if not effectively abandon, his ostensible poetic career. The reasons given for Coleridge's supposed drop-off in poetic power usually focus on some romantic or emotional failure, such as George Watson's blaming it on "unrequited love,"¹⁹³ or Patricia Adair's belief that Coleridge's "loss of joy meant also the death of his imagination."¹⁹⁴ Even Paul Magnuson, in spite of the fact that he finds that Coleridge's "imagination" is "still active" in the late poems, such as (for example) in "Dejection," it subsequently only "may project an image of its own destruction" (110). Yet how definitive this "abandonment" or "falling-off" actually was is to some degree belied by the actual number of poems Coleridge composed during this period, the full extent of which has been fully revealed in J.C.C. Mays's monumental edition of the *Poetic Works*. What is clear, however, is that Coleridge never gave up on his pursuit of the "mystery of Being," but only shifted the principal arena of his search. This philosophical re-orientation and affirmation is evidenced even in the later poems themselves, where we often "find, as a principal element in his poetic language, a philosophically sophisticated use of abstractions" (Bate, *Coleridge* 176) and "allusion[s] to the technical vocabulary and conceptualizations of Philosophy" (Bate, *Coleridge* 177). But if (as we have argued) this re-orientation is an outcome of Coleridge's failure to effectively enter into the moment of vision and authentically project himself solely through the medium of the poetic, and if this failure is simultaneously one contingent on the

¹⁹³ George Watson, *Coleridge the Poet* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) 131-132.

¹⁹⁴ Patricia Adair, *The Waking Dream: A Story of Coleridge's Poetry* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967) 6.

problems and aporias arising from his philosophical research, Coleridge's ontological situation demands that he more completely engage himself in these philosophical issues and remain on what we have called the path of the question in order to again become free to encounter his ownmost potentialities-for-Being – and as a byproduct make such potentialities available for us. Hence we find in Coleridge's later works a poetics predicated on the voluntary imagination is supplemented, if not replaced, by an over-riding influence of the compulsory imaginary in the guise of what we will term the *philosophic imaginary*.

Our conception of Coleridge's development runs directly counter to the negative perception of his supposed desertion of poetic activities in favor of a more or less Quixotic philosophic quest. Citing Coleridge's self-composed epitaph, Bloom concludes that "Death in life defeated the poet," and posits that "for Coleridge the theory of poetry was at last not the theory of life ... Coleridge initiated what he himself could not approve, and wrote his own epitaph many times before his death. The poems live; the theology and philosophy have only a life in death" (237). Such a negative view of Coleridge's supposed abandonment of poetry for philosophy is not a recent development, but was expressed early and often by his contemporaries. In the "Prolegomena" to his edition of the *Opus Maxim*, Thomas McFarland offers some notable examples of such criticism:

As Hazlitt said, in 1817, "Mr. C., with great talents, has, by a ambition to be everything, become nothing. His metaphysics have been a dead weight on the wings of his imagination – while his imagination has run away with his reason and common sense. He might, we seriously think, have been a very considerable poet – instead of which he has chosen to be a bad philosopher and a worse politician." Byron's opinion as expressed to Medwin was that "If Coleridge had never gone to Germany, nor spoilt his fine genius by the transcendental philosophy and German Metaphysics, nor taken to write lay sermons, he would have been the greatest poet of the day" ... Wordsworth himself shared this prevailing opinion as to the superfluity and even harmlessness of Coleridge's philosophical commitment: "Wordsworth, as a poet [reported an interlocutor] regretted that German metaphysics had so much captivated the taste of Coleridge, for he was frequently not intelligible on this subject; whereas, if his energy and his originality had

been exerted in the channel of poetry ... he might have done more permanently to enrich the literature ... than any man of the age.”¹⁹⁵

Riede appears to go beyond a simple poetic-philosophic dichotomy, when he writes that even though in the sphere of the aesthetic “Coleridge never succeeded in finding an adequate authority for himself, but from around 1800 to his death he sought ways to justify poetic authority for others ... The consequence of his failure to establish a poetic authority of his own, but to isolate it and explain it to others, was that he finally established his authority not as a poet but as a critic” (171-172). Yet reading this it is almost impossible not to suspect or devalue Coleridge’s supposed “critic[al]” authority, since it is based on not a mastery of “poetic” practice, but rather is only the result “of his failure to establish a poetic authority of his own” – or in other words, to bend a tired axiom, those who can’t do, critique. Such negative assessments rely on imposing a dichotomous split between a genuine, “poetic” Coleridge and a somewhat less than genuine philosophical Coleridge – a split which itself is predicated on another polar distinction between the poetic and philosophic as distinct domains, wherein the former is presumed as superior to the latter, rather than positing them as overlapping, interdependent, and mutually-sustaining disciplines and fields of investigation.

The philosophic domain is in fact paramount for Coleridge throughout not only his early authorial career, but is essential to his fundamental attunement from his embryonic years. George Whalley, for example, thinks that the commonly posited split between an early “poetic” Coleridge and a later “philosophical-theological” Coleridge is not borne out by Coleridge’s biography, for “Coleridge had been fascinated by philosophy and theology almost from childhood” (162). In Coleridge there consistently exists “a special kinship” between “poetry and philosophy”; and therefore, “Coleridge’s career cannot be neatly divided into a phase during which he produced his most memorable poetry and another in which, imagination and poetry failing, he turned to the solace of philosophy and theology” (Mahoney, “We Must” 196). Mahoney sees Coleridge’s poetic and philosophic enterprises as mutually affirming and reinforcing, for “philosophy can never completely divorce itself from the need to concretize, to vivify abstractions and

¹⁹⁵ Thomas McFarland, “Prolegomena,” *Opus Maximum*, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 15 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 2002) cl.

make them real to the heart” (“We Must” 196); nor (we would add) can poetry ever lose sight of philosophy, unless it is to risk losing its head in the potential morass of the unguided heart. Thus we can see that for Coleridge it is clearly not a case of an “abandonment” of poetry as merely the act of writing poems, but rather an expanding emergence and clarifying of his ownmost ontological concerns. Coleridge’s concerns with his aesthetic-philosophic orientation, which are part of his habitual disposition, and which emerge during the black period with such a degree of insistence that they forced Coleridge to confront them or suffer a more or less total collapse, at the same time demand a shift in the principal arena of engagement.

In line with Coleridge’s over-riding concern with the disclosing of Being through and in the aesthetic, be it through the overtly aesthetic form of poetry, or the less obviously but no less aesthetic medium of philosophy, Kessler posits that “To make his own Being visible was the task he assumed in his later years, and poetry became his means but not his end” (6). To Coleridge, the aesthetic and philosophic are ways of Being specifically carried out as ways of knowing. For this reason, Coleridge “consistently avoided calling most of his works ‘poems,’” insofar as “the end of the poetic process was not a poem (as an artifact), but a new knowledge of the self, a new awareness of Being” (Kessler 5-6). The merger between Coleridge’s poetic and philosophic career is also perceived by Haven, who sees Coleridge’s theoretical writings as being imbued with an aesthetic spirit. Insofar as “Coleridge’s philosophical work appears ... as primarily symbolic and descriptive rather than logical and systematic,” means that “it is possible to examine the philosophy not as a more or less incoherent and derivative system” (17) – as Coleridge’s detractors (among which Haven himself must be numbered, even though his critique is meliorated by his desire to unearth “something more interesting and finally more significant than the systematic philosophy which he could not produce” [4]) insist – but rather should be viewed “as a symbolic projection of such experience” (Haven 17). Since such a reorientation “would in turn suggest that when philosophy replaced poetry as Coleridge’s primary activity” (Haven 17), it follows that Coleridge did not abandon the aesthetic, but rather translated the philosophic into the poetic, and thus “the language and symbols of philosophy came to serve some of the same functions that had earlier been served by the language and symbols of

poetry” (Haven 17) – which at the same time means that Coleridge no less translated the poetic, and therefore the aesthetic, into the philosophic.

The “Imagination” for Coleridge is a “creative Power” equally at play in poetry and prose, and in the poetic and the philosophic, as a power of envisioning or re-envisioning which requires “just that degree of vividness which disquiets & impels the Soul to try to realize its Images” (*Lects 1808-1819* 1: 137). As impelling “the Soul,” (which we will read as analogous to authentic Being, insofar as both are defined in relation to, and determined by, our ownmost powers and potential), the “Imagination” both upsets and goads Dasein “to realize” the “Images” it projects of its world and itself as potentialities-for-Being towards the world and its self by accessing the Imagination as a “creative Power” in the moment of vision. In this way, “the Images become a satisfying world of themselves – i.e. we have the Poet, or original Philosopher” (*Lects 1808-1819* 1: 137). The capacity to “realize ... a satisfying world of themselves” – which is to say, Dasein’s ownmost world as an authentic reality – is what constitutes “the Poet,” which Coleridge at the same time explicitly equates with the “original Philosopher.” But as striving after the “images” of the “Imagination,” the poetic and philosophic are necessarily both in pursuit of the imaginary. In Coleridge’s work, therefore, we find a blurring and melding of the common distinction between the aesthetic and philosophical which occurs “Precisely because Coleridge’s idea of Being resisted definition” and “his poetic impulse resisted conclusions, even a conclusive definition between poetry and prose” (Kessler 4).

Yet insightful as Kessler is in regards to the phenomenological aspects of Coleridge’s thinking, he inexplicably fails to fully bring home the extent of Coleridge’s ontologically-based conception of temporality, which underlies his subsequent discussion, and which he uses to explain precisely how “Coleridge’s idea of Being resisted definition.” While it is true that “Unlike Heidegger, Coleridge” as a Christian “denied Being-Toward-Death because death was no fact for the poet” (Kessler 6); they both nevertheless “view ... Being” as a continuing process of ontological modalizing as a temporalizing of temporality oriented towards the future and the attempt to enact projected potentialities-for-Being “as a

perpetual joining together of what we are and what we can be” (Kessler 6).¹⁹⁶ Yet ultimately for both Heidegger and “Coleridge, Being is a process, a coming into Being; and like the meaning of a poem, it is revealed through acts not objects” (Kessler 6). For this reason, the notion of “The poem as icon had to be shattered; the current of life had to be interrupted momentarily” in an exploration of the limitations of poetic expression “so that Being could be apprehended” (Kessler 9). In his struggles against the view of both “Being” and “the meaning of a poem” as mere “objects,” Coleridge turned towards “The Fragment,” which was his “form for Being-in-Time” (Kessler 9). Herein we see another facet of Coleridge’s conception of temporality. Because the “fragment” is never finished or complete in itself, it is at the same time aligned towards the future, insofar as it remains an open space wherein a recipient may actively enter into the equation, and thereby shore up the fragments against the impinging forms of ruin into an articulated whole. That which is fragmented as a supposed form of ruin is the tangible persistence of ways of having-been as they stretch into the present, and thus at the same time (specifically due to its fragmentary character), it is open towards the future. Here Kessler lays the groundwork – a foundation upon which we will build – for a view of Coleridge’s works not as an affidavit of a failed poetic enterprise, which unavoidably dissolved into an equally fragmented philosophy, but rather as presenting the signs of an unbroken continuum of his ongoing encounter with the imaginary. For this reason, we agree with Kessler that “Coleridge was not the failed poet he claimed to be” (3).

Yet this ostensible turning away from a predominant interest in poetic creation at the same time was a necessary move, so that Coleridge could progress along alternate (although parallel) lines. While here we are in agreement with Haven that “As Coleridge turned from philosophy to poetry,” and thereafter “philosophy rather than poetry became his medium of expression,” and while we do not disagree that philosophy was not merely “a rationalization of poetic experience”; we must nevertheless diverge from his opinion that “philosophy became a substitute for” poetry (119). As a “substitute for poetry,” philosophy is cast simply as a replacement, and hence there is implied a certain inferiority in the latter, rather than valuing it as a continuance of the selfsame project. Nor can we agree with Haven’s view that Coleridge’s

¹⁹⁶ In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger himself abjures to speculate on the possibility of some form of existence after death, since his concern in the specific work is rather with Dasein’s radical finitude, its facticity, and its Being-in-the-world, but yet at the same time he never wholly closes off such a possibility.

“philosophy ... remained fundamentally an attempt to find a language, a set of symbols in terms of which he could describe and make intelligible his own experience of himself in the universe” (119). The point of view implicit in this statement conceives of Being as something which seeks to become a psychological object to itself as a “consciousness”; and hence “philosophy” concomitantly is reduced to the status of a merely “symbolic projection of such experience” (Haven 17). While we cannot disagree with the notion that philosophy may indeed provide assistance towards a greater degree of self-understanding; in its kinship with the aesthetic and as a mode of the philosophic imaginary, philosophy does not supply an outline for experience, but instead it works to shape and structure experience itself. The view of “consciousness” proposed here is also antithetical to an existential-ontological conception of Being, in that it assumes a certain fixedness of Being, which forces it to attribute a static quality to “experience,” thereby unavoidably discounts both Being’s structure as *Insein* and its temporizing of temporality.

It was only by “Denying himself the honorific title of poet,” that “Coleridge proceeded to create a ‘poetry of Being’ that could appear in prose as well as in poems, in sustained discourse or as momentary fragments or *aperçus*” (Kessler 4); and thus we find not an abandonment of the aesthetic, but rather an aesthetic way of Being grounded in the philosophic, wherein “His energy was not diverted from poetry, but was spent in bringing poetry into the service of Being” (Kessler 4) specifically through an engagement with philosophy. Kessler continues by clarifying Coleridge’s conception of the relationship between the ontological and the aesthetic:

Precisely because Coleridge’s idea of Being resisted definition, his poetic impulse resisted conclusions, even a conclusive distinction between poetry and prose. The finite form of Being, or of a poem, remains something to be *seen through*: “the finite form can neither be laid hold of, nor is it any thing of itself real, but merely an apprehension, a frame-work which the human imagination forms by its own limits, as the foot measures itself on the snow” (*Friend*, I, 520). (Kessler 4-5)

Here we not only see the poetic manner of philosophizing to which Kessler calls our attention, but also Coleridge’s ongoing interest in Idealist metaphysics, in spite of his own problematizing of such a position

(as we saw previously).¹⁹⁷ The reason why “the finite form” is “merely” the object of “an apprehension,” or what Kant terms an “intuition,” and not “itself real” is because it is only the shadow play of appearance which clouds and conceals the thing-in-itself (Kant’s *Ding an sich*). In this context, finitude as related to “form” is simply *extension* understood in a Kantian sense as the property of a body as extending out into space. Our “apprehension” itself provides the “frame-work” for “the human imagination” insofar as the imagination as *Einbildungskraft* unifies the manifold of intuition and “limits” it. This form of the imagination is what Coleridge terms the “primary IMAGINATION,” which is the “power and prime Agent of all human Perception” (*BL* 1: 304). Yet not only is the imagination as *Einbildungskraft* limiting, it is also limited. This form of the imagination is not up to the job of “*see[ing] through*” anything. Transcendence of the world of appearance or the given, which defines the world of the real, through outstripping of the limitations of the real as what is actual in any given moment is the task of the “secondary imagination.” Coleridge defines the “secondary imagination” both as a “synthetic and magical power” (*BL* 2: 16), as well as an “Esemplastic” (*BL* 1: 168), or a shaping and unifying, power. The “secondary Imagination” is a power which more specifically “dissolves, diffuses and dissipates in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead” (*BL* 1: 304). Yet while such a “*see[ing] through*” is enacted through the secondary imagination, what it sees, or rather what is disclosed to the imagination, especially insofar as it goes beyond the “fixed and dead” world of the real, by definition carries us into the demesne of the imaginary.

But what is the character of the imaginary that is structurally demanded by a philosophically grounded concept of the “poetry of Being” – in other words, what do we mean by the notion of a “philosophic imaginary”? In *Coleridge as Philosopher*, John H. Muirhead writes that in moving away from an ostensibly poetic profession towards a more philosophically based career, Coleridge “required ... a complete reorientation of the shaping spirit of imagination within him to the new view of the world which

¹⁹⁷ Cf. “Rejection, Dis-illusion, and Dissolution: Reading ‘Dejection: An Ode’ (1802) Against ‘Constancy to an Ideal Object’ (1804 [1828])” (IV.b.i).

his studies in philosophy had by this time begun to open before him.”¹⁹⁸ Here “the shaping spirit of imagination” is no longer seen as self-sufficient, but must be directed towards, combined with, and contextualized within, Coleridge’s “new,” philosophic “view of the world” – a ‘world’ disclosed through Coleridge’s apprehension of a philosophic imaginary.

The shift towards a philosophic imaginary requires a conscious movement away from a strictly poetic attunement – a demand which Coleridge himself acknowledged – a shift wherein we find an explicit melding of the philosophic and aesthetic. In a letter “*To William Godwin*” written from “Greta Hall, Keswick” on “Wednesday, March 25, 1801” (*CL* 2: 713), Coleridge proclaims that he is “in a very unfit state of mind to sit in Judgement [sic] on” Godwin’s “Tragedy” (*CL* 2: 713) which has been sent to him and proceeds to explain and detail his current situation:

I have been, during the last 3 months, undergoing a process of intellectual *exsiccation*. In my long Illness I had been compelled into hours of Delight many a sleepless, painful hour of Darkness by chasing down metaphysical Game – and since then I have continued the Hunt, till I found myself unaware at the Root of Pure Mathematics—and up that tall smooth Tree, whose few poor branches are all at its very summit, am climbing by pure adhesive strength of arms and thighs – still slipping down, still renewing my ascent.— You would not know me—! all sounds of similitude keep at such a distance from each other in my mind, that I have *forgotten* how to make a rhyme ... The Poet is dead in me – my imagination (or rather the Somewhat that has been imaginative) lies, like a cold sniff on the circular Rim of a Brass Candle-stick, without even a stink of Tallow to remind you that it was once cloathed & mitred with flame. That is past by!—I was once a volume of Gold Leaf, rising & riding in every breath of Fancy—but I have beaten my weight & density, & now I sink in quick-silver, yea, remain squat and square on the earth amid the hurricane, that makes Oaks and Straws join in one Dance, fifty yards high in the Element. (*CL* 2: 714)

¹⁹⁸ John H. Muirhead, *Coleridge as Philosopher (Muirhead Library of Philosophy)* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 44.

The year of the letter marks it as being written in the period leading up to the composition of the poem “Dejection: An Ode”; and therefore, the “long illness” and “many a sleepless, painful hour of Darkness” Coleridge mentions can be taken to refer to the conditions which comprise what we have called the “black period.” The “process of intellectual *exsiccation*” is precisely the shift from a predominantly poetic manner of Being-towards-the-world towards one grounded in the philosophic, insofar as it involves Coleridge “chasing down metaphysical Game”; and hence we may furthermore infer that philosophy itself, as the preserve of “metaphysical Game,” is expressly assigned the role of a corrective to the debilitations suffered during the black period. Coleridge’s shift away from the poetic becomes more pronounced as he describes the arduous process of his philosophic ascent – an ascent which has a converse effect on his poetic career. As a result of this change, the first thing to go is Coleridge’s technical, poetic facility; and as a result of this loss, in Coleridge’s own words, “all sounds of similitude keep at such a distance from each other in my mind, that I have *forgotten* how to make a rhyme.” But for Coleridge this shift is more than merely stopping the writing of poems as the cessation of a certain activity; he is aware it marks an essential alteration in the fundamental attunement which directs his ways of Being. Coleridge sees himself as so essentially changed that he begins by telling Godwin, “You would not know me—!”; and he concludes by declaring in no uncertain terms: “The Poet is dead in me.” In the end, Coleridge reiterates his decision in favor of taking up a predominantly philosophic attunement and reasserts the force of the change this decision has wrought in him, which he expresses with not undue emphasis in an effort to ensure that he is not misunderstood (or perhaps in combination with an attempt to fully convince himself): “But I repeat, that I am unfit to decide on any but works of severe Logic.” (CL 2: 714).

Yet while Coleridge’s letter to Godwin is his own definitive statement of the shift in his fundamental attunement; the aesthetic and the imagination, and therefore the imaginary, nevertheless remain central to his thinking. Coleridge’s “imagination” is hardly impaired – his own words belying the greatly exaggerated reports of his imagination’s demise. The terms in which he relates the shift in his fundamental attunement as an ascent of “that tall smooth Tree” which is “Root[ed]” in “Pure Mathematics” are obviously less philosophic and more poetic, utilizing neither syllogisms nor inductive reasoning, but rather imagery, metaphor, and narrative. In his depiction of climbing “that tall smooth Tree”

of philosophic studies, there occurs the same sort of natural genius which was declared by the authors of the *Lyrical Ballads* to be necessary to the poet – a natural genius which is no less necessary to the philosopher, for as Coleridge claims, his intellectual ascent was gained “climbing by pure adhesive strength of arms and thighs.” The orchestrated effects of the passage begin their thematic development when Coleridge describes how his “imagination (or rather the Somewhat that has been imaginative) lies, like a cold sniff on the circular Rim of a Brass Candle-stick, without even a stink of Tallow to remind you that it was once cloathed & mitred with flame”; notably building in intensity as he exclaims (somewhat theatrically), “That is past by!” Coleridge continues building the insistence of the passage’s motives by positing himself as a virtual embodiment of both poet and poem as having been himself “once a volume of Gold Leaf, rising & riding in every breath of Fancy.” The passage finally reaches its crescendo in the concluding stormy image of upheaval, which is not without a stubborn, ponderous triumph: “but I have beaten my weight & density, & now I sink in quick-silver, yea, remain squat and square on the earth amid the hurricane, that makes Oaks and Straws join in one Dance, fifty yards high in the Element.” By giving himself up to the force of “the hurricane,” Coleridge holds himself back in the face of an overwhelming external force – a force which is analogous to our conception of the imaginary.

i. Philosophic *Bildung* in the *Biographia Literaria*, or *Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* (1817)

In the *Biographia Literaria*, or *Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* (1817), Coleridge elucidates the progress of his own philosophical *Bildung*, which is made possible through his encounter with the philosophic imaginary. The outcome of this encounter is threefold. First, it permits Coleridge to redirect himself and circumvent the dead-end he was faced with during the black period. Walter Jackson Bate sees Coleridge “in 1816, after he had long abandoned poetry” as “trying, from the wreckage of his life, to begin a very different career” (*Coleridge* 77), and thereby locates the beginnings of Coleridge’s newly expanding philosophically re-orientation expressly in the work on the *Biographia Literaria*; and even though (as we have seen) philosophy was important to him throughout his life, and while a manifestly aesthetic-philosophic project had been for some time fermenting within him, the *Biographia* itself nevertheless represents the culmination (at least at that particular point in his existence) and first public pronouncement of these long-incubating impulses. Second, it allows Coleridge to pick up where “Constancy to an Ideal Object” leaves off and further explore the dimensions of the ideal itself and its implications for his potentialities-for-Being. Tilottama Rajan similarly reads Coleridge’s “*Biographia*” as “a conversion narrative,”¹⁹⁹ (*Supplement* 105), which details “his shift from Hartley to post-Kantian idealism” (*Supplement* 103), and which as “his prelude to a religion of the imagination is produced inside the story of his life” (Rajan, *Supplement* 101). Third, it authorizes him to not only work out his emerging philosophic conceptions within the context “of his life,” but furthermore allows him to encounter the imaginary through his own philosophical investigations. M.G. Cooke also views the *Biographia Literaria* in essentially ontological terms, seeing it as laying out a “method of *Self*-construction,” wherein “Coleridge does not himself distinguish, or enable us to distinguish, between his opinions and his assertion of himself, between his philosophy and his status, between literature and metaphysics.”²⁰⁰ While we would add “*Self*-

¹⁹⁹ Tilottama Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theories and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell U Pr., 1990) 105.

²⁰⁰ M.G. Cooke, “*Quisque Sui Faber*: Coleridge in the *Biographia Literaria*,” *Philological Quarterly* 50: 2 (1971) 212.

revelation” to “*Self*-construction,” in order to acknowledge the receptive component of the process of self-articulation; we nevertheless concur with Cooke’s central point that Coleridge’s fundamental attunements and their expression as *Insein* are grounded on, conditioned by, and disclosed through, his philosophical pursuits.

Coleridge himself, from the initial, rudimentary rumblings of the incipient project that would become the *Biographia Literaria*, grasped the interpenetration of the biographical and philosophical in the context of his own existence and sees his embarking on a course of philosophic studies as marking a point of transition. In Chapter 10 of the *Biographia Literaria*, during a discussion “*the progress of his opinions in religion and politics*” (BL 1: 168), Coleridge recalls “the generous and munificent patronage of Mr. JOSIAH, and Mr. THOMAS WEDGWOOD,” which “enabled [him] to finish [his] education in Germany” (BL 1: 205):

Instead of troubling others with my own crude and juvenile compositions, I was thenceforward better employed in attempting to store my own head with the wisdom of others. I made best use of my time and means; and there is therefore no period of my life on which I can look back with such unmingled satisfaction. (BL 1: 205-106)

Here Coleridge explicitly posits a shift from a poetic orientation to a philosophically grounded self-image, wherein the former is seen as immature, and the latter is cast as the beginning of a new stage of development, which has its roots and sustenance in his studies of his philosophic predecessors. In a notebook entry from 1803, Coleridge declares, I “Seem to have made up my mind to write my metaphysical works, as *my Life*, & *in my Life*—intermixed with all the other events / or history of the mind and fortunes of S.T. Coleridge” (CN 1: 1515). Not only does Coleridge plan “to write” his “metaphysical works, as” his “*Life*” in the form of a literary-philosophic autobiography; but through the use of “as,” Coleridge at the same time posits an equivalence between his “*Life*” and “metaphysical works,” which is predicated on their underlying similitude. The effect of his “metaphysical works” specifically “*in*” Coleridge’s “*Life*” further underscores the constitutive influence of his philosophical pursuits for his ways of being, and therein we as eavesdroppers may trace the accumulative processes of Coleridge’s own philosophic *Bildung*. Coleridge sees this “intermix[ture]” as global in its effects, both in regards to his

Being-in-the-world of the real and his own reality, insofar as it is at play in “all the other events / or history of the mind and fortunes of S.T. Coleridge.” Coleridge’s lifelong habit of referring to himself at times in the third person, even in the more or less private space of his personal notebooks, bespeaks a degree of critical distance from himself, which marks him as a phenomenological observer and recorder of the occurrences and stages of his own existence.

Yet it would be a mistake to believe that the overt autobiographical component and purpose of the *Biographia Literaria* in any way significantly limits the potential range of applications of the work and effectively confines it to possessing relevance only for Coleridge himself, for “In *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge used the autobiographical framework of his own personal philosophical development as a model for readers anxious to philosophise for themselves.”²⁰¹ To apply Coleridge’s work as a means of becoming capable of “philosophis[ing] for [one]self,” means not only to incur a greater grasp of the history of philosophy and the essential elements and development of certain key concepts; but at the same time extends to the fact that through our own reading of the *Biographia Literaria*, we are enabled to encounter the philosophic imaginary for ourselves in what is basically an act of aesthetic appropriation and application. In a letter to C.A. Tulk written in September of 1817, Coleridge indicates his intentional inclusion of such a program for appropriation within the fabric of the *Biographia Literaria* itself, when he writes, “In my literary Life you will find a sketch of the *subjective* Pole of the Systematic Philosophy; the rudiments of *Self*-constructions” (CL 4: 767). Coleridge’s use of the plural “constructions” indicates his sense of the scope of application for “the rudiments” he presents. Furthermore, since these “rudiments” are somewhat sketchily presented, and since they are ultimately “barely enough to let a thinking mind see *what it is like*” (CL 4: 767), even in laying out the fundamentals of a “Systematic Philosophy,” Coleridge preserves a space of indeterminacy and openness wherein the recipient may enter into the equation.

Thus we may see that the *Biographia Literaria* is simultaneously Coleridge’s literary and philosophical autobiography, as well as a guidebook for the reader anxious to pursue the path of the question. Jackson explicitly brings together these two levels of concern, when he writes that, on one level,

²⁰¹ Jackson, J.R. de J. Jackson, “Editor’s Introduction,” *Lectures 1818-1819 On the History of Philosophy*. 2 vols. By Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 8. (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 2000) cxviii.

in “Coleridge’s analysis of his own intellectual development in *Biographia* ... we are told that as a young man he passed through three philosophical phases: first materialism, represented by David Hartley; then idealism, represented by Berkeley; and finally, the critical philosophy as it is found in Kant and Schelling”; yet on another level, Coleridge’s own “account of these phases is offered as both an explanation and a warning: an explanation of the reasons for his beliefs, but also a warning to others in the hope that they may benefit from his experience.”²⁰²

In the epigraph from Goethe’s “*Propyläen Einleitung*” (BL 1: 3), which prefaces the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge himself somewhat surreptitiously announces the biographical and educational intent of the work. After a gesture of rhetorical self-abnegation deprecating his ability “to instruct others,” Coleridge says he

wishes nevertheless to open out his heart to such as he either knows to be of like mind with himself, but who are widely scattered in the world: he wishes to knit anew his connections with his oldest friends, to continue those recently formed, and to win other friends among the rising generation for the remaining course of his life. He wishes to spare the young those circuitous paths, on which he himself had lost his way. (BL 1: 3)

On the biographical level, the work is a means for Coleridge to reintegrate the disparate and unraveling threads of his previous existence by reconnecting “with his oldest friends,” while at the same time reinforcing his present by “continu[ing] those [friendships] recently formed,” and furthermore vouchsafing his future by “win[ning] other friends among the rising generation.” Here we can see Coleridge consciously shoring up the fragments of the ruin of his black period and attempting to return from the scenes of desolation and isolation that continued to haunt him. As an “open[ing] out” of “his heart,” the *Biographia Literaria* is also a type of confession, which not only is a recounting of his previous existence; but also as a confession presupposes at least a hypothetical addressee as a sort of father-confessor. While Coleridge as a supplicant consciously or unconsciously hopes for some manner of absolution; on another level, his confession also serves as a means of aesthetic-philosophic education, wherein Coleridge turns his

²⁰² J.R. de J. Jackson, “Editor’s Introduction,” *Logic*, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 13 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1981) lxiii.

own life into an *exemplum*, and hence the *Biographia Literaria* itself may be read as a type of cautionary tale.

As a confessional-instruction manual, the *Biographia Literaria* is predicated on the dynamics of the aesthetic equation. The *Biographia Literaria* as a whole can be seen as having the aesthetic shape of a sort of dramatic monologue, wherein not only Coleridge confronts and encounters himself, but the recipient is also an eavesdropper on, and a tacit interlocutor in, the dialogic process enacted within the unfolding of the work itself. Coleridge lays out the rudiments of this process in his *Outlines of the History of Logic* (1803), where he writes, “a true philosophical dialogue <for the purposes of Instruction>” can be conducted by “the same mind in two different States made co-present by the natural fiction of two persons ... There does not exist a more important Rule or one more fruitful in its consequences, moral as well as logical, than the rule of connecting our present mind with our past” (*SW&F* 1: 131). Such a “philosophical dialogue,” initiated “for the purposes of Instruction,” is not simply “philosophical” as a “logical” demonstration, but furthermore has “consequences” which are explicitly “moral” insofar as they may be brought to bear on the conduct of existence. For Coleridge, the aesthetic and philosophic are not opposed realms, but are rather complementary endeavors. While in a letter to James Webbe Tobin written on “Wednesday, Sept. 17. 1800” (*CL* 1: 622), Coleridge announces his decision to “abandon Poetry altogether ... & reserve for [him]self the honorable attempt to make others feel and understand” it (*CL* 623); a few weeks later in a letter to Humphrey Davy written on “Thursday Night—Oct. 9. 1800” (*CL* 630), Coleridge refers to his plan to write “an Essay on the Elements of Poetry,” which “would in reality be a *disguised* System of Morals & Politics” (*CL* 632).²⁰³ Therefore, any absolute split between a poetic and philosophic Coleridge must be read as an over simplification, for in Coleridge’s world both domains of inquiry overlap one another – an overlap first fully brought into the light in the course of the *Biographia Literaria*.

The dialogic character of the *Biographia Literaria* also extends to Coleridge’s, and by implication to the reader’s own, dialogues with the numerous literary and philosophical personages who inhabit the work – figures that are themselves vehicles of the imaginary. As a literary biography, the *Biographia*

²⁰³ Here Coleridge not only looks forward to the composition of the *Biographia Literaria* itself, but further indicates the general direction of his later career as a whole – most notably as it is revealed in works such as *Aids to Reflection* (1825) and *On the Constitution of Church and State* (1830).

Literaria is more than merely a record of Coleridge's "Sketches of [His] Literary Life and Opinions" as announced by the book's alternate title; but more importantly the book is the record of the way in which Coleridge's biography as the history [*Geschichte*] of his existence is structured by and through his aesthetic-philosophic encounters with the imaginary as it is translated and realized through his reading. The figures with whom Coleridge deals in the text all "come to reveal states, possibilities in Coleridge's being" (Cooke 218) – and by extrapolation further work to "reveal" to the reader her/his own slumbering potentialities-for-Being. As providing a vehicle whereby Coleridge is permitted to transcend his former ontological situations and is further enabled to re-envision the parameters of his ownmost existence, these figures are emissaries of the imaginary. We must here disagree with Cooke's view that the "identification" of "the pantheon of literary and philosophical figures with" Coleridge hardly "detracts or distracts from his singular identity" (212); but instead serves to both compel and supplement the ongoing processes of his self-formation. The dialectics of "freedom and control," which "are not so much exercised as evolved," not only "in relation to the audience" (Cooke 212), are also at play in regards to Coleridge himself. Like the structure of a game, which both Gadamer and Iser posit as informing and supporting the aesthetic event, our encounters with the imaginary simultaneously involve the "freedom" of play and the "control" exerted by the structural demands of the guidelines which give form to the imaginary and govern the game itself and help shape our role in it. Through our imaginative participation and agreement with the rules, we also open and submit ourselves to the imaginary, for "The more the reader is drawn into the proceedings by playing the game of the text, the more he or she is played *by* the text" (*P* 258). In a game there is "a reciprocal behavior of absolute contemporaneousness" wherein

neither partner alone constitutes the real determining factor; rather, it is the unified form of movement as a whole that unifies the fluid activity of both. We can formulate this idea as a theoretical generalization by saying that the individual self, including his activity and his understanding of himself, is taken up into a higher determination that is the really decisive factor. (*PH* 54)

Thus “absorption into the game is an ecstatic self-forgetting that is experienced not as a *loss* of self-possession, but as the free buoyancy of an elevation above oneself” (*PH* 55)²⁰⁴ – which is to say, “an elevation above” one’s own previous manner of Being. In this way, “Reading becomes more than even conversation (*Notebooks*, II, 2526) ... it is a mode of experience” (Cooke 218) wherein Dasein grasps itself as a “becoming” (Cooke 219). In the “reciprocal behavior of absolute contemporaneousness” (*PH* 54), there is no longer simply a relationship between a predecessor and a recipient (or copyist), but rather a real-time exchange in the give-and-take, to-and-fro movement of conversation working towards a con-version. Viewed from this perspective, Coleridge’s supposed plagiarisms are not merely “conscious or unconscious borrowing[s],” but rather “what is involved is catalysis” (Cooke 219).

In CHAPTER 9 of the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge “sketch[es] out” the significant stages in his “intellectual biography” (Orsini 184). At the outset of the chapter, in a subsection entitled “*Is philosophy possible as a science*” (*BL* 1: 140), which marks his envoi to his youthful preoccupation with the limited materialist and empirical “schools of Locke, Berkeley, Leibnitz, and Hartley,” (*BL* 1: 140), and serves as a prelude to his tracing of his mature “*obligations to the Mystics*, as well as his “*obligations*” to “*Immanuel Kant*” and “*Schelling*” (*BL* 1: 140); Coleridge begins to trace a conception of “Philosophy” which is grounded in the ontology of Being, and which is progressively revealed to him through the various and cumulative stages of his own process of philosophical *Bildung*. By conceiving of his relation to his intellectual forbearers as “obligations,” Coleridge not only ranks himself as a recipient of determinative influences delivered *ab extra*, but also acknowledges his own indebtedness. To be under an “obligation” to someone, at the same time, implies a duty of reciprocation when one is called by the summons of the original benefactor – a summoning wherein one becomes an agent in her/his own right.

As a “science,” “Philosophy” is both an aggregate of knowledge as “*scientia*,” as well as a structured system whose precincts are accessible to all who are schooled in its terminology and parameters. Philosophy demands from its prospective converts certain rites of initiation whose adepts Coleridge refers to as a “*Literary aristocracy, or the existence of a tacit compact among the learned as a privileged order*”

²⁰⁴ Here the notion of aesthetic play recalls the role of the ecstatic in our discussion of “the moment of vision” (cf. II.b.ii.).

(BL 1: 140). By referring to this “*aristocracy*” specifically as one that is “*Literary*,” Coleridge again makes clear his perception of the overlap between aesthetic and philosophic enterprises. As “*Literary*,” such an undertaking must take into account the complexities of encoding, the dynamics of discourse, and the eventual development of a reading. Coleridge explicitly differentiates his notion of “a system of philosophy ... from mere history and historic classification” (BL 1: 141). To view the possibility of “philosophy” in terms of “mere history” and the “historic” is to constrict it to the domain Heidegger associates with the present-at-hand limits of *Historie*, and hence remove it from the ontologically oriented domain of *Geschichte*. At first, Coleridge “admit[s]” he had believed “that the sole practicable employment for the human mind was to observe, to collect, and to classify” (BL 1: 141) – activities which all exclusively deal with the world of the present-at-hand. Yet before long Coleridge perceived the shortcomings of this approach and its inability to address the self-reflexive issue of Being: “I soon felt, that human nature itself fought up against this wilful [sic] resignation of intellect” (BL 1: 141). In differentiating “philosophy” from “history,” Coleridge at the same time hearkens back to Aristotle’s distinction from the *Poetics* between “history” and “poetry”: wherein the former is concerned with “what has happened,”²⁰⁵ which itself is seen in terms of presence-at-hand as an “is” located in the past; and the latter, which is concerned with “what may happen” (Aristotle 35), which is to say with the possible, and hence necessarily involves the ontological dynamics of *Insein*. For Aristotle, and presumably for Coleridge as well, “Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular” (Aristotle 35). Yet it is through the aesthetic as a universal category that a particular appropriation and application can take place, for it is only through the apprehension of the imaginary schematized in an aesthetic form that we may eventually become enabled to articulate worlds of our own.

For Coleridge philosophy as a discipline is in fact fundamentally grounded in neither speculative metaphysics nor ethics, but in fundamental ontology: “For philosophy is neither a science of the reason or understanding only, nor merely a science of morals, but the science of BEING altogether” (BL 1: 252). Nor

²⁰⁵ Aristotle, *The Poetics of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. S.H. Butcher (Edinburgh: R & R Clark Ltd., 1907) 35.

is philosophy concerned with Being either only in the abstract or the concrete, and hence “its primary ground can be neither merely speculative or merely practical, but both in one” (*BL* 1: 252). While the latter clarification is drawn (as the editors inform us) from Schelling’s *Abhandlungen zur Erläuterung des Idealismus* (1809), and leads thence into an extensive borrowing from Schelling’s *System des transscendentalen Idealismus* (1800),²⁰⁶ the preceding definition of “philosophy” is wholly Coleridge’s own. Diverging from Schelling’s principal interest in epistemology, wherein since “All knowledge rests on the coincidence of an object with a subject” (*BL* 1: 252), and hence the conception of “the truth” according to this approach “is universally placed in the coincidence of the thought with the thing, of the representation with the object represented” (*BL* 1: 254). Coleridge, on the other hand, advances a notion of “The postulate of philosophy,” which is also “the test of philosophic capacity,” as “no other than the heaven-descended KNOW THYSELF! ... And this at once practically and speculatively” (*BL* 1: 252). We may conclude, therefore, that the notion of “truth” which Coleridge posits is not exclusively concerned with either the objective world of the real, or any rigid mimetic relation between a “representation” and “the object represented”; but is rather concerned with ontological truth – which is to say, the truth of Being. “Philosophy” is both a discipline, which is structured according to various “postulate[s],” and at the same time as a standard of “philosophic capacity,” it is a form of attunement as a way of Being-towards the world and our selves. By stipulating that “philosophy” is simultaneously “practical” and “speculative,” Coleridge not only implicitly indicates that he believes himself to have unsundered the rift between the Kantian critiques of pure and practical reason (which Kant himself ultimately allowed are one – a fact which Coleridge appears to be unaware), but also makes it explicit that philosophy is not solely a rarified intellectual pursuit, which indeed also bears a practical application in the playing out of existence [*Existenz*].

In Coleridge’s own view, “The term, Philosophy, defines itself as an affectionate seeking after the truth; but” only insofar as “Truth is the correlative of being” (*BL* 1: 142). Following Coleridge’s syllogistic logic, we may draw the conclusion that he encourages from us – namely, that “Philosophy” itself is

²⁰⁶ James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, eds., *Biographia Literaria*, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 7 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1984) 1: 252 n 2-3.

concerned with, and is the “correlative” of, “Being.” Yet as the editors of the *Biographia Literaria* inform us, this conception of philosophy is hardly novel: “To say that truth is the correlative of being, especially of a supreme Being (which [Coleridge] implies later in the paragraph), and not a matter of sensuous experience, is common either as a postulate or conclusion of many theological and philosophic systems from Plato onwards” (Engell and Bate 1: 142-143 n. 4). Here “philosophy” is intended “in its highest sense, as the science of ultimate truths, and therefore scientia scientiarum” (BL 1: 235). Yet at the same time, Coleridge also introduces a distinctly phenomenological, existential timbre to the previously cited definition of “Philosophy,” insofar as it is conceived ontologically in terms of projection both as the act of “an affectionate seeking after the truth” and as a mode of *Insein*, or Being-towards, “Truth” – which itself is an approach towards grasping the “scientia scientiarum,” or the fundamental ground of *knowing*. “Truth” itself is ontologically defined as “the correlative of Being,” insofar as we “assum[e] as a postulate ... that intelligence and being are reciprocally each other’s Substrate,” and “that both are ab initio, identical and co-inherent” (BL 1: 143). As “an affectionate seeking,” philosophy also has an affective dimension that takes into account the methodological significance of the mood or state of mind [*Stimmung*] of the philosopher her/himself as constituent for the act of “seeking.” By beginning with the primordial structure of Being (and in spite of the Idealist metaphysics which are at the same time evidenced in the foregoing definitions), and insofar as he implicitly recognizes the ontological difference between “Being” and “beings,” Coleridge moves tentatively towards a phenomenological conception of Being as *Insein*. If “Truth is the correlative of Being”; and if “intelligence” (which we will equate with Heidegger’s definition of “understanding”) and being are reciprocally each other’s substrate”; then we may infer that by capital “B” “Being” Coleridge refers to a conception analogous to Dasein; whereas small “b” “being,” as a function of “intelligence” (or understanding) refers to Dasein’s articulation of its world through *Insein* – which is to say, any correlation is originally and ultimately due to Dasein itself, while the “being[s]” are the entities which in their disclosure comprise a given Dasein’s world. Yet Coleridge himself works against the radical subjectivity implied in a strictly Idealist position by conversely defining “intelligence” in terms of “being” as mutual “Substrate[s]”; for through the equation of the two as “ab initio, identical and co-inherent,” Coleridge sees “Being” as always already Being-in-the-world in a mutually-defining

interrelationship. In this way, Coleridge's "Being" itself occupies a medial position as the middle ground, in accordance with the manner in which Heidegger defines Dasein as the "between" [*Zwischen*] of subject and object as "the Being of this 'between'" (BT 132).

As we noted above, Coleridge conceives of his own process of philosophic *Bildung* as a series of "obligations" (BL 1: 146). Coleridge's tracing of his philosophic development begins with an acknowledgement of his "obligations to the mystics" as principally embodied in the person of "the Teutonic theosophist, Jacob Behmen" (BL 1: 146), who primarily emblemizes for Coleridge both the imaginative power demanded by the discipline of philosophy and the correlative exigency for an attitude of openness to the philosophic imaginary. After making allowances for Böhme's "many ... and gross ... delusions" (BL 1: 146-147) and "his utter want of intellectual discipline" (BL 1: 147), all of which are attributed to Böhme's lack of formal education; Coleridge proceeds to characterize him as an exemplar of philosophic enquiry. Coleridge generally defines Böhme's approach as that of "an enthusiast, in the strictest sense, as not merely distinguished, but as contra-distinguished, from a fanatic" (BL 1: 147). In a marginal note to Walter Birch's *Sermon on Enthusiasm* (1818), Coleridge defines both "enthusiasm" and "fanaticism" as "two states of moral being"²⁰⁷ – which is to say, they are two ways of Being-towards the world and one's own self. In his definition of "enthusiasm," Coleridge works to "counter ... the pejorative implications" of the term "current in his time,"²⁰⁸ effectively attempting to rehabilitate it by expressly defining it against "fanaticism" as a way of Being-authentic "contra-distinguished" from the inauthentic Being. Coleridge defines "fanaticism" as a state of Being wherein "heat, or accumulation and direction, of feeling acquired by contagion, and relying on the sympathy of sect or confederacy; intense sensation with confused or dim conceptions" (CM 1: 496). "Fanaticism" is troped as a disease transmitted by the "sect[s] or confederac[ies]" of the *they*, who deals only with the surfaces of present-at-hand things, which is all "sensation" (no matter how "intense" it may be) is able to reach due to its lack of a clear and distinct way

²⁰⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Marginalia*, eds. George Whalley and H.J. Jackson, 6 vols., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 12 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1980-2001) 1: 495; hereafter CM.

²⁰⁸ George Whalley ed., *Marginalia*, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 6 vols. *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 12 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1980-2001) 1: 495 n.1.

of Being-towards-the-world. For this reason, “the fanatic” has no “direction” of her/his own, and hence “can exist only in a crowd” as one who “from inward weakness” is “anxious for outer confirmation” (*CM* 1: 496) – which again is a manner of Being awash in inauthenticity and looking in the direction of the tenuous adjudications of the *they* for self assurance. “Enthusiasm,” on the one hand, “is the absorption of the individual in the object contemplated from the vividness or intensity of his conceptions and convictions” (*CM* 1: 496). Here “contemplat[ion]” or thought replaces mere “sensation,” and the world is no longer the sheen of impenetrable surface, but instead is an ontological space wherein Dasein can become “absor[bed]” through a “vivid” or “intens[e]” attunement predicated on the rational dynamics of engaged, authentic thinking. Thus we find that “The enthusiast” is not *one of the gang*, but “is a solitary” as one “who lives in a *world of his own* peopling [emphasis mine],” who dwells in her/his ownmost reality articulated through the projective capacities of worlding *Insein*. Since “enthusiasm is susceptible of many degrees” (*CM* 1: 496), it is open to a wide range of ontological situations and offers generous latitude for projective application to a wide range of potentialities-for-Being. While “fanaticism,” on the other hand, insofar as it “is one and the same, and appears different only from the manners and original temperament of the individual” (*CM* 1: 496), does not lead to any potential transformation in “moral being.”

For Coleridge, philosophy evidences the projective capacity we previously associated with the aesthetic, insofar as not only “In poems,” but “equally in philosophic disquisitions” we find the presence of “genius” (*BL* 1: 81) – which itself is akin to the state of mind defining enthusiasm. In a marginal note to John Bunyan’s *Pilgrims Progress: Copy B* (1831), Coleridge posits that “No two qualities [are] more contrary than Genius and Fanaticism,” while “enthusiasm indeed ... is almost a Synonime of Genius” (*CM* 1: 818). “Genius” in both the context of philosophy as well as aesthetics is evident insofar as it “produces the strongest impressions of novelty, while it rescues the most admitted truths from the impotence caused by the very circumstance of their universal admission” (*BL* 1: 81-82). Here Coleridge echoes Wordsworth’s language from the “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*; but in the following section, Coleridge shifts to a more decidedly philosophical interest: these “Truths” are “of all others the most awful and mysterious,” and “yet being at the same time of universal interest, are too often considered as *so* true, that they lose all the life and efficiency of truth, and lie bed-ridden in the dormitory of the soul, side by side,

with the most exploded errors” (*BL* 1: 82). As directed towards “truths” which are “of all others the most awful and mysterious,” genius has the capacity and the means to confront the mystery of Being. Here again Coleridge looks forward to Heidegger’s methodology, for just as Heidegger notes that when “Being” is taken as a “‘universal’ concept” (*BT* 3), it gets passed over due to its presumed and assumed obviousness as a foregone conclusion, similarly for Coleridge the supposed universality of such “truths” causes them to convalesce without the possibility of recuperation in the dark inward where they can no longer be distinguished from the atavisms of ancient “errors.” What is required, then, is a revivifying of “truth” through a re-engagement with its source – which is to say (in terms which Heidegger’s repeatedly voices throughout the *Contributions to Philosophy*), we must *cross over* to the *other beginning* and take up again the *grounding question*. Such a crossing over leads us into unforeseeable territories, and hence “produces the strongest impressions of novelty”; while at the same time, it takes us back to our primordial roots in “the most admitted truths.”

Coleridge’s conception of “truth” in his evolving ontological-aesthetic philosophy as it is disclosed through the influence of Böhme also brings the philosophic imaginary into play. While to a certain degree the apprehension of philosophic truth depends on the disposition, ardor, and training of the pursuer, it also befalls one as a form of *Erfahrung*. Not only is “TRUTH” something found, it also “takes possession of” (*BL* 1: 150) those upon whom it exerts influence. As demonstrated by the case with Böhme, such a falling under the influence of the “truth” is dependent on neither prior training, nor acquiring the accolades of the “they” by being “inrolled in the guilds of the learned” (*BL* 1: 148) or having been officiously ensconced as one of “the haughty priests of learning” (*BL* 1: 149); but rather depends on the qualities of both authenticity and openness. Coleridge’s conception of “enthusiasm” not only depends on imaginative power, but is also a form of openness as a giving one’s self over to the imaginary. In *The Statesman’s Manual* (1816), Coleridge defines such a state of being as “the oblivion and swallowing-up of self in an object dearer than self, or in an idea more vivid.”²⁰⁹ While in his treatment of “enthusiasm” Coleridge ostensibly has in mind “the genuine enthusiasm of morals, religion, and patriotism”;

²⁰⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lay Sermons*, ed. R.J. White, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 6 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1972) 23; hereafter *LS*.

“enthusiasm” also touches on the aesthetic. The aesthetic like enthusiasm demonstrates “this enlargement and elevation of the soul above its mere self”; and insofar as the aesthetic is a medium through which Dasein may re-turn to its primordial “there” and orient itself towards its future, aesthetic experience like enthusiasm “attest[s] the presence, and accompan[ies] the intuition of ultimate PRINCIPLES,” which “alone can interest the undegraded human spirit deeply and enduringly, because these alone belong to its essence, and will remain with it permanently” (LS 23). Enthusiasm itself, then, is a state-of-mind or attunement [*Bestimmung*] as a way of Being-attuned, wherein the particular as an individual “soul” is able to connect with the universal as it is revealed through “ultimate PRINCIPLES.” Yet such a loss of “self” is only provisional, for the end of enthusiasm is not a form of self-sacrifice, but rather works to support projection – a condition supported “the aphorism of ancient wisdom, that nothing great was ever atchieved [sic] without enthusiasm” (LS 23).

The “boon” which Coleridge has received from “the writings of these mystics,” and for which he says he owes them a “debt,” is due to the fact that they “acted in no slight degree to prevent [his] mind from being imprisoned within the outline of any single dogmatic system. They contributed to keep alive the *heart in the head*” (BL 1: 152). Thus we may conclude that the truth evolved through the state-of-mind associated with both enthusiasm and the aesthetic is not systematic in the sense of being limited to any single system, nor does it disavow either an orientation towards the particular or universal, but rather seeks to bring them into confluence through conditioning an appropriate way of Being-towards the world and one’s self.

After Coleridge’s *apologia* for having “digress[ed] further than I had foreseen or proposed” in his treatment of the role of the “mystics” due to their importance in his personal spiritual [*geistlich*] development as expressed in his “literary life and opinions” (BL 1: 152), he next turns to address his “*Obligations to Kant*.” (BL 1: 153). What is striking about Coleridge’s “obligations” to “The writings of the illustrious sage of Königsberg, the founder of the Critical Philosophy” (BL 1: 153) is the fact that they are both due to the influence of Kant’s writings themselves and are the product of Coleridge’s own hermeneutic reflections. After praising “The originality, the depth, and the compression of the thoughts; the novelty and subtlety, yet solidity and importance, of the distinctions; the adamantine chain of the logic;

and ... the *clearness and evidence*” of Kant’s works, Coleridge turns to consider what is absent in Kant’s philosophy. In place of the “apparent contradictions which occur” (*BL* 1: 153-154) in certain aspects of Kant’s philosophy (“contradictions” which Coleridge never specifies); he writes, “I soon found” were not contradiction, but rather “were hints and insinuations referring to ideas, which KANT either did not think it prudent to avow, or which he considered as consistently *left behind* in pure analysis, not of human nature in toto, but of the speculative intellect alone” (*BL* 1: 154). Here Coleridge moves into the subsection “*The difference between the letter and the spirit of Kant’s writings*” (*BL* 1: 140) announced at the beginning of the chapter. In the distinction between “*the letter and the spirit*,” a space is opened up wherein the recipient must enter into and actively engage the text and evolve a reading – a reading whose processes of evolution follow the fundamental pattern of the aesthetic event, moving beyond “*the letter*” to apprehend “*the spirit*” of Kant’s works. Coleridge actively enters into the reading of a philosophy text in the same manner as if he were investigating a more overtly aesthetic work by enjoining what we have called the path of the question. The letter of the text becomes something which must be interrogated as an *inter-rogare*, a bi-directional process of calling-into-question;²¹⁰ and which therefore occasions doubts in the recipient. In order to accomplish the evolution of a reading, one must not only be an active questioner, but at the same time she/he must also be taken up into the reading experience in a way exactly like that we delineated in regards to the aesthetic experience as *Erfahrung*. Hence we find Coleridge writing that Kant’s writings “took possession of me as with a giant’s hand” (*BL* 1: 153). Coleridge’s questioning is simultaneously an actively engaged *responsa* – a process wherein Coleridge builds upon his previous detection of “hints and insinuations,” which point beyond the ostensible letter of text and also provide a point of entry for the recipient to enjoin the text.²¹¹ In the processes of calling-into-question, Coleridge even baldly disbelieves some of Kant’s own ostensible statements. For example, Coleridge writes, “In spite therefore of his own declarations, I could never believe, it was possible for him to have meant no more by his *Noumenon*, or THING IN ITSELF, than his mere words express; or that in his own conception he confined the whole *plastic* power to the forms of the intellect, leaving for the external cause, for the *materiale* or our

²¹⁰ Cf. “Busy-ness of the World and its Discontents: Everydayness and the ‘They’” (II.b.ii).

²¹¹ Cf. The discussion of “the aesthetics of hinting” in “Imagination and the Imaginary” (II.a.iii).

sensations, a matter without form, which is doubtless inconceivable” (*BL* 1: 155). For our present purposes, what is important is not the validity of Coleridge’s critique in regards to various specific elements in Kant’s system, but rather what is central for our present purposes is the way in which he interacts with and appropriates the text. In this portion of the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge does not confine himself to understanding the rote “letter” of Kant’s system, but rather addresses himself to Kant’s works and his own relation to them in a manner parallel to aesthetic investigation.²¹²

From this angle of approach, Coleridge’s shift from an elaboration of his Kantian obligations to a discussion of the interchange between the “IDEA” and the “*symbol*” (*BL* 1: 156) no longer appears to be a deviation, but rather is a continuation of the previous line of inquiry, insofar as here we find a point of confluence between the philosophical and the aesthetic. Since “An IDEA, in the *highest* sense of that word, cannot be conveyed but by a *symbol*” (*BL* 1: 156), there must be some form wherein the intellectual content of the former is realized and made accessible – a form which as “a *symbol*” brings us into the domain of the aesthetic. Writing in *Aids to Reflection* (1824), Coleridge defines “a Symbol” as “a sign included in the Idea which it represents ... an actual part chosen to represent the whole” (*AR* 263). In *The Statesman’s Manual* (1816), Coleridge offers an expanded definition of a “Symbol,” which adds that it “always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible: and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative” (*LS* 30). Similarly to Iser’s notion of the fictive, the symbol bridges the real and the imaginary, while transmuting the former and giving shape to the latter. As “characterized by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General,” and “Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through the Temporal” (*LS* 30), the symbol is a shining-forth as a shining-through (*trans-lucere*).²¹³ In exhibiting the quality of “translucence,” a symbol is a conflation of both active and passive tendencies. As “The action or fact of shining through,” translucence makes a symbol either an agent of shining-forth in its own right, or

²¹² For a more specific discussion of Coleridge’s relation to Kant within the context of Coleridge’s own evolving aesthetic theory, as well as for a more detailed schematization of the role of imagination, symbol, and the reason in Coleridge’s aesthetics, please see my article “Coleridge Beyond Kant and Hegel: Transcendent Aesthetics and the Dialectic Pentad,” *Studies in Romanticism* 45 (2006): 465-481.

²¹³ For a more general discussion of shining-forth and shining-through in relation to the aesthetic in general please see “Aesthetic Phenomenology: A Critical Encounter” (I).

assigns it the positive quality of shining-forth; while insofar as it indicates a “Transparency to light,” the symbol is also a medium which passively permits that which shines through to become manifest.²¹⁴ In this second sense, the symbol again evidences a similar function to the fictive and likewise is part of a series of multi-directional border crossings.

The symbol not only marks the point of intersection between the philosophic and the aesthetic, but further discloses a domain of confluence between the imagination and the imaginary. In the *Principles of Genial Criticism* (1814), Coleridge defines “TASTE” as

The intermediate faculty which connects the active with the passive powers of our nature, the intellect with the senses; and its appointed function is to elevate the *images* of the latter, while it realizes the *ideas* of the former. (*SW&F* 1: 365)

Coleridge later assigns the role of “intermediate faculty” to the agency of the imagination; and hence what is above said of “TASTE” may be equally applied to the imagination. David Kaiser perceives the analogous “intermediate,” inter-relating function of the imagination when he writes:

Coleridge holds up the Imagination as the mediator between the material world of the senses and the material world of Ideas apprehended by Reason, the mediator that joins these two worlds through Symbols ... For Coleridge, Symbols thus embody the physical particulars, and express the universal Idea at the same time; they ‘enunciate the whole,’ as he puts it.²¹⁵

The imagination, on the one hand, is an “Esemplastic” (*BL* 1: 168) or projective power, which shapes and unifies, and hence is active as “the mediator”; on the other hand, the imagination “connects the active with the passive powers of our nature,” and since in this parallel aspect to “taste” the “imagination” is a disposition of receptive openness in the forming of reflective, aesthetic judgments, it is at the same time a way of being open to the imaginary as it is revealed through symbols. The symbolic is an emissary and

²¹⁴ “Translucence,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, New Ed. Interestingly, the first historical reference for the first definition is taken from Coleridge’s poem “*Two Founts* 27 The soul’s translucence thro’ her crystal shrine!”

²¹⁵ David Aram Kaiser, “The Incarnated Symbol: Coleridge, Hegel, Strauss, and the Higher Biblical Criticism,” *European Romantic Review* 4 (1994): 142-143.

embodiment of the imaginary, insofar as in its function as the “forma informans” (*SW&F* 1: 377), it gives shape to ideas. Any given “system of symbols” as “the living *educts* of the Imagination,” is both a product of the imagination and a destination towards which it is drawn. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites Coleridge’s use of “educt” as a noun in the above passage as the first historical example of the second definition: “A result of inference or of development.”²¹⁶ While “the Imagination” is the agent of the “infer[ring],” the “inference[s]” themselves are based on and drawn from something beyond the imagination. As undergoing a process “of development,” “the Imagination” at the same time goes beyond itself towards an altered or new version of itself. The dualism underlying the relation between the imagination and symbols and its possible misinterpretation apparently caused Coleridge some concern, for Coleridge’s revisions and musings on this section of the *Statesman’s Manual* continued after the work’s first publication. R.J. White informs us in an editorial note: “In Copy G, after altering ‘*Educts*’ to ‘*Produce*’, C[oleridge] noted: ‘Or perhaps these *μορψωματα* of the mechanic Understanding as distinguished from the ‘*ποιησεις*’ of the imaginative Reason might be named *Products* in antithesis to *Produce*—or Growths” – the latter in the singular replacing “*educts*” in “Copy R” (*LS* 29).²¹⁷ A symbol is not a “product” as a limited physical body which has been mechanically manufactured; but is rather an organic “growth” which develops and is structured according to its own inborn imperatives, and hence is a form of “*Produce*,” more in keeping with the sense we use the word to refer to fruits and vegetables. To “educate” something is literally “to draw” “lead,” or even “command”²¹⁸ someone or something “from” or “out of” (*e-ducere*)²¹⁹ one place or situation and into another as a bringing-out or a bringing-forth, which is reflected in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth-Century English usage of the word as a passive verb meaning “to be lead forth, branch out (said of a river or a blood vessel)”²²⁰; while to “produce” something is a drawing-

²¹⁶ “Educt,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, New Ed.

²¹⁷ R.J. White sorts out the various copies which Coleridge annotated in an appendix to his edition of the *Lay Sermons*: “Copy G” refers to the copy of *The Statesman’s Manual* in the library of James Gilman which “appears to be C[oleridge]’s, and may have been used by H[enry] N[elson] C[oleridge] for his edition of 1839”; while “copy R” to that in the possession of William Lorance Rogers, which contains several of Coleridge’s own “corrections” (*LS* 236).

²¹⁸ “D̄uco,” *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary*, 1955 ed.

²¹⁹ “Ex,” *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary*, 1955 ed.

²²⁰ “Educe,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, New Ed.

forth or leading “in behalf of,” or “in favor of”²²¹ (*pro-ducere*) some agent or goal. Yet regardless of the specific terminology that Coleridge employs, we find both something being acted on *ab extra* and the same underlying notions of movement, development, and change from some starting-point and the taking up of a direction towards some aim. Returning to the original characterization of symbols as “the living *educts* of the Imagination,” we can now see that “the Imagination” does not simply actively create symbols, but is just as much led by symbols beyond itself towards some new situation – which insofar as this destination is the domain of the symbolic and the demesne of the imaginary, we are led into the uncertain and the unknown region of the unrealized.

To be open to the symbolic, just as for the imaginary, means putting one’s own self at risk along the path of the question. While “all symbols of necessity involve an apparent contradiction” (*BL* 1: 156), this is the case only “for those who could not pierce through this symbolic husk”; and therefore, Kant’s writings were not intended” (*BL* 1: 157) for those unattuned to the dynamics of the symbol. Only those willing to place themselves into the hazard by pursuing “Questions which can not be fully answered without exposing the respondent to personal danger” (*BL* 1: 157) will ever have a chance of encountering the “truth.” Only such potentially perilous questions are worth the asking, for “Questions which can not be fully answered without exposing the respondent to personal danger, are not entitled to a fair answer” (*BL* 1: 157). By taking up the path of the question one puts not only one’s self in “personal danger,” but also exposes one to assault by “the adversary” (*BL* 1: 157) – but who or what this “adversary” may be Coleridge never explicitly says. What is clear is that to speak “openly” of such “Questions” is what “would in many cases furnish the very advantage, which the adversary is insidiously seeking after” (*BL* 1: 157); and therefore, we may infer that it is something about the act of asking such “Questions,” or something in the “Questions” themselves, which threaten the adversary. Such “Questions,” both due to the fact that they place one’s own self at risk and intimidate the complacency and self-evasions of the “they” through the open declaration of deviation, can be seen as concerned the issue of authentic Being. To be “expos[ed] ... to personal danger” by placing itself at risk, suggests Dasein has been divested of all its protective and countervailing measures and stands forth baldly in its own stark truth. The same notion of exposing, which

²²¹ “Pro,” *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary*, 1955 ed.

in Heidegger's terms is a form of disclosure or uncovering, is contained in the image of "pierc[ing] through" the "symbolic husk" which both obscures and protects "Kant's writings" against incursions of those for whom they are "not intended." But what does it mean for Dasein to come into its own "truth"?

An aesthetic approach to philosophy and the recognition of a philosophic imaginary also necessitates a re-conceptualization (or at least a qualification) of the notion of "truth" itself. Here "truth" gives way to "Veracity," which "does not consist in *saying*," or rather in evaluating the objective validity of what has been said, "but in the intention of *communicating* truth" (*BL* 1: 157). Here Coleridge's discussion is predicated on a distinction between "*verbal* truth" and "*moral* truth" drawn in *The Friend* "No. 3.

THURSDAY, August 10, 1809"²²²: in the former, "we mean no more than the correspondence of a given fact to given words"; in the latter, "we involve the intention of the speaker," wherein her or "his words should correspond to his thoughts" (*Friend* 2: 42). As a speaking of "*moral* truth," "veracity" is an expression of Being and speaks the truth of *Insein* as a way of Being-towards the world as an uncovering, and hence discloses an ontological reality – which is to say, as an articulating of an intending, "veracity" is akin to Heidegger's conception of an interpretation as a form of discourse.²²³ One must not be tempted to think of veracity as in any way being an inferior form of discourse, for in fact "veracity" as an expression of an ontological understanding involves a "higher sense" of "Truth" than mere "verbal accuracy" (*Friend* 2: 42), which is only concerned with the present-at-hand, and then only in a superficial manner. Yet even though "Veracity" should "not" be equated with "mere accuracy" (*Friend* 2: 43), this does not mean that it is only true for the isolated world of a given Dasein, for it's intention (or intentionality as an *in-tending*) is "to convey [emphasis mine] truth, not merely to say it" (*Friend* 2: 43). The "convey[ing]" or "*communicating*" of "truth" which is the goal of "veracity" presupposes another Being as an addressee who is carried over through enjoining the vehicle of the words as a *con-veying* into the shared reality of a *co-mundus*. The recipient is at the same time constitutive in this event, for in the speaking of "*moral* truth ... the intention of the speaker" is not solely determinative of what is said, since Coleridge stipulates that the "words should correspond to" the original "thoughts" only "in the sense in which he expects them to be

²²² Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Friend*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 4 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1969) 2: 39; hereafter *Friend*.

²²³ Cf. "Dasein and the Articulation of Being" (II.a.i).

understood by others” (*Friend* 2: 42).²²⁴ In such instances, language crosses over into the domain of the aesthetic, and hence is governed by the hermeneutic dynamics of the aesthetic event.

Coleridge’s differentiation between “verbal accuracy” and “moral truth” is parallel to Heidegger’s distinction between the concept of “*ontic truth*” from “*ontological truth*” (*FCM* 360). Both of these qualifications are predicated on “ontological difference as the distinction within which everything ontological moves: being and beings” (*FCM* 360). “Being” is the domain of Dasein, whereas “beings” encompasses the existentiell state of entities that are merely present-at-hand. Ontic truth deals with “beings *in themselves*, just as they are” (*FCM* 360); whereas ontological truth “is concerned with beings *as such*, i.e., which inquires solely about what constitutes the *being* of beings” (*FCM* 360). Such a notion of “truth” is similar to the manner in which “Truth is understood by the Greeks as something stolen, something that must be torn from concealment in a confrontation ... Truth is the innermost confrontation of the essence of man with the whole of beings themselves” (*FCM* 29). An ontologically conceived truth is not determined through the precepts and procedures of propositional logic, for this “has nothing to do with the business of proving propositions at the writing desk” (*FCM* 29). Similarly “in philosophy,” when truth is existentially and ontologically conceived,

propositions never get firmed up into a proof. This is the case, not only because there are no *top* propositions from which others could be deduced, but because what is “true” is not a “proposition” at all and also not simply that about which a proposition makes a statement. All “proof” presupposes that the one who understands – as he comes, via representation, before the content of a proposition – remains unchanged as he enacts the interconnection of representations for the sake of proof. And only the

²²⁴ In this issue of *The Friend*, Coleridge relates “*moral*” both to Matthew Arnold’s sense of the “moral” as addressing the issue of *how to live*, but also to the more common sense of the “moral” as being determined by adherence to, or deviance from, a given standard of “right” and “wrong”; for Coleridge, however, the former seems to provide the grounding for the latter, insofar as “we are always supposed to use [*moral truth*], whenever we speak of Truth absolutely, or as a possible subject of moral merit or demerit” (*Friend* 2: 42). Here one can also detect the possible emergence of a notion of absolute truth that is hardly “absolute” in any conventional sense, but which posits Being itself as “absolute” in a philosophic sense.

“result” of the deduced proof can demand a changed way of representing or rather a representing of what was unnoticed until now. (*C Phil.* 10)

Here we see that propositional logic itself is predicated on a mimetic relationship. The standard of “truth,” while apparently centered in “the one who understands,” involves rather the co-incidence of the “representation” of she/he “who understands” and “the content of a proposition” as an expression of such an understanding. The “one who understands” remains by and large unengaged, and thus does not truly encounter that which is the object of the proposition, and stands removed in the place of a passive spectator. The proposition itself, if it is borne out by the so-called “proof,” is determinative of our ways of Being-towards, and thus any change in our way of Being-towards-the-world must be “the ‘result’ of the deduced proof.” “By contrast, in philosophical knowing,” which is existentially and ontologically grounded, “a transformation of the man who understands takes place with the very first step – not in a moral, ‘existentiell’ sense but rather with Da-sein as measure” (*C Phil.* 10). In other words, “Truth” as “something stolen ... is not simply there” (*FCM* 29) as some-thing directly in front of us. Instead, “as a revealing, it ultimately demands the engagement of man as a whole. Truth is in part rooted in the fate of human Dasein. It is something concealed, and as such is something higher” (*FCM* 29). While our “engagement” is actively assumed, at the same time, it is imposed upon us as part of our “fate” – which in this case embraces our inheritance and structure as human Beings. As “something higher,” it provides us an impetus to reach out towards the shadows of the possible, and gives us something for which to strive – while we wraith-like reach forth after the future ghost of our selves. This engagement is enacted through language conceived specifically as a speaking which effects a “coming-into-language” (*RB* 135) enacted through naming and assertion (as we have previously seen). Thus it is language as a manifestation of “the λόγος” which “tears φ[υ]σις, which strives to conceal itself, from concealment and thus brings beings to their truth” (*FCM* 29).

The aesthetic begins at the point where everyday speaking fails. When “the philosopher can not utter the whole truth without conveying falsehood, and at the same time, perhaps, exciting the most malignant passions,” she/he “is constrained to express himself either *mythically* or equivocally” (*BL* 1: 157). In such forms of speaking, there is still a demand for validity even though validation cannot be

conducted according to conventional standards: “The Conscience, or effective Reason, commands the design of conveying an *adequate* notion of the thing spoken of, when this is practicable; but at all events a *right* notion, or none at all” (*Friend* 2: 43). Such a voice, whose words are delivered “equivocally,” does not necessarily equivocate and parse out only an artful lie, but rather speaks in an equivalent (or equi-vocal) voice, which seeks to approximate the dimensions of ontological truth – a dimension which the speculative extrapolations of both philosophy and poetry (be it in verse, prose, music, pigment, or stone) seek to explore and map. As a link between the sensual and the intellectual, the real and reality, such an equivocal speaking at the same time is a calling together in the symbol as an *equi-vocare* – a vocative case wherein ideas are called forth out of the imaginary into symbolic forms, while the speaker and recipient are called into a shared world. Such mythic or equivocal forms of speaking are for Coleridge at the same time ways of sheltering the truth and preserving it against the encroachments of the “they,” whose lack of understanding when confronted by the truth of authenticity can only “excit[e] the most malignant passions” just like Coleridge’s aforementioned “adversary” (*BL* 1: 157).

The next stop in Coleridge’s tracing of the stages of his own philosophic *Bildung* is an assessment of “*Fichte’s attempt to complete the critical system*” (*BL* 1: 140). Coleridge’s treatment of Fichte is primarily negative and can be read as a defensive maneuver intended to dispel any suspicions of solipsism which some might be tempted to attach to Coleridge’s aestheticized philosophy. In this brief section, Coleridge reveals his self-conscious awareness of the constitutive role of the philosophic in the overall arc of his development, when he writes, “FICHTE’S Wissenschaftslehre, or *Lore* of Ultimate Science, was to add the key-stone of the arch” (*BL* 1: 157-158). While Orsini, on the one hand, is correct in reading the image to refer back to “Kant’s system” (187), the discussion of which is the nearest antecedent; on the other hand, the metaphor of “the arch” is not actually assigned an explicit reference, and hence can also be looked at in regards to the context of the *Biographia Literaria* as a whole and especially in light of its specific occurrence in the section detailing Coleridge’s intellectual obligations. Thus “the arch” for which Fichte’s philosophy “was to add the key-stone” also refers to the arc of Coleridge’s own spiritual [*geistlich*] and philosophic development. Yet since Coleridge says Fichte “*was* [emphasis mine] to add,” the central stabilizing influence, which is to say it “*was*” *supposed* “to add” both support and strength, as well as

completion, we can assume that for Coleridge Fichte in some way falls short. Here again, just as we noticed in Coleridge's treatment of Kant, Fichte is read against Coleridge's own principles as he consciously takes up an inter-active approach to the text and philosophical system under investigation. For Coleridge, the central problem with Fichte's system is the fact that its "fundamental idea" is "overbuilt with a heavy mass of mere *notions*, and psychological acts of arbitrary reflection," and "Thus his theory degenerated into a crude egoismus" (BL 1: 158). This "degenerat[ion]" is a disintegration of Kant's philosophy, in the collapse of which the "I" (or "*das Ich*") erroneously posits itself as absolute. In the wake of the displacement of "Ideas" that verge on the divine, there obdures only "a heavy mass of mere *notions*"; and in place of philosophical reflection that seeks to find the points of confluence of the universal and particular, there remains only isolated "psychological acts of arbitrary reflection." Nor do we any longer find the multi-vocal approach of equivocation as it is expressed through myth and symbols, but only a seemingly endlessly droning "I."

In order to emphasize his critique of Fichte's solipsistic approach, Coleridge appends a fairly extensive footnote, which is in fact longer than the section on Fichte appearing in the main body of the text, and which presents what he calls a "burlesque on the Fichtean Egoismus" (BL 1: 158). In *Coleridge and German Idealism: A Study in the History of an Idea*, Gian N. G. Orsini dismissively refers to the footnote as "a metrical squib, of which some lines will give a sufficient idea" and proceeds to quote a handful of lines taken only from the first portion of the passage:

Here on the market-cross aloud I cry

I, I, I! I myself I! ...

The inside and outside, the earth and the sky,

I, you and he, and he, you and I,

All souls and all bodies, are I myself I!

All I myself I! (BL 1: 159; Orsini 177)

Limiting the discussion to these lines, Orsini is quite right to state that "Merely as a stylistic parody of the repetition of the word 'Ich' in Fichte's early writings Coleridge's squib has some point, but not much" (Orsini 178); however, when viewed in context of the *Biographia Literaria* as a whole, and when the latter

portion of the passage is taken into account, the seemingly insignificant “squib” is really more of a trenchant critique.

Introducing the “burlesque,” Coleridge writes that it “may, perhaps, be amusing to the few who have studied the system, and to those who are unacquainted with it, may convey as tolerable a likeness of Fichte’s idealism as can be expected from an avowed caricature” (*BL* 1: 158-159). Here Coleridge not only chooses an overtly aesthetic vehicle to convey his critique, he openly acknowledges it as “an avowed caricature,” and thereby moves the philosophic into a dialogic relation to the aesthetic; but also throughout the second half of the “burlesque” itself, the philosophic is further aestheticized as he depicts Fichte’s notion of the *Ich* and the world that it purportedly constitutes as purely grammatical constructs:

A pronoun-verb imperative he shone—
The substantive and plural-singular grown
He thus spake on! Behold in I alone
(For ethics boast a syntax of their own)
Or if in ye, yet as I doth depute ye,
In O! I, you, the vocative of duty!
I of the world’s whole lexicon the root!
Of the whole universe of touch, sound, sight
The genitive and ablative to boot:
The accusative of wrong, the nom’native of right,
And in all cases the case absolute!
Self-construed, I all other moods decline:
Imperative, from nothing we derive us;
Yet as a super-postulate of mind,
Unconstrued antecedence I assign
To X, Y, Z, the God infinitives! (*BL* 1: 159-160)

As “a pronoun verb,” the *Ich* is in the “imperative” mood and “sh[ines]” forth with its own light as the sole source to project and illuminate the world – a world whose substance and variety are merely the reflex of

“The substantive and plural-singular grown” *Ich*. Even for the sensual world as “the whole universe of touch, sound, sight,” the “I” assumes “The genitive” of possession and the “ablative” of subordination, which determines all interrelations in space. In such a solipsistic condition, “ethics” becomes merely a matter of “syntax,” since it is the “I” that indicts “the accusative of wrong” and designates “the nominative of right.” In such an ethical scheme, “the vocative of duty” calls the other not to a state of attentiveness through the vocative “O!”; but merely “depute[s]” the other to play its part “In” the “O!” which is no longer a vocal summons, but merely an emphatically empty zero. From this a perspective, the “world” as a linguistic construct is merely a “Lexicon,” with the “I” at its “root.” The arbitrariness of the “Self-construed” *Ich* posits itself as “in all cases the case absolute” (*BL* 1: 160) merely through language games and verbal legerdemain. “Mood” is not a state-of-mind wherein Dasein finds itself in its thrownness, nor is it a way of Being attuned towards the world, but is rather something which the “I” is in control of and able to “decline” at whim. In this context, “decline” punningly refers not only to the declensions of the grammatical system of an inflected language, but also indicates a “decline” as a weakening or deterioration of Being itself. In such an imperially “Imperative” state of affairs, even God is disabused of the quality of infinitude and becomes instead a mere function of “assign[ed] ... infinitives.” Coleridge similarly characterizes Fichte’s “*religion*” (complete with “scare italics”) in the main body of the text as “consist[ing] in the assumption of a mere ORDO ORDONS” (*BL* 1: 159-160) – or in other words, as an imperative ordering. In his critique of Fichte, Coleridge ultimately calls our attention to the self-deluding potential of language not only in the sphere of the philosophic, but also by implication in the aesthetic, as in both fields potentially “a mere ORDO ORDONS” (*BL* 1: 160) decreed by the perverse *fiat* of an idiosyncratic solipsism.

Yet for Coleridge, Fichte does not go irretrievably wrong in his metaphysical system, but primarily wanders astray in regards to its ethical implications – which is to say, its moral implications for the ontological, existential question of how to live. In spite of the fact, “Coleridge not only fully grasped Fichte’s metaphysical principle,” but also “praised it highly”; Coleridge, at the same time, “In a contemporary letter ... criticizes Fichte’s ethics” (Orsini 177). In a letter “*To J.H. Green*” written on “13 December 1817 (*CL* 4: 791), Coleridge defines Fichte’s influence by contradistinguishing it from Kant’s

impact upon him. Coleridge writes of the latter, he “can not conceive the liberal pursuit or profession, in which the service derived from a patient study of his works would not be incalculably great, both as a cathartic, tonic, and directly nutritious [sic]” (CL 4: 792). In all three functions, Kant’s “works” are troped as an external agent, which either purges, mediates, or fortifies the reader, who for her/his part is placed in the position of a patient requiring either a cure or restorative; and therefore, Kant becomes a representative of the health-giving potential of the encounter with the philosophical imaginary. While “Fichte in his moral system,” on the other hand, “is but a caricature of Kant: or rather he is a Zeno” (CL 4: 792). The reference to “Zeno” is to the pre-Socratic philosopher Zeno of Elea (c. 490 B.C.? – c. 430 B.C.), who is most commonly associated with what has come to be called “Zeno’s paradox,” which is referenced in Aristotle’s *Physics* and deals with motion; and since Aristotle proved “Zeno’s reasoning” to be “fallacious,”²²⁵ Zeno himself has come to be cited as an emblem of verbal sophistry. Here Coleridge restates the central tenet of his earlier critique from the *Biographia Literaria*, and depicts Fichte’s philosophy as a pernicious influence which carries out its insidious effects through a co-opting and perversion of linguistic usage. As an infection residing in Fichte’s “mortal system,” such sophistry ultimately clouds and pollutes Dasein’s capacity for projection as what Heidegger terms discourse [*rede*] through what is essentially a fallen form of discourse similar to idle talk.²²⁶ Coleridge’s evaluation of Fichte highlights the ontological aspect of Fichte’s “metaphysics”; for even though “His metaphysics have gone by ... he has the merit of having prepared the ground for, and laid the first stone of, the *Dynamic* Philosophy by the substitution of Act for Thing” (CL 4: 792). Since in Coleridge’s assessment, Fichte recognizes ontological difference, distinguishing not only in degree, but also in kind, between being as a “thing,” and hence mere presence-at-hand; and Being as “Act,” in whose existence “Being is an *issue* for it” (BT 12); then for Coleridge the ultimate crux of Fichte’s philosophy is grounding in freedom and its orientation towards the future as the site of potentialities-for-Being. Therefore, we may reasonably conclude that in spite of the fact that Fichte’s system opens up Dasein’s moral freedom to choose how to

²²⁵ Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. R.P. Hardie and R.K. Gaye, *The Collected Works of Aristotle*, ed. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Pr., 1908) 602-851.

²²⁶ Cf. “The Busy-ness of the World and Its Discontents: Everydayness and the ‘They’” (ii.b.i).

exist; through befuddling the source of projection, Fichte unavoidably closes down the possibility for Dasein to claim itself out of confusion and become authentic.

In Schelling, who brings to a close the series of “*Obligations*,” Coleridge finds both a corrective for Fichte’s shortcomings and the final signpost of his own philosophic *Bildung*. When Coleridge writes, “In Schelling’s ‘NATUR-PHILOSOPHIE,’ and the ‘SYSTEM DES TRANSCENDENTALEN IDEALIMUS,’ I first found a genial coincidence with much I had toiled out for myself, and a powerful assistance in what I had yet to do” (*BL* 1: 160); he is, on one level, defending himself against anticipated charges of intellectual plagiarism; but on another level, he is both acknowledging the constitutive role of Schelling in his philosophic education, as well as simultaneously staking a claim on behalf of the authenticity and originality of his own philosophic development. In a notebook entry from December of 1804, Coleridge deals with the issue of intellectual priority in regards to his study of German philosophy as a whole and makes a similar claim for co-incidences in their lines of thought:

In the Preface of my Metaphys. Works I should say—Once & all read Tetens, Kant, Fichte, &c—& there you will trace or if you are on the hint, track me. Why then not acknowledge your obligations step by step? Because I could not do in a multitude of glaring resemblances without a lie/for they had been mine, formed, & full formed in my own mind, before I had ever heard of these Writers, because to have fixed on the partic[ular] instances in which I have really been indebted to these Writers would have [been] very hard, if possible, to me who read for truth & self-satisfaction, not to make a book, & who always rejoiced & was jubilant when I found my own ideas well expressed already by others, < & would have looked like a *trick*, to skulk there not quoted,> & lastly, let me say, because (I am proud perhaps but) I seem to know, that much of the matter remains my own, and that the Soul is *mine*. I fear not him for a Critic who can confound a Fellow-thinker with a Compiler. (*CN* 2: 2375)²²⁷

²²⁷ Whether or not one accepts Kathleen Coburn’s eminently reasonable justifications in the notes to the above entry, which maintain that “the more recent scholarly vanity *cum* scrupulousness in such matters was not to the taste or standard of [Coleridge’s], time or temperament”; nor was Coleridge able “with certainty” to “remember which entries were original, and which, and from what source, were quotation”

In dealing with the encounter with the philosophical imaginary, it is not often simple to tell where Coleridge's sources leave off and Coleridge himself begins. Nowhere in the above entry does Coleridge declare that he is totally original. In the first part of the passage, Coleridge seemingly claims that "they had been mine, formed, & full formed in my mind, before I had ever heard of these Writers"; and if this were indeed the case, it would not be a question of Coleridge's relation to the philosophic imaginary through these "Writers," since they did not open up new potentialities-for-Being, but merely confirmed what he already knew. Yet on closer inspection, we find that "they" refers not to the ideas of these "Writers" (as one would expect), but instead seemingly (lacking any other more eligible candidate) looks back to Coleridge's own "obligations" to these "Writers." Therefore, "obligation" shows a tripartite referentiality which parallels the three terms of the aesthetic equation: firstly, it refers both to the substance of the obligation itself, the matter concerning which one has assumed an obligation; secondly, it includes the one to whom the obligation is owed; and thirdly, the one who is under the obligation. Later in the passage, the boundaries between Coleridge and the "Writers" who are the sources of his "obligations" become even more blurred. Coleridge's certainty falters, and now he only "*seem[s]* [emphasis mine] to know, that much of the matter remains [his] own." The only thing he remains sure about is, as he says, "the Soul is *mine*." Again we find the selfsame tripartite referentiality underlying Coleridge's obligations – but here he emphasizes the distinction between "the matter" with which the obligation is concerned and "the Soul," which he professes to be his own and can be taken to refer to Coleridge status as a distinct Dasein. Hence "Soul," in other words, points towards Coleridge's conception of himself not only as an integrated self, but also as an authentic Being.

By the time of a letter "*To J.H. Green*" written on "13 December 1817" (CL 4: 791), Coleridge comes to see such "obligations" to his philosophical brethren as less of a beneficence and more of a burden – an onus which threatens to overwrite his self and obscure his own authentic Being.

(Coburn 2: 2375); I am disposed to lend credence to Coleridge's statements due to the fact that they were recorded in the private venue of his notebooks, and therefore not meant for anyone else's eye. While Coleridge may be guilty of some degree of self-delusion (as most of us unfortunately are), throughout his works he also consistently shows a high degree of self-awareness, and even self-deprecation, which leads me to conclude, whatever the number his faults, not to be listed among them is the sin of pathological self-delusion.

As my opinions were formed before I was acquainted with the schools of Fichte and Schelling, so do they remain independent of them: tho' I con- and pro- fess great obligations to them in the development of my Thoughts—and yet seem to feel, that I should have been more *useful*, had I been left to evolve them myself, without knowledge of their coincidence. (CL 4: 792-793)

Again Coleridge declares that his “opinions were formed before” he began to familiarize himself “with the schools of Fichte and Schelling”; but now he further asserts that his “opinions” simultaneously “remain independent” of his German counterparts. Coleridge’s acknowledgement of his “great obligations to them in the development of [his] Thoughts” as a “con-” and “pro-fess[ion]” has both a public and private dimension: in the former instance, when one confesses a sin, it is not only to receive absolution from an external authority, but also is intended to cleanse his own soul from the taint of the offense by coming to terms with it through the open admission of fault; in the latter case, one not only makes a profession to anyone who will listen, but also actively works encourage the selfsame point of view or set of beliefs in the hearers, while at the same time bringing the private dimension of one’s “Thoughts” explicitly out into a community forum. Yet as the letter progresses, the private dimension becomes more and more paramount. In the first part of the letter, Coleridge speaks of “my opinions” and “my Thoughts,” which while they are part of him as a possession which he owns and which also own or possess him; in the second half of the passage, Coleridge shifts to a focus on his own individual Dasein as an “I.” It is not his ideas or philosophy but Coleridge himself, who would have been “more *useful*,” if he “had been left to evolve” his “Thoughts” on his own.

“Truth” for Coleridge, insofar as it is not “mechanical” but “dynamic,” is (as we have seen) not an ontic, scientific standard dealing with the congruence of thought or words to things, but it is rather concerned with the ontological truth of Being. As ontologically grounded, “truth” itself must be temporalized in terms of the future as the site for as yet undisclosed potentialities-for-Being, and hence “truth[s]” are disclosed through the encounter with the imaginary which is analogous to Heidegger’s

conception of the experience of the call.²²⁸ Coleridge “regard[s] truth as a divine ventriloquist” (*BL* 1: 164), who speaks through us as a medium through which the ‘truth’ is channeled. Hence we can see that the experience of “truth,” which is an outgrowth of the encounter with the philosophic imaginary, like the truth we saw evolved through the aesthetic event, is an experience as *Erfahrung*. While when Coleridge says, “I care not from whose mouth the sounds are supposed to proceed, if only the words are audible and intelligible” (*BL* 1: 164), he is on one level simply offering yet another defense against anticipated accusations of “plagiarism” (*BL* 1: 164); yet on another level, he can be seen as paralleling the dynamics of the call of conscience and the aesthetic, wherein the call itself seems to come from beyond the Dasein who is called, insofar as “The call” arises seemingly from nowhere and appears to come “from afar unto afar” (*BT* 271). While “The ‘voice’” of the call “is taken rather as a giving-to-understand,” wherein Dasein is the recipient of the truth of the call; at the same time therein “lies the momentum of a push – of an abrupt arousal” (*BT* 271) of Dasein back to its “there.”

In “A Letter from Liberty” from *Consciones ad Populum: or Addresses to the People* (1795), we find the first connection between “ventriloquism” and the call, when Coleridge describes “CONSCIENCE” as “a perfect ventriloquist,” who “could throw her voice into any place she liked.”²²⁹ In *The Courier* for “26 September 1811,” Coleridge again links (albeit in a satirical context) “conscience” to “a shrewd ventriloquist.”²³⁰ The closest parallel to the above-cited passage from the *Biographia Literaria*, however, is found in *The Friend* “NO.9. THURSDAY, October 12, 1809” (*Friend* 2: 122), where Coleridge writes,

Laws obligatory on the Conscience, can only therefore proceed from that Reason which remains as always one and the same, whether it speaks through his or that person: like the voice of an external Ventriloquist, it is indifferent from whose lips it appears to come, if only it be audible. (*Friend* 2: 127)

In both passages, we also find a concern with the reception of the call of “truth” or “Conscience,” which depends on whether the call itself is “audible” (*Friend* 2: 127; *BL* 1: 164) and “intelligible” (*BL* 1: 164), so

²²⁸ Cf. “The Aesthetic as *Erfahrung*: The Call and the Moment of Vision” (II.b.ii).

²²⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1795: On Politics and Religion*, eds. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 1 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1971) 31.

²³⁰ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Essays on His Times*, ed. David V. Erdman, 3 vols., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 3 (Princeton: Princeton U Pr., 1973) 2: 308-309

that it can be heard [*gehört*]; yet at the same time, it is a matter of indifference “from whose mouth the sounds are supposed to proceed” (*BL* 1: 164), or “whether it speaks through this or that person” (*Friend* 2: 127). What is paramount is the call (or rather the calling) itself, which for those who authentically hear its voice is an experience as *Erfahrung*, since its “Laws” are “obligatory” (*Friend* 2: 127) – an obligatory quality which recalls Coleridge’s own “obligations” to his philosophic precursors as emissaries of the philosophic imaginary.

Yet Coleridge does not see himself as inescapably tethered to these obligations, nor does he view his philosophical enterprise as something essentially fixed, insofar as he finds in Schelling “a powerful assistance in what I had yet to do” (*BL* 1: 160). Through his apprehension of the philosophic imaginary, Coleridge simultaneously turns towards the trajectory of his own future and the issue of bringing to pass his ownmost-potentialities-for-Being – a project which is far from completed within the scope of the *Biographia Literaria* itself, but which nevertheless provides an attunement that sets the primary focus of the remainder of Coleridge’s work and the principal trajectory for the remainder of his existence.

At this point, it is clear that Coleridge has emerged from the state of ontological limbo we witnessed in the poems constituting the “Black Period” – an emergence made possible by the encounter of “the philosophic imagination” (*BL* 1: 241) with the philosophic imaginary. The “discursive” form of “knowledge” which defines the parameters of the poetic has been superceded by the “highest and intuitive knowledge” (*BL* 1: 241) conveyed out of the philosophic imaginary. Yet while the aesthetic can aim towards this latter kind of “knowledge,” which “in the language of Wordsworth” is a function of “The vision and the faculty divine” (*BL* 1: 241); since it is an outgrowth of the ongoing process of disclosing the imaginary, it is at the same time beyond any mere “faculty” under any lone individual’s conscious control, and hence such “knowledge” must be more fundamentally apprehended through a receptive openness. Coleridge next inserts a quotation (as the editor James Engell informs us) from Plotinus’s “*Ennead* 5.5.8” (*BL* 1: 241 n. 4):

It is not lawful to enquire from whence it sprang, as if it were a thing subject to place and motion, for it neither approached hither, nor again departs from hence to some other place; but it either appears to us, or it does not appear. So that we ought not to pursue it

with a view of detecting its secret source, but to watch in quiet till it suddenly shines upon us; preparing ourselves for the blessed spectacle as the eye waits patiently for the rising sun. (*BL* 1: 241)

Whereas in Plotinus, the “it” refers back to “the Intellectual-Principle,”²³¹ which itself is an internal form of “vision” (Plotinus 398), whose illuminating “light” shines forth from “within itself” (Plotinus 399); in the context of the *Biographia Literaria*, the “it” has as its immediate antecedent “the highest and intuitive knowledge” (*BL* 1: 241). Here the connection between such “knowledge” and the imaginary comes into sharper focus. Like the contents of the imaginary, the origin of such “knowledge” is not able to be known, since they are not mere “thing[s],” and hence are not defined or delineated by the narrow limits imposed upon merely present-at-hand entities, which for their part are “subject to place and motion”; but rather both the imaginary and such “knowledge” emerge from some unspecified “secret source.” Nor do they come towards us and then “depart” simply for “some other place” within a cartographic space; but rather they are either disclosed or remain undisclosed. Both “the highest and intuitive knowledge” and the imaginary cannot be actively “pursue[d]” or chased down, but instead demand from the recipient a more or less passive openness, wherein we “watch in quiet” and “wait ... patiently” until they “suddenly shine” forth “upon us like the rising sun,” or dawn like the moon cresting over jagged pines, its light raining on the dark surface of a trembling lake. Yet such passiveness does not encourage or endorse slothfulness, but rather presupposes a trained readiness on behalf of the recipient as a disposition to be affected, for our responsibility is to engage in “preparing ourselves for the blessed spectacle.”

Such readiness is the purview of “the philosophic imagination,” which Coleridge equates with “the sacred power of self-intuition” (*BL* 1: 241). While here Coleridge (as Engell again informs us) is following Schelling’s concept of “‘Self-intuition’, or *Selbstanschauung*,” which “is a pivotal postulate in Schelling’s *S[ystem of] T[ranscendental] I[dealism]*” (*BL* 1: 241 n. 6). Coleridge herein simultaneously goes beyond Schelling and moves the discussion into the domain of an ontologically grounded aesthetic by postulating “They and they only can acquire the philosophic imagination ... who within themselves can interpret and understand the symbol” (*BL* 1: 241-242). In the original context that provides the antecedent

²³¹ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen McKenna (London: Penguin, 1991) 399.

for Coleridge's continued discussion, Plotinus also conceives of such "vision" as a passive form of seeing, insofar as it "is sight without the act"; and yet at the same time "it is the truest seeing" (Plotinus 399). While for Plotinus such "vision" is concerned with "the light" cast by "the Light and the Source of Light" (Plotinus 399); in the section following the one quoted by Coleridge, Plotinus makes it clear that such vision also awakens capacities in those who have been exposed to the "light," for after "setting its entire being" towards the "Intellectual-Principle," Dasein becomes "tranquilly filled with power and tak[es] a new beauty to itself, gleaming in the light of that presence" (Plotinus 399).

The readiness prepared by the "philosophic imagination" ultimately is a readiness to grasp as yet unapprehended potentialities-for-Being disclosed through, and slumbering in, the symbol. Those who have attained the "philosophic imagination" have already begun to undergo a form of metamorphosis akin to the process wherein "the wings of the air-sylph are forming within the skin of the caterpillar" (*BL* 1: 242); and such readiness is available for "those only, who feel in their own spirits the same instinct, which impels the chrysalis of the horned fly to leave room in its involucre for antenna yet to come" (*BL* 1: 242). Under the sway of the "philosophic imagination," "They know and feel, that the *potential* works in them, even as the *actual* works on them!" (*BL* 1: 242). In recognizing the confluence of "the *potential*" and "the *actual*," Being explicitly grasps the interplay of reality and the real, the dynamics of which potentiate the moral imperative of both the aesthetic and the philosophic. For this reason, "the organs of the spirit," which "are framed for a correspondent world of the spirit," and which "exist in all," even though they "are not developed in all alike," are "first ... disclose[d]" directly through and "in the *moral* being" (*BL* 1: 242). By taking up the moral question of the issue of Being through the encounter and confrontation with its self, Dasein discloses its own "correspondent world of the spirit" – which is to say, its authentic reality. For Coleridge, the "symbol" is essential in this process, since (as we saw above) the symbol both constitutes a principal point of intersection between the philosophic and the aesthetic, as well as revealing the confluence among the imagination and the imaginary.

Here we return to the imagination, the point at which we began our investigation – although here we find a view of the imagination which has been transvalued through the introduction of the concept of the philosophic imaginary. The imagination, therefore, is both the point of departure and the place of

return for Coleridge's emergence from the limbo of the black period. Along these lines, M.G. Cooke also sees "the imagination" as central to Coleridge's process of *Bildung*, which the *Biographia Literaria* records:

For the imagination would seem ultimately to emerge as the capacity of which Coleridge has knowledge and need, but not true possession, the capacity to live at the kinetic point of intersection between autobiography and philosophy, centering and comprehending all the deadends, contradictions, and discontinuities of experience, with poise of mind and peace of spirit, settling ever higher on whatever grows from the ceaseless, indifferent activity of perception and feeling. The *Biographia* is the vehicle for the expression of the possibility, the possibilities of imagination in this sense. (Cooke 229)

In describing Coleridge's concept of, and relation to, "the imagination" as a "capacity of which Coleridge has knowledge and need, but not true possession"; Cooke implicitly introduces the notion of the imaginary into the equation. As a "capacity," the imagination is not merely a faculty under one's direct control, and hence is not something which can be an object of "possession" as a type of *Erlebnis*; but rather is a "capacity" which is open towards the experience of the imaginary like a vessel waiting to be filled. Here we depart from the common focus on the definitions of the forms of the "imagination" (however incomplete or anti-climactic they may be) presented in *Chapter 13* and move instead towards developing a more holistic reading of the text of the *Biographia Literaria* as a whole. As a record not only of Coleridge's personal struggles through the travails of the black period, but also as an equally personal vehicle of exploration of the philosophic imaginary, the *Biographia Literaria* reveals itself to be a "point of intersection between autobiography and philosophy," which permits Coleridge again to "center" himself. From this reinforced vantage point, Coleridge is enabled to "comprehend ... all the deadends, contradictions, and discontinuities of experience," which previously had defined the motionless inertia occasioned by the failure of his aesthetic imagination as *Erlebnis*. Yet Coleridge's newly evolved clarity (which one can't help but feel Cooke slightly overstates in a minor, and therefore forgivable, paroxysm of enthusiasm), since it reflectively dawns only in the emergence of the light of the philosophic imaginary, occurs only at "the kinetic point of intersection between autobiography and philosophy" as a grounding

moment in the continuous temporalizing and projection of Being. For this reason, the *Biographia Literaria* itself “is the vehicle for the expression of the possibility” not only of the “imagination,” but also of “the possibilities” of an existence which is open to the experience [*Erfahrung*] of the philosophic imaginary.

ii. *The Concealed Storehouse: The Philosophic Imaginary and Coleridge's Legacy*

Coleridge himself assesses the results of the *Biographia Literaria* in a specimen of *Table Talk* from "28. June 1834" (*TT* 1: 491) – an assessment contextualized within the processes of his own continuing *Bildung*. Evaluating the earlier work on its own terms, Coleridge finds, "All that metaphysical disquisition at the end of the first volume of the *Biographia Literaria* is unformed and immature;" and even though "it contains the fragments of the truth," nevertheless "it is not full, nor thought out" (*TT* 1: 492). Yet when the earlier work is viewed in light of Coleridge's subsequent philosophic project, he says "It is wonderful to myself to think, how infinitely more profound my views now are, and yet how much clearer they are. The circle is completing; the idea is coming round to, and to be, the common sense" (*TT* 1: 492). In Coleridge's view, the *Biographia Literaria* must be read not only in reference to his personal existence and in the context of his entire process of philosophical development; but must also be contextualized within the intellectual currents of the time – all of which like the philosophic imaginary (and daseinal existence in general) are temporalized not only as ways of having-been, but more importantly look towards the future. Through the use of the comparative, Coleridge not only indicates a greater depth and transparency in his "views," but also conveys an openness and open-endedness, wherein the revelation of the philosophic imaginary is an ongoing and effectively infinite process – a notion which is further underscored by present participles "completing" and "coming" in the following sentence. While apparently Coleridge holds forth the possibility of "The circle" finally attaining "completi[on]," the fact that this table talk entry took place just one week before his last conversation with Henry Nelson Coleridge, and just one month before Coleridge's own death, renders the possibility of any such eventually achieved "complet[ion]" a matter about which we can only speculate.

Yet the significance of the *Biographia Literaria* is limited to neither Coleridge's own personal existence, nor its influence on his contemporaries, but it at the same time holds forth a portal into the philosophic imaginary for its audience. Coleridge himself recognizes the work's wide range of applicability beyond his immediate sphere, when he adds to his assessment of the work itself his perception that "the idea[s]" which the work presents are also "coming round to, and to be, common sense" (*TT* 1:

492). By meeting and becoming allied with “common sense,” the philosophic imaginary enters into play and in the domain of the real, and potentially becomes a force in the lived existences of its recipients. In the same specimen of table talk, Coleridge himself offers an assessment of his “system” as a whole addressed to a generalized recipient: “You may not understand my system, or any given part of it or you may be disgusted with it and reject it – well and good: but this I say, if you once master it or any part of it, you cannot hesitate to embrace it as the truth; all doubt is over. You cannot be skeptical about it” (*TT* 1: 491-492). Thus the dynamics of reception we posited as underlying the aesthetic cycle, and the subsequent application of aesthetic experience which comes about through its successful completion, also play out in regards to the encounter with the philosophic imaginary. Central to continuance and success of this process is the recipient’s authentic engagement with the text as a coming to grips with it, and through the text with the potentialities-for-being which are evolved out of the imaginary. One must “master” Coleridge’s “system” not as a whole, but only “any part of it”; for like an aesthetic work, a philosophic work also solicits a series of hermeneutic reflections. Thereby the encounter with the philosophic imaginary opens doors on all sides – an effectively boundless series of doors whose numbers increase the further one explores the architecture of its expanding recesses.

Coleridge’s nineteenth-century successors also recognize (however tacitly and incompletely) the paramount importance for him of, and his role as guide into, the shadowed demesne of the philosophic imaginary. While Coleridge’s legacy is all too often dogged by the poetic-philosophic dichotomy that we have sought to (at least partially) realign, the presence of the philosophic imaginary nevertheless is consistently found as a subtext in various attempts to assess Coleridge’s career, the presence of which is manifested as a kind of magic or spell-like power which sheds its influence over those who are susceptible to it. The philosophic imaginary is further characterized by its suggestive capacity, both as an outgrowth of its hypnotic power, as well as in its kinship with (what we have termed) the aesthetics of hinting²³² – a power which personified Coleridge himself.

In the essay “Coleridge” from the volume *Essays and Studies* (1875), Algernon Charles Swinburne laments that “If to the man’s critical and philosophic faculty there had been added a formative

²³² Cf. “Imagination and the Imaginary” (II.a.iii).

power as perfect as was added to his poetic faculty, the fruit might possibly have been wellnigh as precious after its kind.”²³³ For Swinburne this “formative power,” on one level, is an expressive “power,” which is able to “find ... and seize upon the clearest and fullest expression” (273). Yet Swinburne at the same time recognizes, “we must judge of his poetic faculty by what is accomplished,” in regards to Coleridge’s “critical and philosophic faculty”; yet in assessing Coleridge’s overall achievement, on the other hand, “we must judge not by what is accomplished, but by what is suggested” (273). By shifting the standard of evaluation away from the actuality of whatever has been “accomplished” to “what is suggested,” Swinburne turns away from a concern with Coleridge’s poetic successes as they are embodied in the sphere of the real and instead faces the philosophic imaginary. The philosophic imaginary is not contained by, nor disclosed solely through any one given work, but rather is opened up through a recipient’s encounter with a text. The suggestive power of the aesthetic, which recalls the dynamics of hinting, is empowered specifically by the influx of the imaginary and is equally at play in the philosophic imaginary. The suggestive calls forth hermeneutic reflection, which awakens new ways of Being-towards the text, and hence also opens up the imaginary and gives it shape through the assignation of an interpretive schemata as the evolution of a reading. While “the value of [what is accomplished]” in Coleridge’s critical and philosophic works “be generally small” (274), and even though “the value of [what is suggested]” in them “is” only “sometimes great”; its suggestive worth is nevertheless “so great indeed that we cannot weigh or measure its influence and its work” (274). Since the imaginary itself is effectively boundless, “its influence and its work” are concomitantly unquantifiable. Here Swinburne, after a note of apparent deprecation and a rhetorical feint of misdirection, admits the importance and scope of the influence of Coleridge’s seminal pioneering of the philosophic imaginary. Swinburne stresses the relative lack of importance which should be acceded to the immediate circumstances of a writer in formulating a judicious assessment of her/his work, since unlike the “contemporary students or judges of a great man’s work”; for those more remote in time, “his moral or social qualities, his opinion on this matter and his action in that, are nothing except in so far as they affect the work done, the inheritance bequeathed us” (274). In the end, what is important is not the specific minutiae of the given historical moment [*historischer Augenblick*] of the author; but what is

²³³ Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Essays and Studies*, 3rd ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1888) 273.

paramount is rather the integrity of the world of the work, and how that world and the potentialities-for-Being which it discloses are enjoined and taken up by the recipient. Even though Swinburne admits to possessing “all fit admiration and gratitude for the splendid fragments so bequeathed of a critical and philosophic sort,” he nevertheless “doubt[s]” Coleridge “being remembered, except by a select body of his elect, as other than a poet” (274). Yet in spite of Swinburne’s misgivings about of the sphere of influence he expects will be exerted by Coleridge’s “critical and philosophic” legacy; he nevertheless characterizes it as durable in its drawing power, “for some studious disciples of the rarer kind he will doubtless, seen from any possible point of view, have always something about him of the old magnetism and magic” (274). Like the imaginary as a form of *Erfahrung*, Coleridge’s “critical and philosophic” legacy draws its prospective adherents to itself and transfixes them under its spell. The same “perfection of imaginative quality,” which in the view of Swinburne makes Coleridge “the greatest of lyric poets” and gives him “his special power” (275) is no less separable from Coleridge the philosopher and critic.

In Walter Pater’s essay on “Coleridge” from *Appreciations* (1889), we again detect the beguiling presence of the philosophic imaginary. Early in the essay, Pater follows the common pattern of dividing Coleridge’s “literary life”²³⁴ into the two periods delineated according to the dominance of either a poetic or philosophic attunement, wherein the latter is characterized by (in language which hearkens back to the dichotomy established in by Coleridge himself in his poem *Dejection: An Ode*) “an effort of sickly thought, that saddened his mind, and limited the operation of his unique poetic gift” (68-69). Yet even though “Coleridge’s intellectual sorrows were many” (Pater 73), there ironically was “one singular happiness” remaining for Coleridge: “an inborn taste for transcendental philosophy” (Pater 74). Here Pater transcends the simple poetic-philosophic dichotomy, which he ostensibly previously endorsed and posits instead that while Coleridge’s philosophic studies apparently precipitated his descent into the limbo of the black period, the same philosophic pursuits simultaneously provided him with a means of deliverance. The same rhetorical misdirection occurs when Pater addresses the range of influence of Coleridge’s philosophic work on subsequent generations:

²³⁴ Walter Pater, *Appreciations: With an Essay on Style* (London: Macmillan & Co. 1910) 68.

So what the reader of our own generation will least find in Coleridge's prose writings is the excitement of the literary sense. And yet, in those grey volumes, we have the larger part of the production of one who made way ever by a charm of voice, of aspect, of language, above all by the intellectual charm of new, moving, luminous ideas. (69)

The "grey volumes" which contain Coleridge's philosophical, "prose writings," regardless of the fact that they do not encourage "the excitement of the literary sense," have "a charm" uniquely their own. As "the larger part of the production" of Coleridge's more broadly conceived "literary" efforts, the "charm" of the philosophic works themselves are an extension of the "charm" of Coleridge the man as he presents himself through "voice," "aspect," and "language." Yet "above all" this "charm" is not solely an extension of mere persona, but is more importantly "the intellectual charm of new, moving, luminous ideas." These "ideas" themselves are the outgrowth and warrant of the philosophic imaginary. As "new," they present a way of Being-towards-the-world or one's self heretofore unimagined; and as "moving" and "luminous," they both provide an impetus towards the realization of such as yet unapprehended potentialities-for-Being and light the way as a guide. As "charm[ing]," such ideas are not only seemingly magical or otherworldly, but are furthermore for those who find themselves under their sway an experience characteristic of the imaginary as *Erfahrung*. Since this magic quality is also extended to Coleridge himself, he inferentially becomes either an outright personification or forthright emissary of the philosophic imaginary.

The image of Coleridge as the incarnation and interpenetration of the aesthetic and philosophic imaginary is found in Arthur Symons's essay on "Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1843)" from *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry* (1909). Symons observes that grasping "the double existence of the poet and the philosopher"²³⁵ is essential for an authentic understanding of Coleridge and his critical significance. Symons dispenses with the standard dichotomous opposition of "the poet and the philosopher," and instead posits "each" as "supplementing and interpenetrating the other" (129). Nor are the terms "poet" or "philosopher" merely the denomination of two occupations, but rather as "two aspects of one reality" (Symons 129) are ontologically based – "reality" here being synonymous with the sense in

²³⁵ Arthur Symons, *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry* (London: Archibald Constable & Co. Ltd., 1909) 127.

which Heidegger defines the term as a world which arises through *Insein*. This parallel is further solidified, when Symons telescopes his previous statement, therein moving beyond a conception of “the poet and the philosopher” as terms simply serving to indicate an individual who evidences a particular disposition, casting them instead more generally as “the poetic and philosophic attitudes,” which “are but two ways of seeing” (129). As “attitudes” or “ways of seeing,” both “the poetic and philosophic” are conceived as forms of attunement and specific ways of Being-towards as the instantiation of *Insein*. Nor does Symons devalue the philosophic in relation to the poetic as is so often the case in Coleridgean criticism, for both are mutually sustaining, and each is equally necessary to the support of the other, for “The poet who is not also a philosopher is like a flower without a root” (Symons 129). By concentrating only on one side of what is an interdependent relationship and allowing the converse to be inferred, Symons blatantly works against the commonly supposed (at least by literary critics) superiority of poetry to philosophy. Yet Coleridge’s aesthetic and philosophic concern with “reality” is not a limited personal ontological domain, but rather goes beyond any lone daseinal world and strives to explore the reaches of the philosophical imaginary at large. While “In Coleridge, metaphysics joined with an unbounded imagination, in equal flight from reality,” which is to say the real; and even though “Each was an equal denial of the reality of what we call real things” (Symons 130); each has a particular function and sphere of action. As “experimental, searching, reasoning” (Symons 130), philosophy, on the one hand, directly engages the imaginary, assays its contours, reaching forth into its recesses, and seeks to elucidate the laws governing the immaterial – for the imaginary is not incompatible with any sense of order or wholly resistant to the working out of interpretive architectures. Poetry, on the other hand, as “a ‘shaping spirit of the imagination,’ an embodying force” (Symons 130) exhibits the function of the aesthetic in general and like Iser’s conception of the fictive gives palpable and communicable form to what philosophy brings forth from the imaginary. Ultimately the interplay of the philosophic and imaginary are both central to Coleridge’s Being, for through the mediums of the philosophic and aesthetic, Coleridge’s “sight was always straining into the darkness” (Symons 130), always striving to go beyond the known and intercept unknown truths of Being and give voice to them for all who are willing to hear.

Yet in spite of whatever ground we have gained through investigating the shadowy architectonics of the philosophic imaginary, we still find ourselves peering “into the darkness” (Symons 130) alongside Coleridge, in a situation analogous to Keats’s conception of “human life” as “a large Mansion of Many Apartments” (Keats 1: 280). We stand poised on the threshold of the “dark passages” revealed leading out from Keats’s “Chamber of Maiden Thought,” when “many doors are set open” (Keats 1: 281). Like Keats, Coleridge, and the Romantics as a tribe, we also (as children of the Romantics) “are in a Mist—*We* are now in that state—We feel the ‘burden of the Mystery’”; and “Now if we live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore them” (Keats 1: 281). Here we return to the point at which we initiated our investigation of Coleridge’s encounter with the philosophic imaginary through his attempts to circumvent the shortcomings of an exclusively poetic approach to the imaginary and his subsequent exploration of “the mystery of being” (*Lects 1818-1819* 1: 220) through the alternative of a philosophic medium. But does this mean that we are cursed to go around and around in an ever revolving vertiginous circle, wherein origin and conclusion are similarly obscure and equally pointless? Must we stand at the threshold peering into the cloying darkness, each one of us the reincarnation of a forlorn Atlas trying to bear up under the weight of our own worlds without chance of any recourse?

V. Aesthetics As Self-Con-frontation: Coming Home to Ourselves

“Gradually, thinking on from point to point, we shall come to perceive that all true happiness and nobleness are near us, and yet neglected by us ...”

John Ruskin: *Modern Painters*

“The struggle was, and still might be, to preserve some of the values that make life worth living. And they are still mousing around for a significance in the chaos.”

Ezra Pound: *Guide to Kulchur*²³⁶

Having determined the manner in which Dasein projects itself (either in the person of the artist or the recipient) in relation to, and out of, the aesthetic; and having articulated the structure of the aesthetic work as both a transformation of the real and as a gestalt of the imaginary; as well as having investigated the way in which Dasein enters onto the path of the question, Dasein is called out of its homelessness and back to its self and its “there” through undergoing an aesthetic experience and emerges into the moment of vision, wherein it may authentically reclaim its projective capacities in the sphere of the real; we now turn to address the way in which Dasein may dwell in its freedom. We have reached the point wherein the aesthetic equation comes full circle – although this completion should in no way be interpreted as “final,” since the finality of the aesthetic (like the “closure” of the hermeneutic circle) is always only provisional and continually able to be supplemented further, since it is a path which constantly awaits us and may be ever enjoined and rejoined. Nor is Dasein’s freedom in this instance absolute, since it is disclosed and conditioned through the foregoing aesthetic experience. But this does not mean that this freedom is always merely conditional, for in emerging back into the real, Dasein at the same time takes possession of itself. While as Being-in-the-world, Dasein unavoidably remains contextualized within the everyday, surrounded by a distinct environment and placed within certain site-specific circumstances; this does not mean that Being is exclusively determined by either “natural” or societal worlds. If it were the case that the average, everyday world is universally and inescapably determinative for Dasein, the very idea of authentic Being itself would be inconceivable, since there would be no frame of reference outside of the everyday from which vantage point we could view its confines and assess its boundaries. Every reader will have to admit

²³⁶

Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, 1970) 8.

this truth to her/himself, for who has never imagined a world wherein circumstances are altered, a world in which the situations as they stand at any given moment are utterly changed? Thus, in the aesthetic in general, and in literature in particular, reality and the real as we have previously known it must intersect in the trans-valued field of the real: “Ultimately, the text brings about one more boundary-crossing that occurs within the reader’s experience: it stimulates attitudes toward an unreal world, the unfolding of which leads to the temporary displacement of the reader’s own reality,” and thus the “differing types of boundary-crossing ensure assimilation of a transformed world that *issues forth* [emphasis mine] from them” (*FI* 20). The situation is similar for the artist, who upon termination of an act of creation, stands back from the now independent work, relegated to the position of a recipient. The artist (like the audience) is similarly transformed by the aesthetic experience in a way far more profound than any mere “psychological” benefits accrued through an analogue of a “talking cure” which only circumvents some blockage before sending the “patient” back to the state enjoyed before the onset of whatever “disorder” occasioned the “treatment” in the first place; for she/he has not merely circumvented something which has occurred in the past only to pass the time more comfortably in the present, but has rather trans-formed her/himself by being open towards the future, all the while never forgetting the constitutive role of the past and its constitutive role in historicity. The question of our freedom, however, is still undecided, for our freedom exists only in light of the way we issue forth – an issuing forth which enacts the continual transforming of our world and our selves. “Our world,” at this stage, is no longer limited either solely to the world of the real into which we have been thrown, nor exclusively to the sense of “worldhood” as the domain of a daseinal reality, but now simultaneously embraces both.

When defined ontologically, the domain of the aesthetic is a site wherein Dasein may confront itself, and thus “The nature of all art, as Hegel formulated, is that it ‘presents man with himself’” (*TM* 48). All “natural objects – can express moral ideas in artistic presentation” (*TM* 48), but only in that these ideas are furnished from outside (*ab extra*) by Dasein, and insofar as the real is transformed by and through the aesthetic. For this reason, “Hegel ... described the expression of the moral as the ‘radiance of the spiritual’” (*TM* 49) – “the spiritual” embracing both our Being as *Geist* (i.e. as both “spirit” and “mind”) and the transformation of the real into the suprasensible domain of thought. At the same time, “the autonomy of

aesthetic consciousness" (TM 41), originally posited by "Kant," allows "art" to "become an autonomous phenomenon. Its task is no longer to represent the ideals of nature, but to enable man to encounter himself in nature and the human, historical world" (TM 49) – a "human, historical world" which is the *Geschichte des Geistes*. While in undergoing the actual experience of a work of art "the mediation must be thought of as total," the artwork itself nevertheless preserves its own daseinal integrity, for "Neither the being that the creating artist is for himself ... nor that of whoever is performing the work, nor that of the spectator ... has any legitimacy of its own in the face of the being of the artwork itself"; and while "What unfolds before us is so much lifted out of the ongoing course of the ordinary world and so much enclosed in its own autonomous circle of meaning" that the recipient "is set at an absolute distance," and "this distance is aesthetic distance in a true sense, for it signifies the distance necessary for seeing, and thus," however paradoxically, "makes possible a genuine and comprehensive participation" (TM 128). Equally paradoxically, a recipient's "ecstatic self-forgetfulness corresponds to his continuity with himself," for when "one loses oneself" in an aesthetic experience, we are subject to the "demand ... that one grasp the continuity of meaning" in one's ownmost terms, "For it is the truth of our own world" (TM 128). In crossing back into a Dasein's own lived existence in the real through aesthetic confrontation, which is really only Dasein's self confrontation, the path of the question turn back on and presses Dasein itself. In this way the aesthetic, as that which "rends" Dasein from itself, "at the same time gives" Dasein "back the whole of" its "being" (TM 128). For this reason, Bruce Krajewski notes, "Part of Gadamer's aesthetics leads one to self-questioning, to see oneself over and over again brought into the world of the work of art; and similarly he brings the work of art into the world."²³⁷

The alienation and strangeness which (as we have seen) is visited upon Dasein in its transgression of boundaries, however, is violent and destructive only provisionally, and when it is viewed from a limited perspective. When viewed in regards to the totality of the aesthetic equation, such alienation and estrangement is also ontologically constructive. Dasein's ability to preserve and develop its self in the confrontation with its own progressive alienation through aesthetic experience, on the sides of both the

²³⁷ Bruce Krajewski, "Gadamer's Aesthetics in Practice in *Wer bin Ich und wer bist Du?*," *Maps and Mirrors: Topologies of Art and Politics*, ed. Steve Martinot (Evanston: Northwestern U Pr., 2001) 23.

artist and the recipient, has much in common with what Keats called “*Negative Capability*” (1: 193). Keats characterizes “negative capability” as a state of being wherein we are “capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason” (1: 193). The aesthetic, whose world (as opposed to the world of the real) is uncertain, replete with “Mysteries” and “doubts,” and which works to excite (to paraphrase Max Ernst) *the irritable faculties of the mind*, demands just such a negative capacity from Dasein. Negative capability is furthermore a way of knowing which we previously associated with the aesthetic, and hence is defined against the subject-centered, psychologically oriented stance that strives after and demands some degree of certainty. Keats associates this opposite demand first and foremost with someone like “Coleridge,” who “would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge” (Keats 1: 193-194). Here Keats expressly defines negative capability in contradistinction to the totalizing efforts of psychological, scientific cognition which latches onto concepts that are themselves the result of the understanding’s [*Verstand*] unifying function – thus negative capability conversely is a condition in which the certainties centered on, and boundaries defined by, the logically-conditioned self are dissolved. Dasein instead opens itself to ways of knowing which are not necessarily endorsed by established manners of Being-towards-the-world. While such ways of knowing, especially when defined from the perspective of conventional and endorsed manners of Being-towards-the-world, may be unfinished and incomplete as “half knowledge”; they are nevertheless able to catch certain “fine isolated verisimilitude[s]” out of the miasma of “mystery.” A forgetting of the self as it has previously been conditioned, and as it has defined itself, is for Keats the very essence of the “poetical Character itself” (Keats 1: 386), for both the artist (and specifically of Keats’s personal poetical character) and the recipient. Keats distinguishes his own type of poet from that of “the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone” as something which “is not itself,” and in fact “it has no self” and “no character” of its own. The alienation attendant on the “egotistical sublime,” as opposed to the productive form of alienation associated with undergoing an authentic aesthetic experience, is incapable of re-turning Dasein to its “there,” and hence also towards its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-itself, for the simple reason that by repudiating its Being-in-the-world and its Being-with-others, Dasein necessarily denies itself. Our “character,” our “self” is in

the end dependent on our Being in relation to the world of the real. When Dasein presumably “stands alone” (regardless of the fact that such a state is a structural impossibility), it is converted into “a thing per se” – which is to say it is merely Being as a presence-at-hand. In Keats’s view, on the other hand, the poet is rather a “camelion [sic]” shape-shifter, and thus “is everything and nothing” in itself. This lack of “Identity” allows the poet to enter wholly into not only human, but also non-human modes of Being, for the poet is “continually in for – and filling some other Body – The Sun, the Moon, the Sea” (Keats 1: 387). Similarly the recipient, by reenacting the projections of the artist – which is to say “reenacting” in *kind*, though not necessarily in the same *degree* – temporarily goes out of her/his own discrete Being by sacrificing a personal “Identity” in order to fully enjoy the Being and world of an artwork.

The aesthetic, at the same time, requires much more of Dasein than mere self-preservation, recognition of its status as Being-in-the-world, or capacity to open itself to the imaginary – it demands an active *responsa*. “As an act of boundary-crossing,” the aesthetic is not exclusively an act of transgression, but must be reflected in an alteration in Being as *Insein*, and hence “can be adequately described only if worlds are to be constituted in which actions are to be preformed” (*FI* 168). The alienation which resolute Dasein undergoes in its process of *Bildung* is at the same time constitutive for Dasein’s own authentic understanding (i.e. for Dasein’s ability to grasp its ownmost potentialities-for-Being), and as such is also potentially productive, and thus “*Verfremdung* [alienation] is not only what understanding must overcome, but also what conditions it” (Ricoeur 140). This does not, however, exempt Dasein from the demand to return to its self and its lived existence in the real out of its personal alienation. Similarly, Hegel’s notion of “theoretical *Bildung*” is founded on the “basic idea” of “alienation” and (in Hegel’s words) “the return to oneself” (*TM* 14). This basic movement also parallels Heidegger’s conception of Dasein’s return out of fallenness and the attendant feeling of *Unheimlichkeit* to its “there,” wherein it can become at home with itself. Gadamer describes the process of Hegelian *Bildung* as requiring Dasein “To recognize one’s own in the alien, to become at home in it,” a process which is also “the basic movement of spirit, whose being consists only in returning to itself from what is other” (*TM* 14). This return “from what is other” is similarly constitutive for the aesthetic not only in the recipient’s returning to her/himself out of the otherness of the work of art, but more fundamentally as a return from aesthetic reality to the real, while at the same time

never losing sight of what has been disclosed through the experience of an aesthetic reality, so that the otherness of a previous mode of Being is simultaneously confronted. Thus “*The true locus of hermeneutics is*” the “*in-between*” opened up by “the polarity of familiarity and strangeness” (TM 295). In the case of an individual aesthetic experience, the same interplay and interdependence of the familiar and strange, the real and reality, is operative: in “the mode of the whole human experience of the world,” which Gadamer calls “hermeneutical ... There is always a world already interpreted, already organized in its basic relations, into which experience steps as something new, upsetting what has led our expectations and undergoing reorganization itself in the upheaval. Misunderstanding and strangeness are not the first factors,” for “Only the support of familiar and common understanding makes possible the venture into the alien, the lifting up of something out of the alien, and thus the broadening and enrichment of our own experience of the world” (PH 15). Thus we can see that “At bottom, the ordinary is not ordinary; it is extra-ordinary, uncanny” (PLT 54) – in other words, the real makes possible realities, while at the same time realities permeate the real and everyday.

The aesthetic in general, and Romantic poetry in particular, provides a pointed example of the exploration of ontological unfolding and concealedness in general – and specifically concealedness as it occurs in the interplay between the everyday and the aesthetic. The exploration of the unknown as it emerges from the imaginary and which is concealed by the trappings of the everyday becomes an explicit aesthetic principle, for example, in Wordsworth’s “Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads*, as well as in Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s two-part plan for the *Lyrical Ballads* as a whole, wherein it was their stated purpose that Coleridge’s poems would show the presence of the everyday in the supernatural, while Wordsworth would portray the presence of the supernatural in the everyday. In fact, it is “the coupling of the remarkable and the *ordinary*, of the strange and the *familiar*, of that which is outside of any explanation and that which is *explicable*” (Malpas 290), which defines “wonder” – a word which in its bivalence as a noun and a verb is the locus wherein both philosophy and the aesthetic find their source and prime directive. It is “the encounter with the wondrous” activated through a specifically aesthetic encounter which, even though “it represents a sudden disabling” as “an intrusion into our normal activities and a disruption of those activities,” “takes us out of our ordinary involvement with things and makes what is ordinarily

unquestioned, questionable, makes what ordinarily seems familiar, strange” (Malpas 289). While previously we saw the opacity and alienation which also accompanies wonder as akin to the self-alienating strangeness and emptiness Dasein may experience in its transgressions and turning away from the familiar and everyday back towards itself, we can now see that the “questioning” of the supposedly “unquestionable,” and the strangeness which lies at the root of even the most ordinary, the most mundane, is precisely what makes possible Dasein’s capacity to potentiate its ownmost-potentialities-for-Being and ever more fully dwell in its ownmost world in its lived existence.

Along these lines, Johannes Anderegk sees “fictional communication” (156), which “as ‘fiction’ or ‘fictionality’ appears to have its authentic²³⁸ place” specifically “In a functionally understood aesthetic” (154). Fiction or fictionality, as an “alternative language-use [*Sprachverwendung*] or alternative communication,” evidences “precisely that interest in the transcending [*Transzendierenden*], which is also the interest of the aesthetic” (Anderegk 157). Contradistinguished from the “conventionalized language” (157) form of “the language-of-reality [*die Wirklichkeitssprache*]” (Anderegk 156), as well as from “the instrumentalized [*instrumentalisierte*] character of language” (Anderegk 164) of such languages, aesthetic communication

is also supposed to lead not to useable information about objects and facts of its own sphere-of-experience [*Erfahrungsbereichs*]; its achievement, which is often described as alienation or defamiliarization [*Verfremdung*], as irritation or innovation, is supposed to lie to a greater degree in the possibility to reflect or to change the typical concept of reality, or the typical constitution-of-reality [*Wirklichkeitskonstitution*]. (Anderegk 156)

The “achievement” of the aesthetic lies not only in its ability to carry out *Verfremdung* – which in its dual meaning comprising both “alienation” or “defamiliarization” (a concept which was also advanced by Shklovsky, as we discussed previously),²³⁹ parallels our model of multi-directional border crossings – but also is to be found in its capacity to alter the average, everyday world of the real. Here we can see that the

²³⁸ Taking into account Heidegger’s general influence on the *Konstanz*-School and *Rezeptionsästhetik*, and following Macquarrie and Robinson’s customary practice in their translation of *Sein und Zeit* (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson [San Francisco: Harper, 1962]), in this particular context I have chosen to render “*eigenlichen*” as “authentic.”

²³⁹ Cf. “The Domain of the Aesthetic in Johnson’s Criticism” (III.c).

capacity “to change the typical concept of reality, or the typical constitution-of-reality [*Wirklichkeitskonstitution*]” of which Anderegg speaks (156) is in fact a *visionary* capacity. In the same spirit, and recognizing the constitutional interpenetration of the real and reality, Italian filmmaker Federico Fellini defines “The visionary” as “the only true realist.”²⁴⁰ Such a notion of visionary, aesthetic experience, while it remains firmly grounded in Dasein’s facticity, is no longer delimited by a narrow realism, nor wholly constrained by narrow socio-political factors. Herein we return to the originary Greek conception of the aesthetic as dealing with the sphere of sensation in the no longer opposed realms of direct and visionary experience.

When we have an authentic encounter with art, such as in the case when one properly disposed visits a museum, “we do not leave it [i.e. the museum] with exactly the same feeling about life that we had when we went in. If we really have a genuine experience of art, then the world has become both brighter and less burdensome” (RB 26). When we catch sight of the imaginary beyond the horizon of the real and see the future beckoning and stretching out towards us, the weight of the overwhelming world of the real disperses (if only for a moment), and yet at the same time the real itself becomes transformed in the fulsome emergence of the imaginary. The encounter with an aesthetic work, if it is to be authentic, further demands from us a response, and for this reason “Every work leaves to the person who responds to it a certain leeway, a space to be filled by himself” in “an answer” which “must be [our] own, and given actively” (RB 26). Similarly in a Heideggerian framework, “to understand a text ... is not to find a lifeless sense which is contained therein, but to unfold the possibility of being indicated by the text” (Ricoeur 56) by actively responding to it. In this way, “we shall remain faithful to the Heideggerian notion of understanding which is essentially a *projection* or, to speak more dialectically and paradoxically, a *projection* within a prior *being-thrown*” (Ricoeur 56) – specifically “a prior *being-thrown*” into lostness as the average, everyday fashion of Being-in-the-world. To “understand” aesthetically, therefore, means *to understand oneself in front of the text*. It is not a question of imposing upon the text our finite concept of understanding, but of exposing ourselves to the text and receiving

²⁴⁰ *The Magic of Fellini*, Written and dir. by Carmen Piccini, 3DD Entertainment, 2002.

from it an enlarged self, which would be the proposed existence corresponding in the most suitable way to the world proposed. (Ricoeur 143)

Our understanding of ourselves, an understanding which includes not only what we commonly mean by “understanding” as the grasping of some thing or circumstances in their essentials and implications, but also involves the specialized sense in which Heidegger uses the term as the structural precondition required for Dasein’s existentiell projection of itself in an interpretation. In the realm of the aesthetic, this newly emergent understanding is possible only through a specific aesthetic experience [*Erfahrung*] that brings to us, and brings us to, a new way of understanding, which we can now appropriate in a specific interpretation of our own. The term “appropriation,” as it is defined by Ricoeur, means “that the interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself” (Ricoeur 158). Such an understanding is available to any Dasein regardless of its previous state of development – provided only that it no longer with head fallen forward on a languid neck trudges aimlessly in its lostness in the ruts of the “they.” “Appropriation” as Ricoeur’s “translation of the German term *Aneignung*” opens up a distinctly ontological dimension, in that “*Aneignen* means ‘to make one’s own’ what was initially ‘alien’” (Ricoeur 185). Hence “appropriation,” in the sense of “*Aneignung*,” is the way in which we finally overcome the alienation, which (as we saw) both makes possible, and is the upshot of, an authentic aesthetic experience. For this reason, Ricoeur calls our attention to “The link between appropriation and revelation” (Ricoeur 191). An aesthetic experience is a “revelation,” wherein “The reader is rather broadened in his capacity to project himself by receiving a new mode of being from the text itself” (Ricoeur 192). “Revelation” as a revealing is analogous to the process of disclosing or unconcealing which is an unfolding of truths of Being.

But the revelations that we receive from, and bring about through, an aesthetic experience are not ends in themselves. While at this point we have responded by re-ordering our world and re-positioning ourselves, we have not yet voiced a response in our ownmost terms. For the aesthetic process to bring out the full relevance of an artwork to its audience, the recipient must first move from merely apprehending the constitutive elements of a particular work as *signs*, and from these signs, creating *meaning*, and eventually move towards a *significant* response. Specifically in regards to the sphere of literature, but in terms equally

applicable to the aesthetic in general, Iser defines “meaning” as “the referential totality which is implied by the aspects contained in the text and which must be assembled in the reading,” whereas “significance” is defined as “the reader’s absorption of meaning into his own existence” (*Act R* 151). In order for this “absorption” to eventually occur, something has to “happen” (*Act R* 152) to, or befall, the recipient as a form of *Erfahrung*. The thinking of what Iser terms “alien thoughts” present in, and presented through, the text are “only successful to the extent that they help formulate something in [the reader]” and “can only form themselves in our consciousness when the spontaneity mobilized by the text gains a gestalt of its own” (*Act R* 158) – a gestalt which as an interpretive schemata must be actively structured by the recipient for her/himself. This new configuration of previously more or less alien elements attains its shape both from, and within, the recipient’s Being; and therefore, in their newly apprehended familiarity, they may be applied to the recipient’s specific, lived situation. It is at this point that the artwork becomes directly relevant, or “significant,” to the recipient’s Being as a distinct Da-sein.

Our response to an aesthetic encounter, however, is dialectic insofar as it is only as it takes shape through a process of *conversation*. Since “*the fusion of horizons that takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language*,” and since such fusion explicitly occurs in “conversation,” it follows that “Every conversation presupposes a common language, or better, creates a common language” (*TM* 378), which “must be first worked out in the conversation” (*TM* 379) itself. If a “conversation” is to be “successful,” the interlocutors must “both come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community” as a shared world or *co-mundus*. This is not attained “merely ... by putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view, but” demands that we hold ourselves back while at the same time holding ourselves open towards an other, and only in this way are we “transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were” (*TM* 379). We can see that the Dasein who is engaged in an authentic conversation eventually comes to realize a new potentiality-for-Being which is disclosed through the processes of con-versation. Therefore, the alter-ation effected through a conversation, the “reach[ing] of an understanding” also involves self-confrontation. Through enjoining the conversation, we cannot at the same time totally hold ourselves back and allow the world of the work to overwrite us wholly in its own terms. We must also emerge from our own reticence in an act of

self-assertion. As the aesthetic encounter plays out, we come to speak more and more in a voice that is our own. The authenticity of this voice (as giving a voice to one's self) gradually becomes ever more evident to us, for "Whenever this reservedness comes to word, what it says is always enowning. But to understand this saying means to enact the projecting-open and to execute knowing's leap into enowning" (*C Phil.* 55). This "leap," which crosses over the rifts between the real and reality, the recipient and the aesthetic, is made possible though a conversation which translates *Kenntnis* into ontological *Wissen*,²⁴¹ and thereby becomes a form of *conversion*.

In the framework of an aesthetic phenomenology, the notion of "conversion" implies, first of all, a conversion in the common sense as indicating the swapping of one belief system for another (such as religious or political conversions), and which further implies the change is accompanied by joining "a new community" (*TM* 379). Yet in an aesthetic context, this "new community" does not necessarily imply some aggregate of individuals all holding to a common set of beliefs, for the "community" created may be comprised of only the aesthetic work itself and a recipient – and to a more shadowy (though not necessarily lesser) degree, the artist her/himself. To view conversion solely in the context of a group is to leave it open to the charge of merely serving to consolidate another version of the "they." In the second sense of "conversion" (which in fact provides the grounding for the first sense), Dasein undergoes a "turning with" (literally a *con-version*) not only alongside the artwork, but also along with its self – both of which, insofar as they are constitutive of the voice of the call, seem to come from somewhere beyond us, no less in the latter case as in the former. This second sense of "conversion" at the same time imposes upon us an imperative, which is also voiced in the call, and which we must actively take up if it is to be truly heard. We do not merely recognize ourselves in a static mirror, for "It is not only the 'This art thou!' disclosed in

²⁴¹ While in German "*die Kenntnis*" and "*das Wissen*" both ostensibly mean "knowledge," there is a significant difference underlying the two terms. "*Die Kenntnis*" is derived from the verb "*kennen*," meaning "to know," "to be acquainted with," or "to recognize" – all of which imply previous and direct familiarity with a specific object of knowledge. "*Das Wissen*," on the other hand, in its etymological connection not only with "*wissen*," which means "to know," "to remember," and "to know of or about [something]"; but also "*wissenschaftlich*," which as an adjective characterizes something as "scientific" or "academic," and hence implies an abstract form of knowledge (*Collins German Dictionary*, 1991 ed.). Thus we can see that the former refers to a knowledge empirically derived from direct experience [*Erlebnis*], whereas the latter connotes a theoretical, ontologically centered form of knowing, which (for our present purposes) is the result of an aesthetic *Erfahrung*.

a joyous and frightening shock” through an aesthetic experience which calls us out of fallenness and back to our selves; but “it also says to us: ‘Thou must alter thy life!’” (PH 104). In taking up the challenge of “alter[ing]” our “li[ves]”, we simultaneously turn towards, and orient ourselves in accordance with, our new situation and the potentialities-for-Being disclosed through it. The imaginary, insofar as it is disclosed through, and given form in, the aesthetic, is now translated into the real through its application in a Dasein’s lived existence. Here we enjoin the “moral” in a dual sense: firstly, Dasein takes up the responsibility of choosing the direction of its existence by enacting a concrete manner of Being-towards as a distinct way of Being, and thereby realizes the moral dimension of existence by addressing the question of how to live; and secondly, by explicitly orienting itself in relation to modes of Being-possible which are in fact possible in the sphere of the real and are carried out in the context of the with-world, Dasein enters into proximity to the moral as it is commonly conceived in relation to an ethical system, insofar as “Dependence on possible experience and demonstration by means of it remains the alpha and omega of all responsible thought” (PH 172).

Here we can finally see the point at which the aesthetic equation comes full circle. If “the basis of such demonstration” carried out through the interplay of the elements of the aesthetic equation “is genuinely universal and, if one can so express it, infinite in a finite way,” then “All our ways of thinking are dependent upon the universality of language” (PH 172); and therefore, on its capacity to disclose worlds. In this context, “the universality of language” refers to the universal accessibility of the aesthetic for an audience – provided, of course, that the recipient is open to the speaking of a particular “language” as one who at least *in potentia* is able to hear. Since an individual artwork is not only the concretization of the *Insein* of an artist, but also is the result of the unfolding of a recipient’s interpretation – which (as we have seen) is also an instantiation of *Insein* – we can conclude that a “linguistic formation is a schematization of the experience of the world” (PH 172). Here “language” and “linguistic formation” do not refer exclusively to a system of articulated or written symbols or signs as mere tools, but rather hearken back to Heidegger’s previously outlined ontological conception of language, in that it has its “*existential-ontological foundation*” in “*discourse or talk [Rede]*” (BT 160-161), and as such it “*is existentially equiprimordial with state-of-mind and understanding*” (BT 161). As “the Articulation of intelligibility,”

discourse “underlies both interpretation and assertion” (*BT* 161), and hence language is the basis for *Insein* as worlding projection. From this it follows that “the experience of the world,” which itself is a “linguistic formation” as “a schematization,” involves the entire range of “worlds” which have informed our investigations: the world as the sphere of the real, the respective worlds of the artist and the recipient as unfolding realities, and the world of the work itself as the confluence of the real, reality, and the imaginary.

Yet the aesthetic is not an end in itself, for while “Art, like a festival, brings to a standstill ordinary, everyday activities,” ultimately “What we achieve in coming to a standstill is the potential for revelation” – one which vouchsafes only “the *potential* [emphasis mine] for revelation.” Here we come to the religious dimension of the aesthetic and the homecoming it makes possible, wherein the aesthetic itself is a path towards revelation – or even salvation. In the framework of a phenomenological aesthetics, “revelation” is achieved through “opening ourselves to an artwork,” whereby at the same time “we open ourselves to the heightened truth of artistic representation,” which “Gadamer provocatively compares to a religious experience” (Devereaux 67). As a medium of revelation, In “Gadamer’s view, art inherits the old role of myth and religion. Insofar as it does so, art may be thought to answer the ethical needs left wanting by the collapse of these traditions. It may at the same time provide a new sense of tradition to counterbalance our rootlessness” (Devereaux 67) – or in other words, it may provide the way towards, and a foundation for, a dwelling wherein Dasein can be at home with its self and authentically ex-ist. While some might object that by conceiving of the religious in terms of the aesthetic is to debase this “heightened truth” commonly associated with the former into the merely “representati[ve]” function of the latter; and thereby limit religion to a form of “picture-thinking” such as that which Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* associates with religion in general; the two spheres are nevertheless closely allied. To deny their kinship would be tantamount to denying the religious in general, for the religious, if it is to be made available to us, needs the aesthetic. Since inexpressibility and un-representability are often constitutive of the domain of the religious, it requires some way in which it can be humanely comprehended. It is this very inexpressibility which demands that the religious finds a means towards expression, even if it is not an exact expression, but only a proximate one. While “Gadamer acknowledges that our experiences, even our religious experiences, no longer have the immediacy or intensity of myth,” and hence “art cannot recapture

that lost power” (Devereaux 68) in its totality, we should not infer that the aesthetic is lacking in religious power. Even though the all consuming “intensity of myth” that is activated through what Claude Lévi-Strauss terms the *participation mystique* is no longer available to us due to the supposed extent of our spiritual and scientific development and the fact that we are no longer emerged in a mythic landscape; there remain ways of Being no less “Intense” and “power[ful],” which are enacted through, and oriented by, the aesthetic. The aesthetic, precisely in its *as if* structure, and the artwork itself, insofar as it possesses its own daseinal Being, and hence its own world, permits another form of the participation mystique (albeit in a more subtle, and intellectual manifestation), wherein the aesthetic becomes effectively as immediate as myth. Analogously, the ritual, ceremony, and prayers which comprise religious liturgies, and which constitutes a large part of even everyday personal religious practice, as well as the architecture, statuary, and paintings which are themselves forms of ritual, are all aesthetic means whereby religion is vivified and becomes immediate in the context of a Dasein’s existence.

In spite of the fact that “art cannot recapture” the “lost power” associated with “myth” in its full extent; nevertheless “art” still “confronts the loss of the mythic past with a promise of reordering the present” (Devereaux 68); and therefore, its power is not wholly lost, but has only been trans-formed. The promise of “reordering,” which the aesthetic and religious still hold out to us, since it can only occur in terms of a presencing, can never result in a final, temporally closed order, but is instead a constantly reiterated process (as Devereaux emphasizes in her use of the present participle) of reordering. Since this process is not as a mere repeating of what has been, but is reiterated in terms of ever-expanding horizons merging out of the future, it is theoretically boundless, and as such is effectively infinite (even if its is only finitely infinite). It follows, therefore, that the aesthetic tradition itself is grounded in an authentically ecstatic temporality. The past, either as a mythic past, or as an ongoing and cumulative aesthetic tradition, is a having-been which is at the same time futural, insofar as it is continually reassessed not only from the perspective of the present, but also in light of the prospect of the future – and hence the tradition itself is not fixed, but rather is characterized by its futurity as disclosing orientations towards continually unfolding

potentialities-for-Being.²⁴² “Reordering” is particularly in play in the modern, in that “modernity” insofar as it is conceived of as “the time of the new, the time of new beginnings,”²⁴³ which at the same time entails that “modernity’s form of life is decentering and destabilizing,” since “with such an open, expectant stance towards the future, we also impose a number of burdens on ourselves, rendering our form of life crisis-prone” (Kompridis 38). Thus potentiality itself, as the genus of “the new,” can be “a transgressive, unruly, unsettling force in our lives” (Kompridis 41). This means that “we must evidently learn to adapt to new life conditions of fluidity, hybridity, of rapid and relentless change”; and therefore, “For us it is not a question of *whether* to be open to the new; but of *how* to be open to it” (Kompridis 41). But how do we “adapt” to these conditions, and are these conditions inescapable? One way of “adapt[ing]” is the “reordering” accomplished through aesthetic and religious experience. While some might believe that these forms are anachronisms or forms of escapism which neglect more immediate and effective types of commitment, this should not be taken as advocating a simple return to previously established ways of Being, for this would be to deny the peculiar tenor and conditions of the current world (although one may healthfully harbor doubts as to the extent or urgency of the seemingly numberless crises which are drummed up almost daily by the ever proliferating media outlets and power consolidating politicians in order to get people in line with the *cause du jour*); it is instead a holding forth of the possibility of re-engaging previous modes of Being, not as a mere mimicking, but rather as a mode of authentic repetition. In order to become authentic, an aesthetic or religious experience cannot remain a simple meeting with various traditional forms of representation, be they iconographic, textual, or ritualistic; but must ultimately enter intimately into our minds and hearts – and be present on our lips as a *responsa*.

In bringing the world of the everyday and clock-time to a “standstill,” and thereby paradoxically opening up the expansive dimensions of ecstatic temporality, and thereby uncovering the possibility of revelation, the aesthetic shows itself to be ultimately dependent upon the structure of *Insein*, insofar as it

²⁴² Hence the notion of an “aesthetic tradition” as we are herein employing the term does not imply a fossilized list of “great works” that can never be added to or amended; rather the tradition itself must be seen as a constantly evolving concept open to new voices. We must caution, however, that the scope of the aesthetic as determined under the aegis of Aesthetic Phenomenology, necessarily calls for a global and rigorous reassessment of what precisely constitutes and characterizes “authentic art.”

²⁴³ Nikolas Kompridis, “The Idea of a New Beginning: A Romantic Source of Normativity and Freedom,” *Philosophical Romanticism*, ed. Nikolas Kompridis (New York: Routledge, 2006) 37.

grounds and makes possible Dasein's active and passive attunements, and subsequently either its active projections or holding itself back in the open as equally valid modalities of Being-towards. Here we return to our starting point – but in a “return” wherein the articulation and *Geschichte* of Being is grasped in a new way. No longer are “attunements” solely the manner in which Dasein projects itself beyond its self, but now we furthermore can see “that they reach more primordially back into our essence, that in them we first meet ourselves – as being-there, as a Da-sein” (*FCM* 68). Heidegger, however, maintains that it is

Precisely because the essence of attunement consists in its being no mere side effect, precisely because it leads us back to the grounds of our Dasein, the essence of attunement remains concealed or hidden from us; for this reason we initially grasp the essence of attunement in terms of what confronts us at first, namely the extreme tendencies of attunement, those which interrupt and then disappear. Because we take attunements in terms of their extreme manifestations, they seem to be one set of events among others, and we overlook the peculiar being attuned, the primordial, pervasive attunement of our whole Dasein as such. (*FCM* 68)

The aesthetic, for its part, while it still “leads us back to the grounds of our Dasein,” due to the fact that it foregrounds the processes of developing and thematizing individual attunements; and insofar as attunements no longer “remain ... concealed or hidden from us,” the aesthetic makes the processes underlying attunement explicit and raises them to thought [*Denken*]. While the aesthetic may still “confront ... the extreme tendencies of attunement,” and while such extremes similarly “interrupt” the flow of everyday existence (similarly to the *deficient modes* wherein tools call attention to themselves as objects when through insufficiency or malfunctioning they are removed from the in-order-to, which they fulfill within a given equipmental context), they do not subsequently “disappear” due to their concretization in the gestalt of an artwork, nor do they fade away in their application to a specific Dasein's existence. For this reason, “attunements” no longer “seem to be one set of events among others,” insofar as they become part of the continuity of a Dasein's existence – a process which becomes explicit and is furthered through due to the heightening and intensification accompanying both the aesthetic work and its reception both as an *Erlebnis* and as an *Erfahrung*. Herein we are furthermore enabled to see here the authentic character of a

“projection” revealed as “a peculiar *turning toward themselves on the part of whoever is projecting*” and as a “*removal ... into something possibly actual*” (FCM 363); wherein at the same time projection becomes “an *opening for making-possible*,” which as such “always speaks into what is possibly actual” (FCM 364). In returning from an aesthetic reality of the world of an artwork into the trans-valued lived existence of a Dasein in the sphere of the real, wherein it is now re-turned towards its “there,” and from whence it may repeatedly re-attune itself in accordance with its own measure as “an *opening for making-possible*,” Dasein is henceforth able to direct itself outward again through a projection upon its own reality as the domain of the “possibly actual” – in other words, “*In projection world prevails*” (FCM 365), which concomitantly means *Insein* ultimately “*prevails*.”

Now that our investigations have come full circle, we have “*prepare[d] our entering into the occurrence of the prevailing of the world*” (FCM 351) – an authentic world as reality which is simultaneously opposed to, and conjoined with, the world of the real, insofar as it remains directly and consistently concerned both with Dasein’s facticity and its potentialities-for-Being. The world of the real is now illuminated in light of Dasein’s ownmost world, and hence is the domain of its Being-at-home. While we have disclosed the “philosophizing entry and return of man into the Dasein in him”, this process has nevertheless only been detailed in its principle structural elements and articulations and has not fully entered into language, since the authentic itself “can only ever be prepared, never effected,” for “the unfolding of its essence cannot be reduced to some erudite discourse” (FCM 351). The “Awakening” (FCM 351), for which the aesthetic in general (and aesthetic phenomenology in particular) works to prepare the way, is not a question of mere “philosophizing”; but is rather “a matter for each individual human being” (FCM 351), which must be encountered in her/his own lived existence. This process of “Awakening” at the same time is not wholly under the control of the Dasein who is moving towards becoming awake, in that it is “not a matter of his or her goodwill or even skillfulness”; but is rather a matter “of his or her destiny, whatever falls or does not fall to him or her” (FCM 351) as an *Erfahrung* or revelation. What is required of us is the proper ontological openness, since “Everything that contingently falls upon us ... only falls and falls due to us if we have waited for it and are able to wait” (FCM 351). The aesthetic, in its relation to the imaginary, has the character of a “mystery,” and “Only whoever honors a

mystery gains the strength to wait. Honoring in this metaphysical sense means action that engages in the whole that in each case prevails through us” (*FCM* 351). “Waiting” itself requires holding ourselves tactfully back in an attitude of “honor[ing],” and “Only in this way do we enter the possibility that this ‘as a whole’ and world will explicitly prevail through us, so explicitly that we have the possibility of inquiring about it in a comprehending way” (*FCM* 351) along the path of the question. The “Awakening” effected through aesthetic experience makes it possible for us to appropriate the real “as a whole” and our own reality as a “*prevailing of the world*” in an understanding and authentic way.

Aesthetic phenomenology provides us with a means of access to such an “Awakening” and a path homeward back to ourselves and the truth of Being. When we find ourselves more and more dominated by the forces of what Heidegger generally refers to as “technicity” – forces that threaten to reduce Dasein to a mere object, close off its freedom, and blind it in its fallenness; when we seem to be lodged between the postmodern rock of indeterminacy and the hard place of immanent destruction; when art has too often been reduced to the endless play of a hall of mirrors²⁴⁴ and appears to be languidly dwindling into the long drawn out laughter of parody and kitsch (the laughter of the dying amused by, and subsequently furthering, their own demise); when the very notion of “honoring” (the carping, self-inflated agents of cultural reeducation heedless of its source and ignorant of its essential role in value-positing) is seen only as the knee-scraping gesture of subservience to an automatically suspect “ideology” – the question of what it means “to be” now becomes ever more urgent in its anxious demands for an answer, or at least an attempt at a response. Due to “its attentiveness to the contemporary happenings of the life-world, phenomenology has been the first to recognize that the modern experience of homelessness in the actual order of things is what propels us to construct a new house for ourselves in imagination” (Kearney, *Poetics* 7). But this should not be taken to endorse a view of the aesthetic as being in any way merely “escapist,” as a turning away or fleeing from the paramount concerns of the “real world” and the need for relevant praxis – as if we could ever completely crawl into the aesthetic and conceal ourselves therein for an indefinite period in an ongoing dream of security, while still managing to maintain some faint semblance of sanity. Our

²⁴⁴ For the image of the postmodern view of representation as a series of mirrors, I am indebted to Richard Kearney’s discussion in his *Wake of the Imagination*.

conception of the aesthetic envisions it as an invitation, a guide, and a passage – as a path which takes Dasein out of itself and returns it to its ownmost “there” – and at the same time critically permits Dasein to go beyond itself. “In the midst of a world in which everything familiar is dissolving, the work of art stands as a pledge of order” (*RB* 104) – and the promise of re-ordering. As making possible an authentically enacted re-ordering, the aesthetic looks forward into the imaginary, without losing sight of the real, all in light of the continuity and prospects of Dasein, both in its ownmost potentialities-for-Being-itself and as Being-with [*Mitsein*]. Thus we may define “Art in the proper sense” along with Heidegger, as “art in the grand style,” which is “desirous of bringing waxing life itself to power. It is not an immobilizing,” neither as a calcification into a mere sensual, present-at-hand appearance, nor as enfolding Being within the limits of its imposed confines; but is rather “a liberating for expansion, a clarifying to the point of transfiguration, and this in two senses: first, stationing a thing in the clarity of Being; second, establishing such clarity as the heightening of life itself” (*N* 1: 216). Ultimately, the aesthetic resolves the issue of our Being by disclosing to us our freedom *to be* in our potentialities in a multi-dimensional “trans-figuration” with the “clarity” of St. Thomas Aquinas’s conception of *claritas* which lights up the clearing wherein Dasein comes home, articulates its own world around the hearth and in the company of its family, and henceforth dwells.

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