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**From Aesthetic Experience to Onto-Aesthetics:
Rethinking the Modern and Postmodern Sublime**

A Thesis Presented
by

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Abstract of the Thesis

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Modern articulations of the sublime—those found in Kant and his immediate successors—emphasize the dual structure of the experience, focusing on the sublime’s unique tendency to terrorize or induce pain in its viewer. As opposed to beauty, whose aim is solely to pacify and pleasure, the modern sublime initially incites fear before resolving itself into pleasure, or, more acutely, into bliss. This duality I term the “double moment” of the sublime (for it is an experience that happens “in a moment,” *in einem Augenblick*, to use Kant’s phrase) and here describe how it structurally grounds all modern versions of the sublime. I also discuss another unique feature to the modern sublime—the weight given to this experience as it reveals higher philosophical truths. Indeed, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche—the three figures whose sublime is explicated in the first three chapters—all proffer readings of the sublime that posits the sublime as *the* revelatory aesthetic experience—revelatory of reason’s power and autonomy, mankind’s freedom, or an individual’s unity with primeval nature. The sublime is, for these modern thinkers, what Heidegger calls a principle of far-reaching disclosure—a description he employs in *Being and Time* in relation to *Angst*, or anxiety. Curiously, Heidegger’s discussion of anxiety reveals a deeper intimacy with the modern sublime. Its experiential structure follows that of the double moment—a fact that allows

me to claim an analogous kinship between the experiences of the sublime and of anxiety. Heidegger, however, in his post-*Being and Time* writings moves away from notions of experience (*Erfahrung*) and *Dasein*. Distancing his thinking from subjectivism, Heidegger emphasizes the event, which he calls *Ereignis*. The event simply happens, without recourse back to the “subject of experience.” Thus, though anxiety has its lineage in the history of modern thought, late Heidegger moves thinking toward its post-modern destiny. The importance of *Ereignis* is appropriated by Lyotard in his thinking about the sublime. For Lyotard, the sublime happens, it is an event “of” Being, where Being announces itself—though not to a subject. The event is more rarified, more sudden, less palpable than an “experience” can capture. Thus, in the postmodern sublime, herein explored solely in Lyotard’s writings, the “subject of experience” is jettisoned, and there remains only the fact: *there is*. Rather than an aesthetic experience that reveals certain truths to its viewer (modern sublime), the event of the sublime (postmodern) is merely Being announcing itself in the sheerest of modes, before anything *is* what it is—“before” there are objects and, so too, before there are “subjects.” The movement, then, from Kant to Lyotard—through Heidegger, who acts as a pivot for the entire discussion—is the tracing of thinking the sublime, first as an aesthetic experience, then as an onto-aesthetic event. What remains to be seen is what vestiges of the old sublime are found in the new, *and vice versa*. Is Lyotard’s sublime still revelatory of “truth,” a concept itself plagued by the de-centering techniques of postmodern thinking? Or, are there signs, within the modern sublime, that reveal that, all along, the sublime has concerned itself with Being and its self-announcement? The present work, both genealogically and critically, explores these questions and, in the end, illustrates that the sublime needs to be rethought in terms of its history (as utterly revelatory) and re-engaged as a meaningful philosophical concept. Indeed, if Lyotard is right, and the sublime event is the annunciation of Being, then there is, I would argue, no more important matter for philosophical inquiry to pursue.

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List of Abbreviations

<i>BOT</i>	<i>The Birth of Tragedy</i> , Nietzsche
<i>BT</i>	<i>Being and Time</i> , Heidegger
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Critique of Judgment</i> , Kant
<i>D</i>	<i>The Differend</i> , Lyotard
<i>EH</i>	<i>Ecce Homo</i> , Nietzsche
<i>FS</i>	<i>Friedrich Schiller: Essays</i> , Walter Hinderer and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (eds.)
<i>GM</i>	<i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i> , Nietzsche
<i>HJ</i>	<i>Heidegger and "the jews,"</i> Lyotard
<i>HT</i>	<i>The Honor of Thinking</i> , Gasché
<i>I</i>	<i>The Inhuman</i> , Lyotard
<i>L</i>	<i>Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime</i> , Lyotard
<i>LPPS</i>	<i>Lyotard: Philosophy, Politics, and the Sublime</i> , Hugh J. Silverman (ed.)
<i>OS</i>	<i>Of the Sublime: Presence in Question</i> , Jean-François Courtine et al. (eds.)
<i>OWA</i>	<i>On the Origin of the Work of Art</i> , Heidegger
<i>PC</i>	<i>The Postmodern Condition</i> , Lyotard
<i>TB</i>	<i>On Time and Being</i> , Heidegger
<i>WWR I, II</i>	<i>The World as Will and Representation</i> , 2 Vols., Schopenhauer
<i>Z</i>	<i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i> , Nietzsche

Introduction

When I think of these things, I am seized by a godlike pleasure,
And I shudder with awe...
Nature's veil is stripped free, and all made manifest.

—Lucretius

One calls *unheimlich* all that which was supposed to remain secret, veiled, and which manifests itself.

—Schelling

§1. Moses and Isis

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe opens his essay, “Sublime Truth,” by distinguishing between the two instances in which Kant quotes “the most sublime” utterances in *The Critique of Judgment*.¹ The first is the famous passage in the “Analytic of the Sublime” in which Kant invokes the commandment, “Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image” and describes the sublime as a “negative presentation.”² The other passage is less well-known, relegated to a footnote in §49. There Kant quotes the “famous inscription on the Temple of Isis (Mother Nature): ‘I am all that is and that was and that shall be, and no mortal hath lifted my veil’” (*CJ*, 185). “Moses” and “Isis” are the shorthand names that Lacoue-Labarthe nominates for these two utterances, both divine, both announcing the unrepresentability of the god and, more generally, the limitation of

¹ See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, “Sublime Truth,” in *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett, ed. Jean-François Courtine, et al (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 71-108. Henceforth cited as *OS*.

² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 135. Henceforth cited as *CJ*.

presentation itself. Their delineation from one another, however, is what frames Lacoue-Labarthe's essay, and, borrowing his initial rendering, shall frame this one, as well.

“In the first case,” writes Lacoue-Labarthe, “the presentation is conceived in terms of the figure, the form, the image (or in biblical terms, the ‘graven image’). If there is a question, it can only open onto a problematic ... of delimitation and unlimitation. ... In the second case, the presentation is thought as unveiling. And perhaps that changes everything” (*OS*, 74). The case of “Moses” corresponds to what I shall call “modern” or “metaphysical” accounts of the sublime, the case of “Isis” to “postmodern” or “non-metaphysical” accounts. The former is conceived in terms of an aesthetic experience *of*—of the limitations of imagination in the face of what appears an absolute magnitude or unmatched force, or of the formless form of all-too-threatening natural phenomena, or of the relentless and savage will at the heart of nature, or of the unbounded intoxication that accompanies the voluptuous commingling of joy and terror in human tragedy. The modern/metaphysical sublime is always, furthermore, the aesthetic experience *of* an agent or an intentional consciousness. Thus, its formulations remain beholden both to the modern conception of human consciousness as the epistemological center of subjective experience passed down to us from Descartes’ *cogito*, as well as to the insistence on immediacy and intimacy that the *cogito* has with itself—what I call the *inviolability of self-consciousness*. The latter dispenses with this “of” and no longer interests itself with the nature of sublime experience or its concomitant emotions within the intentional subject, but with the sublime *event* itself, as an occasion of Being—unveiled—but only in the instance of its happening, which vanishes as soon as one realizes it is even happening

at all. Here, the sublime offers no “content” of which to speak. There is no form, no figure, no phenomenon, no self-referential consciousness—there is only, the *there is*—as in Heidegger’s pregnant *es gibt*—*there is* only event or *Ereignis*—only the event of Being and the Being of the event. Lyotard does indeed describe an auto-affective thinking that the sublime engenders, but this thinking—a thinking which feels itself thinking—though reflexive, is not self-conscious, which means that it does not pretend to “knowledge” of consciousness as one has knowledge of the Pythagorean theorem or the temperature outside one’s door. Auto-affective thinking replaces, in some sense, self-conscious, self-referential, thinking, and, in postmodern fashion, attempts to sidestep the tendency to posit a human agent at the center of the sublime.

My aim is not only to elucidate the stark contrast between these two different “sublimes,” but also to trace within the sublime itself, *despite* variations between the two accounts, an essential characteristic that has *always* belonged it. The sublime is more than an aesthetic category and has farther-reaching consequences than have hitherto been assigned to it. Certainly, the history of philosophies on the sublime have tended to make the somewhat obvious connection between the sublime and the ethical—Kant’s two examples testify to this kinship—but I see the possibility to expand the domain of the sublime to other fields of thought. I understand it as a richly generative experience that has seminal implications for ontology, phenomenology, deconstruction, social and political thought, as well as for ethics. The sublime ignites a kind of thinking and a posture of being-in-the-world that have far-reaching implications for *doing* philosophy at all. Modern accounts of the sublime, such as those found in Kant, Schiller,

Schopenhauer, and even Nietzsche, understand the experience of the sublime as revelatory, despite its inherent ineffability, of something essential to human action and self-understanding; this characterization of the sublime is recast, denuded of its strictly human function, in its postmodern formulations, found in Lyotard, Nancy, Derrida, and Lacoue-Labarthe. Yet its capacity to unveil is no less emphasized by these latter figures, just as *what* is unveiled, is of no less importance to the understanding of what it means to be human. It is with this *what*—meaning-laden and brimming with content in the modern sublime—that the postmoderns take issue, specifically Lyotard, who would rather re-investigate the sublime in terms of its *that*—simply in terms of the fact *that* it happens.

This essay is, in many ways, a sort of a genealogy (though an incomplete one to be sure) of the sublime. But its foremost purpose is to explore how the sublime can be rethought as an origin of philosophical wonder and genuine philosophical thinking. The instances of the modern sublime that I analyze in the first three chapters, though understood chiefly in aesthetic terms, contains latently within it the kind of disclosive nature described above. In Chapter Four, I introduce a reading of anxiety in Heidegger's *Being and Time* that, through an analysis of the structure of the modern sublime and the structure of anxiety, proves a kinship between the two. Both anxiety and the sublime, I contend, are what Heidegger calls "primordial principles of far-reaching disclosure." These readings aim to show that the sublime, in its modern avatars, has *always* been considered such a principle, and that the sublime extends even to the aestheticless world of Heidegger's phenomenological ontology.³

³ The question of whether or not anxiety, after its kinship to the sublime has been shown, should be considered an aesthetic phenomenon, shall be discussed at the end of Chapter 4.

I continue this line of thinking by focusing, in Chapter Five, on the sublime's simultaneous move both *away* from experience, *Erfahrung*, and toward event, *Ereignis*, and into its newly-discovered intimacy with ontology, found specifically in Lyotard. The postmodern sublime unveils, rather than human dignity or the human vocation prevalent in the modern sublime, the sheer fact of existence, the blunt fact that *there is* existence. One is brought face to face with Being in the postmodern sublime, and this encounter shocks one, in a sense, to reconsider existence from a vantage point newly disabused of Being's (and Isis') veil.

§2. The Tale of Two Sublimes

The sublime is an aesthetic category, attributable to certain phenomena, whose utter vastness is so incomprehensible that it causes one, in one's inherent inadequacy of understanding, to fear, at least momentarily, for one's existence. At the heels of this fear, comes a feeling of exaltation of self as independent from the formerly threatening phenomena. These two contrasting experiences, together, form what I shall call the "double moment" of the sublime. The first "layer" of this moment is the obliteration of one's ordinary sense of significance—both of oneself and of one's relationship to the world. The second is the elevation and empowerment of oneself and the reaffirmation of one's own significance and standing within the world. Modern or metaphysical accounts of the sublime, despite proposing widely disparate content, all rest upon the structure of

the double moment. We will look at three philosophers who construct the sublime in this manner: Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche.

A remark on the term “double moment” is needed before we proceed. The need for the “double” of the sublime is clear: all modern accounts of the sublime pivot upon a duality—fear and exaltation, repulsion and attraction, annihilation and empowerment, etc. The sublime cannot be what it is without this tension between opposed feelings, without this contradictory duality. However, it is the coupling of the “double” with the “moment” that demands explication. One might ask how a moment, indivisible, simple, and containing no parts, be can be *double*. This line of thinking is more numerical than is necessary. Certainly the term “double” causes one to think of number, but I employ it not only in order to maintain the contradictory duality at the heart of the sublime, but also to indicate the richness, the depth, the layers, and the multiplicity that beats at that heart. Moreover, ephemerality is equally essential to the experience of the sublime. It is not an aesthetic experience, like beauty, that offers a scene for contemplation. Rather, the sublime entails a certain violence against repose and meditation; it threatens to destroy us, if not in a literal, bodily sense, then at least by way of abolishing the comfort of our daily routines. Thus, we can hardly remain in its grasp for more than the *moment* of its occurrence. I may well sit for long periods of time on plush leather seats in a climate-controlled wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art contemplating a painting by Cézanne. I am unable, however, to stand with my feet in the surf, looking up at a clear night sky, under the gaze of a million star-shines, some of which reach my eyes from a billion light years away, without feeling dwarfed and abandoned on what now seems only an insignificant strand in New Jersey, and no longer the sought-after destination of my

family's summer holiday. I must turn away from the terror that fills me at that moment and return to my family and to my vacation, both of which offer meaning and security—in short, they reinforce that feeling of significance that the sublime sky previously threatened to strip from me. As we will see, Kant's sublime, for example, especially his mathematically sublime (of which my example would be an instance), could not exist without the emphasis of the moment, the *Augenblick*. Furthermore, Lyotard's sublime, which I shall discuss in Chapter 5 as the cornerstone of the postmodern or non-metaphysical sublime, similarly demands that the sublime occur in the *instant*.

We can shed from the sublime neither its duality nor its ephemerality. The synthesis of these two pieces of the sublime might cause the intellect a modicum of despair or anxiety, but no more than does the sublime itself. As indicated above, and as shall become explicitly evident below, the sublime dissolves meaning, disintegrates sense, and obliterates one's ability to fathom or articulate one's place within the world, which earlier seemed so readily understood. The transition from fear to exaltation can be thought discretely, as fear, *then* as exaltation, only after the fact, in the recollection of the experience. The experience of the sublime, in its occurrence, retains the element of *evaporation* that the term implies in chemistry.⁴ It recedes from thought as quickly as it overtakes thought. It does this in a "moment" that is "double," in a flash that cuts unfathomably deep.

⁴ I owe this insight, specifically to relate the aesthetic sublime to its chemical counterpart, to Professor Ed Casey. One can look at any standard English dictionary to find the definition alluded to. This metaphor applies less well to the postmodern sublime, as evaporation connotes the existence of some thing, before the evaporation happens, that is the object *of* evaporation. The postmodern sublime wishes to focus on the *happening* itself without offering recourse to experience or to the reification of any object that could precede the event of the happening.

My account of the modern/metaphysical sublime moves along the following path: I begin with Kant, then move on to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, before ending with a chapter on Heidegger's understanding of anxiety (*Angst*) in *Being and Time*.⁵ By elucidating three different versions of the modern sublime, we shall see its pliability and breadth, which will be enhanced as we extract another version of it from Heidegger's phenomenological ontology. First, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche's work on the experience of the sublime fall into a chronology in which each figure depends heavily on the one who precedes him. Schopenhauer's philosophy borrows Kantian apparatuses, and Nietzsche's most explicit and focused treatment of the sublime, found in *The Birth of Tragedy*, owes its metaphysical orientation directly to Schopenhauer and the latter's privileging of *will*. Though Nietzsche does not discuss Kant's sublime in *The Birth of Tragedy*, a Nietzschean critique of Kantian aesthetics can be made by inference, either through Schopenhauer's Kant and Nietzsche's Schopenhauer, or else from Nietzsche's various, almost always derisive, commentary on Kantian philosophy (especially Kantian morality, of which Nietzsche is severely critical).

Second, and more importantly, in metaphysical and ontological terms, the accounts of the sublime posited by these three thinkers virtually exhaust all possibilities. Kant embraces being; for him, an autonomous moral self offers one of the few glimpses we have into the realm of *noumena*. Schopenhauer runs from being; he inverts Kant's scheme and posits a pure will-less observer *outside* and *away from* the will, his version of the thing-in-itself. And Nietzsche dissolves the dichotomy altogether and turns towards becoming; he asserts a self that exists *as nature*. To borrow Heideggerian language, Kant

⁵ The analysis of Kant's sublime, specifically the realization of moral autonomy that the sublime engenders, will be bolstered by some remarks by Friedrich Schiller, whose aesthetics are borrowed from Kant *en masse* but retain an accessibility and poetic quality lacking in Kant.

places Being in the authentic self alone, Schopenhauer characterizes Being as that which the authentic self attempts to escape, and Nietzsche sees the self as authentic only when it coincides with Being *as* nature, which is as constantly *becoming*. This has the appearance of a dialectic, but it is *merely* an appearance. Nietzsche's sublime is not an *Aufhebung* of Kant's and Schopenhauer's sublimes. Neither are Kant's and Schopenhauer's sublimes opposites, in the strict sense. These three offer broad and divergent possibilities of *how* the experience of the sublime, metaphysically understood, can be interpreted.

Heidegger's corpus, on the other hand, is virtually devoid of any explicit mention of the sublime. His great text on aesthetics, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, has been interpreted, I think rightly, as containing elements of the sublime, yet it is not to that work that *our* discussion shall turn.⁶ Rather, I shall show how Heidegger's analysis of anxiety in *Being in Time* closely resembles modern accounts of the sublime. The analogy between the sublime and anxiety will allow us to think of both as, what Heidegger would call, "far-reaching and primordial principles of disclosure." Though he invokes this expression only with regard to anxiety, it is an appellation that is just as appropriate to affix to the sublime. It is as this far-reaching and primordial principle that modern accounts of the sublime will be treated. Is this begging the question? Hardly. Our analyses of Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche reveal that their accounts presuppose the sublime as a principle such as Heidegger describes. We have stated that the *structure* of

⁶ For the beginning of a reading of Heidegger's text and an exposition of the sublime, see Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's essay, "Sublime Truth," in *OS. Of The Origin of The Work of Art*, Lacoue-Labarthe writes, "what this text describes, in its own way and at a depth doubtless unknown before it, is the experience of the sublime itself" (*OS*, 95).

the experience (i.e., the double moment) is identical for each thinker, but what is even more striking in their concordance is the magnitude of that which is revealed *in* or *through* that experience. An encounter with the sublime does not render meaning that was already there, before the experience, or that was accessible in any quotidian manner. The experience of the sublime obliterates and transcends not only our ordinary understanding of our own significance, and our relationship to the world, but also obliterates and transcends our ability to *articulate* our ordinary understanding. What shines forth in the face of this obliteration is something that, for each of these thinkers, sits at the very core of his philosophy. In this way, the sublime is, for Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and any thinker who were to engage the sublime *as* the double moment, a “far-reaching and primordial principle of disclosure.”

Heidegger stands, then, at the beginning and the end of my treatment of the modern sublime. On the one hand, the evocation of his principle (of anxiety) fortuitously guides our discussion of the sublime without the least interpretive violence on our part. On the other hand, it is only after we have thoroughly elaborated the sublime that anxiety will reveal itself fully as a cousin of the former. Our investigation, thus, is a circle, the likes of which Heidegger employs at the outset of *The Origin of the Work of Art*. Though this paper focuses primarily on the sublime, for the purposes of this discussion, one ought grant priority neither to the sublime, nor to anxiety; they are *both* primordial principles of far-reaching disclosure, and are so independently. Likewise, they both, independently, occur as the double moment. One, then, must ask: Is anxiety sublime; is the sublime anxious? Indeed, what is the “proper” relationship between the sublime and anxiety? Are they analogues? Is one *genus*, the other *species*? Is anxiety an

aesthetic phenomenon, or the sublime an existential “state-of-mind,” *eine Befindlichkeit*? These questions shall be discussed at the close of Chapter Four, though I urge the reader to keep them in mind (or at hand) throughout.

Lyotard’s reconfiguration of the sublime, in terms of Being and non-Being, and the terminology he employs are appropriated from Heidegger. Lyotard’s *il y a*, is Heidegger’s *es gibt*. Lyotard also borrows Heidegger’s term, *Ereignis*. The postmodern sublime is the *Ereignis*, the event, the occurrence, the happening of Being. Being happens in the moment of the sublime. It is not some particular event or occurrence, but occurrence *itself* ... occurrence as opposed to non-occurrence ... Being as opposed to non-Being.

This juxtaposition of opposites draws Lyotard to Burke’s sublime, which Lyotard describes as the terror that *nothing further* will happen. Thus, the sublime can be posed in a question: Is it happening? When faced with the threat of absolute *privation*—which is all that non-Being could be, if it *is* anything—one must ask, *is it happening?* The “it” is the instant of *there is*, which cuts through the Burkean terror and answers—*yes*, it is happening, but that is all. Simply, the sublime responds: *There is*.

Heidegger’s undoubted influence on Lyotard places Heidegger in a unique position within my discourse. We have established Heidegger’s integral importance to the first part of my thesis. But Lyotard’s, and thus the postmodern sublime’s, dependence on Heidegger situates him as a pivot—a turning—from the modern, to the postmodern. This is further evinced by the dilation of the sublime that the title of my paper proposes: From aesthetic experience to onto-aesthetics. I find an analogue of the

sublime in Heidegger's *phenomenological* ontology, which itself acts as the prelude for Lyotard's sublime, found in what I might call, *deconstructive* ontology. Furthermore, there should be no doubt that Heidegger and Lyotard are talking about the same *feeling* when the former invokes "anxiety" and the latter "the sublime." On more than one occasion, Lyotard describes the feeling that accompanies the threat of non-Being as "anxiety," and Heidegger describes anxiety as the feeling which grips Dasein in the face of "nothing" in particular—just sheer Being-in-the-world. Heidegger is, then, a conduit, a passage, but maybe also a hinge, between the modern and postmodern sublime. He is, in my project, the opening up of the sublime, through its analogy with anxiety, into the ontological. This gesture is taken up in full by Lyotard, for whom the sublime becomes simply an annunciation of Being itself.

Lastly, the term "onto-aesthetics," which will be explained and justified in detail at the close of the essay, demands some proleptic hints with regard to its significance and origination. I have chosen to consider the postmodern sublime as belonging to "onto-aesthetics," as opposed simply to "ontology," for two main reasons. First, in order to highlight the inability of the postmodern sublime to be articulated or inscribed within an account of an experience of *what* happens—one of the fundamental characteristics that distinguishes it from its modern precursor—I thought it was important to drop the "-logy" from ontology. Undoubtedly, the postmodern sublime is "onto-logical" in some sense—it is a matter concerned utterly with Being—but there is no "logic" of it that can account for it or study it. It is "onto" but not "logical." Second, the postmodern sublime, though not an aesthetic *experience*, is not altogether devoid of aesthetic value. Lyotard, as will be seen, complicates the sublime, so that it is no longer *merely* aesthetic, but it never

forsakes its aesthetic character. To subsume the postmodern sublime under the rubric “ontology” alone would have obscured this and risked giving the impression that I mean to jettison the sublime completely from the discourse in which it was originally conceived.

I. Kant: *Nature, Absolutely*

One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime.

—Emerson

Immanuel Kant's elucidation of the sublime (and of the beautiful) at the end of the eighteenth century is invaluable to all subsequent aesthetic theories both in philosophy and in the art world proper. Kant introduces the sublime as "a pleasure that arises only indirectly." He states that "it is produced by the feeling of momentary inhibition of the vital forces followed immediately by an outpouring of them that is all the stronger" (*CJ*, 98). He articulates the sublime as the exhibition of an indeterminate concept of reason that occurs in the interplay between the powers of *imagination* and *reason*.⁷ In general, an object of overwhelming vastness, either of magnitude or might,⁸ presents itself to the imagination in such a way that the power of the latter is inadequate to apprehend it. Such a strain on the limits of imagination summons reason, which demands, according to its idea of totality, that imagination exhibit the object as a whole. However, since the object appears as *absolutely large* or *absolutely powerful*, the imagination could only exhibit it as an *absolute whole*. As Kant explains, imagination

⁷ Since there are two types of reason at work in the judgment of the sublime – theoretical, or speculative, reason and practical reason – there are two corresponding types of sublime – the mathematical and the dynamical. Kant states that the imagination refers the mental agitation constitutive of the sublime "either to the *cognitive* power or to the *power of desire*. ... The first kind of agitation is a *mathematical*, the second a *dynamical* attunement of the mind" (*CJ*, 101).

⁸ *Magnitude* (*Grösse*) refers to the mathematically sublime, *might* (*Macht*) to the dynamically sublime. The former occurs when an object is presented as absolutely large, the latter when an object is presented as absolutely powerful.

inevitably falls short as its role is to structure our empirical intuitions into nature *as appearance*, it can never exhibit anything but *comparative* magnitudes or might. Hence, imagination fails to meet reason's demand.

The mathematical sublime can help elucidate this point. The imagination is called upon to present a phenomenon as a single whole in one intuition, a task Kant calls "comprehension" (*Zusammenfassung*). A problem occurs when the largest basic measure, the *Grundmass*, exceeds what can be taken in "in one glance," *in einem Blick fassen* (*CJ*, 110). Despite the violence it will do to the imagination, "reason demands totality for all given magnitude ... [and] exempts from this demand not even the infinite" (*CJ*, 111). But the infinite is *absolutely* large and not merely large in comparison with other magnitudes (it is as "absolutely large" that Kant defines the sublime at the beginning of his discussion. See *CJ*, 103). No exhibition that the imagination can offer could satisfy reason's demand, not even its largest *Grundmass*, precisely because even the largest of measures offered by the imagination "in one moment," *in einem Augenblick*, is small, *infinitely small*, in comparison to the infinite as a whole.⁹

When confronted with the sublime, the subject undergoes a sort of *mental agitation*. The inadequacy of imagination is accompanied by a *displeasure* in its inability to meet reason's decree, but then, immediately following, comes an indirect and *negative* feeling of pleasure—a pleasure in the knowledge, because of imagination's failure, that

⁹ Kant compares "comprehension" (*Zusammenfassung*), which, in his Latin, he calls *comprehensio aesthetica*, to "apprehension" (*Auffassung*), or *apprehensio*. Both are functions of the imagination. The former, however, seeks to exhibit a magnitude in one intuition, while the latter progresses to infinity without hindrance, as it is allowed to "lose as much on the one side as it gains on the other" (*CJ*, 108). It is the requirement to exhibit a magnitude in *one single intuition* that marks imagination's moribund destiny. The only proper *Grundmass* of nature is the whole of nature itself. This concept is, Kant tells us, "self-contradictory ... because an absolute totality of an endless progression is impossible" (*CJ*, 112). The violence of reason in its journey to realize its own power and independence is on display here.

within oneself there is a *supersensible* power that transcends all sensibility. Though thwarted in one's attempt to find a standard by which to make the object of nature correspond to one's idea, this failure brings to the fore the idea of a *higher* power. This higher power, furthermore, has just been shown to be independent of nature, and thus, points to our independence from nature. One might not be capable of presenting, for example, the infinite as a whole in intuition. However, nothing stops one from *thinking* the infinite, as a whole, without contradiction. This ability indicates that we possess *mental* powers that exceed the sensible; this is our moral vocation—our freedom.

Kant establishes the sublime in the manner we might have expected—as that occurrence, at the same time pleasurable and painful, that brings us into contact with an elevated notion of self. His claims, however, also have deeper implications that are crucial for his system. According to Kant, judgments are based on the *a priori* principle of *purposiveness*. In aesthetic judgments, because they are reflective judgments, this *a priori* principle is legislated *subjectively* through the interplay of mental powers. The experience of the sublime seems *contrapurposive* insofar as imagination is unable to perform the task reason demands of it. However, this contrapurposiveness is, at the same time, *subjectively purposive* with respect to our moral vocation, for it manifests the power and autonomy of reason. Kant needs to show this subjective purposiveness in order to claim that judgments of the sublime are universal and necessary, and he needs to show that these judgments are universal and necessary because he is doing transcendental philosophy, which seeks the possible *conditions* for all experience, conditions which must be *a priori*, universal, and necessary.¹⁰ Defending why the analytic of the sublime

¹⁰ In §24 of the Third Critique, Kant explains that he will undertake the analytic of the sublime in the same manner that he examined judgments of taste. Therefore, the “liking for the sublime” can

is at the same time its deduction, Kant says that judgments concerning the sublime “contain a purposive relation of the cognitive powers, which we must lay *a priori* at the basis of the power of purposes (the will) and which is therefore itself *a priori* purposive; and that already provides the deduction, i.e., the justification of the claim of these judgments to universally necessary validity” (*CJ*, 142-3).¹¹ The contradiction in which the sublime consists lies, for Kant, at the heart of his transcendental project, which demands that the conditions for possible experience, in this case experience of the sublime, be *proven* (which is what Kant means by “deduction”). The sublime could not be validated if its contrapurposiveness did not resolve itself into purposiveness; that the sublime occurs as a contradiction is essential to its essence.

When discussing the “negative” aspect of the sublime, Kant speaks of *displeasure* in general, but mentions fear with respect to the dynamically sublime. One fears for one’s physical existence when encountering an object of nature that appears overwhelmingly powerful: “Bold, overhanging and, as it were, threatening rocks, thunderclouds piling up in the sky and moving about accompanied by lightening and

be presented as follows: “[I]n terms of *quantity*, as universally valid; in terms of *quality*, as devoid of interest; in terms of *relation*, [as a] subjective purposiveness; and in terms of *modality*, as a necessary subjective purposiveness” (*CJ*, 100). I refer the reader to Jean-François Lyotard’s *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), henceforth cited as *L*) for a rich and exhaustive discussion of Kant’s application of these categories to the experience of the sublime. This text is particularly valuable for investigating how the sublime, as a judgment made specifically by the power of *reflection*, is related to and reliant upon the various cognitive apparatuses that Kant establishes in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Furthermore, Lyotard devotes a wealth of pages to unpacking §24, specifically with respect to the sublime’s claims of necessity and universality, as well as to the division of the sublime into the mathematical and the dynamical—a division that, for Lyotard, assumes a vital, though often overlooked, role in Kant’s analytic.

¹¹ Lyotard’s analysis of the sublime’s necessity and universality, mentioned in the previous note, allow him to artfully unravel Kant’s “deduction” of the sublime. Essentially, Lyotard explains the quote just given, which is all Kant offers by way of a “proof” for the universality and necessity of judgments concerning the sublime.

thunderclaps, volcanoes with all their destructive power, hurricanes with all the devastation they leave behind, the boundless ocean heaved up, the high waterfall of a mighty river, and so on” (*CJ*, 120). These are all so powerful—so *physically* powerful—that any resistance on one’s part seems futile. Hence, the displeasure that one experiences at the moment of such an encounter is, indeed, fear.

In the case of the mathematically sublime, as in the case of the infinite, one does not fear for one’s physical existence when one feels the inadequacy of imagination, yet one feels *diminished* to the point that one becomes fearful of the *annihilation* of one’s sense of self. Though Kant himself does not use this language, other thinkers, such as Schopenhauer, as we shall see, pose the effect of the sublime in such dramatic terms. And Kant does, for his part, argue that once one is in actual danger, the ability to judge the object *aesthetically* is lost (*CJ*, 120).

Now, we must delve further into the notion of the supersensible, as Kant asserts that it is evinced in the experience of the sublime. In general, the supersensible to which Kant refers is reason’s autonomy (i.e., freedom) with respect to nature; no matter the inadequacy one initially feels in the face of the sublime, one is assured of reason’s superiority over nature in one’s very ability to *think* what cannot merely be *sensed*. Kant describes the sublime as “an object (of nature) the presentation of which determines the mind to think of nature’s inability to attain to an exhibition of ideas” (*CJ*, 127). Thus, reason is capable of formulating ideas to which nothing in nature can correspond, and the failure of imagination is, rather, a limitation of nature that illustrates the independence and power of the mind.

By virtue of his transcendental project, Kant attempts to delimit the range of human knowledge. He says that we have only limited access to the supersensible realm, but that we do, *a priori*, know the *will*. Recall the quote given above in which Kant claims that the purposive relation between the cognitive powers, imagination and reason, is presupposed by the “power of purposes,” which is itself *a priori* purposive. This “power of purposes” is the will, which is the capacity that one has to carry out one’s actions in the world and the *supersensible* to which one has access. Of the supersensible, Kant says the following:

It is this idea that is aroused in us when, as we judge an object aesthetically, this judging strains the imagination to its limit, whether of expansion (mathematically) or of its might over the mind (dynamically). The judging strains the imagination because it is based on a feeling that the mind has a vocation that wholly transcends the domain of nature (namely, moral feeling) (*CJ*, 128).

It is the freedom of the human will that is *felt* in the experience of the sublime. This makes sense when we realize that Kant premises his notion of the sublime on the supersensible found within; he clearly states that we speak improperly if we call the natural object “sublime.” Rather, it is, and can only be, the ideas of reason, the freedom of the will, the moral autonomous self that can properly be thought of as *sublime* (*CJ*, 99).¹² The encounter with nature’s brute size or might, at first appearing as an unbounded power with which one has no hope of contending, summons the even more

¹² Multiple times throughout the discussion, Kant disabuses his reader of the common mistake of referring to natural phenomena as “sublime” (see *CJ*, 105, 113, 114, 123, and 142), though on more than one occasion he falls victim to the same mistake. For the latter, see, for example, p. 127: “The sublime can be described thus: it is an object (of nature) *the presentation of which determines the mind to think of nature’s inability to attain to an exhibition of ideas.*” The text clearly names the sublime *as object*, though what is attested by that object, and by nature’s shortcomings, is reason and its ideas. Despite the occasional clumsiness of Kant’s language, however, there can be no doubt about his meaning; only that which is “in the mind” (*im Gemüt*) is sublime, *not* the natural phenomena that prompts the sublime feeling (*CJ*, 113).

powerful force contained within, free from nature's imposition and sway. In this way, the subject is exalted, shown to be independent from *all* nature, and ultimately revealed as an autonomous supersensible self. Fear turns into strength, inability into infinite ability. This encounter elucidates wherein the truly sublime resides—within man's autonomous self.¹³

Friedrich Schiller's formulations, which are less technical, more poetic, and in many ways, more accessible than Kant's, offer guidance here.¹⁴ Schiller emphasizes the *dignity* and *humanity* that belong to humans as beings that *will*. He asserts, "the will is what distinguishes the human race, and reason itself is nothing but the will's everlasting

¹³ There is a sense in which the dynamically sublime, as in the case of the mathematically sublime, can be thought in terms of *magnitude*. Kant writes, "when we judge [something] aesthetically (without a concept), the only way we can judge a superiority over obstacles is the *magnitude* of the resistance" (*CJ*, 119 my italics). The "resistance" is that of the human will, which, considered as an *absolute causality*, retains some semblance to the *absolute totality* that reason demands in the mathematically sublime. However, Kant certainly would not pursue this analogy further, at least not in a *literal* sense, for what would, or could, it mean to "measure" the resistance of the will? But, since the sublime is that which is *absolutely large* (*CJ*, 103), or, in the context of the quote, *absolutely resistant*, no comparative measure is possible. And this is the point—the will is immeasurable in comparison to *anything* present in nature (or anything represented by imagination in aesthetic judgment). What at first appears to be a possible conflation of the two "types" of sublime reveals the true sublimity of the will, and the misappropriation of "magnitude" to "will" falls away, as do all comparisons to reason's and the will's autonomy.

This discussion also furnishes a place to mention a trait of the sublime that will be explored at various times throughout this essay—the *inarticulability* of sublime experience. In general, sententious expression falls away in the moment of the experience of the sublime. We find this in Kant, not only in the confusion of this quote, but in his notion of "subreption," in which "respect for the object is substituted for respect for the idea of humanity within our[selves, as] subject[s]" (*CJ*, 114). We, including Kant himself (see the previous note), often *misspeak* with respect to that which is "truly" sublime. In fact, we cannot help but *misspeak* about that which is *unspeakable*.

¹⁴ Schiller borrows his notion of the sublime directly from Kant. However, owing to his poetic genius, Schiller imbues his formulations with a spirit that is simply lacking in Kant's technical language. This "addition" adds flesh and depth to the topic. Thus, in Schiller one finds more moving descriptions, even if, as some have argued, less philosophically arduous. In truth, Schiller's philosophy is just as rigorous as his prose is lovely.

rule.”¹⁵ Our freedom of will is such that its rule is *absolute*. Man “can no longer be the sort of entity that wills, if there is even a single case where he absolutely must do what he does not want to do” (*FS*, 71). Schiller writes, “the entire essence of the sublime rests upon the consciousness of this rational freedom of ours ... [it is] feeling oneself to be transported and elevated to a point beyond fate, beyond all contingencies, and beyond all natural necessity” (*FS*, 26). Encountering the sublime, “the *humanity* in our person remains unvanquished, although *the human being* would have to succumb to that power of nature” (*FS*, 27).

Thus, our autonomy is absolute, unbounded, and that which makes man *man*. It is our mark of distinction. It is also, let us not forget, the supersensible, which, according to Kant, we *assume* for nature, but *know* in ourselves. Schiller calls this the “*indestructibility of our being*” (*FS*, 31). Kant indicates the enormity of this knowledge: “The human mind ... must have within itself a power that is supersensible, whose idea of a noumenon cannot be intuited but can yet be regarded as the substrate underlying what is mere appearance, namely, our intuition of the world” (*CJ*, 111). Indeed, the supersensible world of noumena, though not capable of being intuited, is thought of as the reality underlying the natural world of phenomena, yet the occasion of the sublime gives us a glimpse of this realm *as it exists within us*.

We are beginning to understand how the sublime gives us access to that part of us which, to borrow Platonic language, partakes of *true being*. Kant, unlike Plato, grants us access only to pieces of that realm, yet, one of those pieces is our *autonomous will*, which

¹⁵ See *Friedrich Schiller: Essays*, eds. Walter Hinderer and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (German Library. 17. New York: Continuum, 1993), 70. Henceforth cited as *FS*. All quotations that follow can be located in two essays in this collection, “Concerning the Sublime” and “On the Sublime.”

is attested in the face of the sublime. Kant writes, “if we judge aesthetically the good that is intellectually and intrinsically purposive (the moral good), we must present it not so much as beautiful but rather as sublime” (*CJ*, 132). He argues that it occasions our acquaintance with that in us which is uniquely human, which is the uniquely human trait that separates us from *all else* in nature and, moreover, shows us our independence *from* nature. It was the exaltation of self that we expected to find in the experience of the sublime. For Kant, the self that is exalted is of a specific character, namely, the autonomous, willing, moral supersensible self who exists outside the bounds of nature and the senses.

II. Schopenhauer: *Contra Nature*

*Das Schaudern ist der Menschheit bestes Teil.
Wie auch die Welt ihm das Gefühl verteure,
Ergriffen fühlt er tief das Ungeheure.*

[The shudder is the best part of man.
However dearly the world makes him pay for it,
He feels the immense deep inside, seized with astonishment.]
—Goethe

Schopenhauer's philosophy is an intriguing blend of pessimism and idealism that draws from both Western and Eastern philosophical traditions,¹⁶ with aesthetics claiming a predominant role therein. One of the more arresting features of Schopenhauer's philosophy is—despite the heavy influence of Kant, whose transcendental project demands an epistemological and metaphysical asymptote—his willingness to bypass the transcendental caveat and assert a *noumenon*, an ultimate level of reality that is the world-in-itself, “behind” any and all phenomena. He describes this reality as an undifferentiated, blind, striving energy, without any definite *telos*, and he calls this *will*. The will manifests itself as a multitude of empirical objects, which, as objectifications of the will, comprise the world as *representation*. Indeed, Schopenhauer begins his *magnum opus* with the following: “The world is, on the one side, entirely *representation*,

¹⁶ In addition to Schopenhauer's many references to the *Upanishads* and other Hindu texts, his worldview, as well as his ascetic ideal, closely resembles some of the basic tenets of Buddhism. For example, Schopenhauer's entire metaphysics depends on the belief that life consists of constant desiring and the subsequent suffering that comes from the inevitable unattainability of the fulfillment of that desiring. This articulation paraphrases the “Four Noble Truths” that are central to Buddhist philosophy.

just as, on the other, it is entirely *will*.¹⁷ Aesthetic contemplation, especially that of the sublime, claims a privileged place because it provides a means, within the world of representation, to excise oneself from the harsh, agonal world produced by will and, in fact, reveals a path toward raising oneself above willing and freeing oneself from will's noose. This exalted state is that of the ascetic, which is the only truly worthy manner of being in Schopenhauer's world.

The basic structure of the world as representation is what Schopenhauer sees as a synthesis of Kantian and Platonic insights. On the one hand, Schopenhauer takes as his starting point the transcendental subjectivity that imposes, as preconditions for all possible empirical objects and experiences, the forms of space and time (Transcendental Aesthetic) and the pure categories of understanding (Transcendental Analytic).¹⁸ The empirical aspect of the world consists of a plurality of spatio-temporal objects. The world one perceives is a region of phenomena structured in terms of space, time, and the category of causality (*WWR I*, 445-446).¹⁹ This structure is what Schopenhauer calls the principle of sufficient reason—"the ultimate principle of all finiteness, of all individuation, and the universal form of the representation as it comes to the knowledge of the subject as such" (*WWR I*, 169). This principle states that for every event there is another event, or series of events, that functions as its cause and sufficiently explains its

¹⁷ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 vols, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), 4. Henceforth cited as *WWR I* and *WWR II*.

¹⁸ For the Transcendental Aesthetic, see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 76-104; for the Transcendental Analytic, specifically the Table of Categories, see 132.

¹⁹ It should be noted that Schopenhauer retains only one of Kant's twelve categories, causality, asserting that the other eleven are determinations of either space and time, or of an object's empirical properties (which turn out, in his view, to be only fuller determinations of causality). For a more complete discussion of Schopenhauer's criticism of Kant see the *WWR I*, Appendix, pp. 413-534.

occurrence. Since the principle of sufficient reason works to individuate the will into the phenomena of our world as representation, Schopenhauer also refers to it as the *principium individuationis*.

The world as representation is comprised of a plurality of discrete objects located in space and time and subject to causal relations. One's relationship to the world in this schema is governed by one's inner constitution as will—that is, as a blind, striving force. Thus, one's *representation* of the world is motivated by one's egotistical desires for various gratifications, and one perceives objects in the world solely as a means to one's ends. Furthermore, one presumes that others perceive the world similarly, and so, takes the world to be a myriad of wills, occasionally working in concert, but mostly acting in conflict with one another. It is this basic conception of human existence that grounds Schopenhauer's pessimism.²⁰

In addition to the individuated, objectified phenomena of will that are subject to the principle of sufficient reason, Schopenhauer posits the "Ideas," the interpretation of which he borrows directly from Plato.²¹ The Ideas are immediate objectifications of the

²⁰ The world as representation is "an unending conflict between ... phenomena as individuals. It is visible at all grades of individuals, and makes the world a permanent battlefield of all those phenomena of one and the same will; and in this way the will's inner contradiction with itself becomes visible" (*WWR I*, 265-6). Schopenhauer's deep pessimism is evident not only in the structure of the world, but expresses itself poignantly right there on his pages. Hear, as just two examples of many similarly dreary sentiments, the following: "the fate of mankind as a whole is want, wretchedness, misery, lamentation, and death" (*WWR I*, 352) and "existence is certainly to be regarded as an error or mistake" (*WWR II*, 605). Schopenhauer's pessimism is *lived*, as opposed to being merely *professed*. I am thinking of the distinction made by Gabriel Marcel between lived and professed atheism—the former is genuine and so truly devoid of any religious feeling; the latter makes claims to atheism but still retains a deeply spiritual leaning. Nietzsche is an example of the professed atheist. See Gabriel Marcel, *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, trans. S. Jolin and P. McCormick (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 43-4.

²¹ Whereas Plato struggled in his dialogues to get his readers to distinguish *eidoi* from mere things, urging them not to think of the former in terms of the latter (see, especially, *Parmenides*), Schopenhauer is indifferent to this problem. He uses, virtually interchangeably, the words "archetype," "species," and even "prototype" to describe his notion of the Idea. Some of these

will, at adequate and definite grades, and they stand outside of the strictures of time, place, and causality. Everyday phenomena are objectifications of will that have passed through, in a sense, the Idea, and are, therefore, *indirect* objectifications, whereas the Ideas objectify will directly.²² The latter are—and this is of paramount importance—still *representations*, i.e., objectifications, of will. Like their Platonic counterparts, Schopenhauer’s Ideas are eternal and unchanging, but, in stark contrast to Plato, Schopenhauer grants access to them only through *perception* and, more specifically, through the aesthetic contemplation that perception of these Ideas evokes.²³

In the aesthetic contemplation of an object, which can be either an object of nature or of human artifice,²⁴ not only is the Idea of that object expressed, but a change also occurs in the subject: “the person who is involved in this perception is no longer an individual, for in such perception the individual has lost himself; he is *pure* will-less, painless, timeless *subject of knowledge*” (*WWR I*, 179). Furthermore, Schopenhauer clearly states that the knowledge of Ideas is solely the possession of art, which “repeats the eternal Ideas apprehended through pure contemplation,” and whose “only source is knowledge of the Ideas [and whose] sole aim is communication of this knowledge” (*WWR I*, 184-5). The posture of pure will-less subject of knowledge is the necessary

terms adhere to Plato’s definition better than others. However, since Schopenhauer offers an adequate expression of his own notion of the Ideas, we need only interperate this as a problem in his interpretation of Plato and not as a problem within his own system.

²² The following definition helps to clarify Schopenhauer’s position on the relationship between Idea and phenomenal object: “The *Idea* is the unity that has fallen into plurality by virtue of the temporal and spatial form of our intuitive apprehension” (*WWR I*, 234). The multiple individual objects “participate” in the one unchanging Idea of that object.

²³ “Knowledge of the Idea is necessarily knowledge through perception, and is not abstract” (*WWR I*, 186).

²⁴ Schopenhauer does not make a distinction between the effectiveness of expressing Ideas in nature or in art: “The Idea remains unchanged and the same, hence aesthetic pleasure is essentially one and the same, whether it be called forth by a work of art, or directly by the contemplation of nature and of life” (*WWR I*, 195).

condition for the attainment of the knowledge of Ideas, just as the expression of the Ideas is the necessary condition for the elevation of individual to pure will-less knower, “the clear mirror of the inner nature of the world” (*WWR I*, 186; see also 178).²⁵ These transitions, one in the object, the other in the subject, occur *only* in aesthetic contemplation.

The elevation of the individual occurs in experiences of both the beautiful and of the sublime, but for Schopenhauer, these two experiences differ in one, and only one, respect, and decidedly on the subjective side of aesthetic contemplation. In the case of the beautiful, the beauty of the object, wherein knowledge of that object’s Idea resides, removes the will without any resistance, hence *imperceptibly*. Thus, what remains is the pure will-less subject of knowledge contemplating the Idea, with no recollection of will. In the sublime, the pure will-less state of the subject is attained by a “conscious and violent tearing away” (*WWR I*, 202); the subject’s conscious removal from will is prompted by a hostile element in the phenomena that is simply lacking in the presence of beauty.²⁶ In the sublime, because the subject is exalted consciously, there remains a faint

²⁵ Aesthetic experience demands, as its necessary condition, on the one hand, the transition from knowledge of an individual object to knowledge of the Idea and, on the other hand, the elevation from individual to pure will-less subject. These are the “two inseparable constituent parts” of aesthetic contemplation (*WWR I*, 195-6). Furthermore, the capacity within human beings *both* to create works of art that express Ideas *and* to be receptive to Ideas in aesthetic contemplation is what Schopenhauer calls *genius*. Though degrees of genius vary, and profound genius is rare, it is a universal condition of aesthetic experience. Without it, one could never perceive an Idea: “We must therefore assume as existing in all men that power of recognizing in things their Ideas, of divesting themselves for a moment of their personality, unless indeed there are some who are not capable of aesthetic pleasure at all” (*WWR I*, 194-5).

²⁶ “The feeling of the sublime is distinguished from that of the beautiful only by the addition, namely the exaltation beyond the known hostile relation of the contemplated object to the will in general” (*WWR I*, 202). One might compare the kinship between the beautiful and the sublime in Schopenhauer with an assertion that Kant makes in his *Anthropology*: “*Beauty* alone belongs to taste; it is true that the *sublime* belongs to aesthetic judgment, but not to taste. However, the *representation* of the sublime can and should nevertheless be beautiful in itself.” (Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Robert B. Loudon (New York:

recollection of will and a subsequent impetus to remain in the state of pure will-less knowing. Thus, Schopenhauer states, “this exaltation must not only be won with consciousness, but also maintained” (*WWR I*, 202).

The experience of the sublime enables one to extract oneself from the grip of the will and to see, for the first time, one’s true relationship to it. What Schopenhauer claims assails the individual is similar to that which Kant posits—either an incomparably powerful force, or an infinitely large magnitude.²⁷ When overwhelming power or

Cambridge University Press, 2006), 138. Undoubtedly, since the only difference for Schopenhauer occurs in the *subject*, he would agree with Kant, and even more, argue that the sublime is *always* also beautiful.

²⁷ Schopenhauer adopts Kant’s distinction between the dynamical and mathematical sublimities (see *WWR I*, 205). However, he does add another “type” of sublime, which he calls “weak” because it does not operate by overpowering the individual. This sublime is subtle and demands a keen aesthetic sensibility. In fact, Schopenhauer suggests that, if one is lacking in that regard, one should skip these examples and move directly to the Kantian variety (*WWR I*, 202-3). I shall take time to explain one of the two examples of the “weak” sublime he offers because it reveals a sublime that, because the feeling can be brought on *merely by thought*, resembles what we shall see in Chapter Five when we look at the postmodern/non-metaphysical sublime.

The sun is our source of light, and thus grants us the power to see and, as it pertains to our discussion, to contemplate aesthetically. Furthermore, it is also our source of heat and, therefore, the source of all life. Thus, “what heat is for the will, light is for knowledge” (*WWR I*, 203). In the deepest sting of winter, when the whole of nature is frozen, one sees the sun’s rays illuminating the landscape and all its constituents: trees, rocks, fields, streams, etc. There is no doubt that these objects are illuminated by the sun, yet they are not being warmed by it. For this reason, mere illumination without warmth, the rays of the sun are a concern of the purest knowledge, not the will, and the beauty with which these objects appear elevates their perceiver into a state of pure will-less knowing (as all beauty does). At this moment, however, one faintly recalls the lack of warmth from those rays, a deficiency of the principle source of life, which stirs a desire to transcend the grip of the will; one prefers to remain immersed in pure knowledge than to return to the thrall of the will. One turns away from willing, and at this moment, makes a transition from the feeling of the beautiful to that of the sublime.

In this example, the sun is sublime because it betrays the cause/effect structure of the phenomenal realm. The illuminated rays that offer no warmth are a concern of pure knowledge rather than will because their naturally assumed effect is that they *will bring warmth*. When one experiences rays of sunlight *without* the accompanying feeling of warmth, one feels something is askew. The world as representation, which is governed by spatial, temporal, and causal relations, has failed to perform in accordance with its own rules; the expected, seemingly necessary, causal connection simply did not take place. Thus, the winter sun that offers only its light is an object of the purest knowledge. Once one realizes that those rays are not providing the principle source of life that were expected, one wants to remain in this elevated posture of pure will-less knowing

vastness disrupts one's security, one feels "annihilated" with respect to oneself as a willing, striving agent in the world.²⁸ Hence, one turns away from this slavish posture and is elevated to pure contemplation of Ideas, with no hindrance from the rapacious will. Against the shadow of one's own nothingness, one immediately recognizes that the world exists *merely* as one's representation. Thus, the individual subject proves to be the *supporter* of the phenomenal world; the dependence one felt on the world is abolished by the realization that the world is, itself, dependent on the pure subject.

Herein lies the value of the sublime over and above the beautiful; only in the former does one become aware of the true conflict that lives within the heart of the world itself—the inner conflict of the will. The subject is moved from its relational nexus in the phenomenal realm to the state of pure knowing consciously and hence *perceptibly*. In experiences of the beautiful, as well as of the sublime, the subject suspends its willful interest in the object, but it is only in viewing the sublime that the subject is conscious of this suspension. The difference occurs not in the subject's relationship to the will, but rather in one's *knowledge*, or *awareness*, of that relationship.

This knowledge, which sees through the *principium individuationis*, is what Schopenhauer calls a *quieter* of the will; it is the knowledge of the will's inner conflict and of the inherent suffering that permeates the life of every living creature (*WWR I*, 397). It is through this quieting of the will that resignation, or denial of the will, can be

rather than descend back into the fetters of willing. It is at the point of this realization, or remembrance, that the transition from beautiful to sublime takes place.

²⁸ This "annihilation" can take the form of death—its most extreme expression—but also refers to the experience of the mathematical sublime, in the face of whose vastness one feels reduced to nothing. Schopenhauer's "weak" instances of the sublime, discussed in the previous note, only annihilate one's dependence on the will and do not cause fear *per se*. It should be noted that, again, just like in Kant, the experience of the sublime loses its aesthetic value if one finds oneself in *actual* danger. If the pure will-less observer lets the will re-engage the scene, even "one single, real act of will," aesthetic contemplation, and the elevation it evinces, is lost (*WWR I*, 202).

achieved. *Denial of the will-to-live, or complete resignation*, is the only means of salvation and solution to the unending suffering caused by egoism and the infinite conflict that it precipitates. Schopenhauer sees two paths to the denial of will. One is the attainment of the knowledge of the real nature of the world, as seen through the suffering inherent to our existence; the other is the actual *experience* of excessive pain felt by an individual in one's own life.²⁹ The attainment of knowledge of the inner nature of the world is precisely the knowledge that one receives in contemplation of the Ideas in the experience of the sublime. Beauty cannot quiet the will because it offers no resistance and, hence, does nothing to reveal the inherent contradiction at the core of will. Only the sublime reveals this, and so, it is the sublime that is a quieter of the will and, more importantly, a path toward Schopenhauer's most highly vaulted posture—the will-denying ascetic.³⁰

The recognition of the pervasiveness of suffering, to which one is granted access in contemplation of the sublime, produces “perfect goodness of disposition and universal love of mankind” (*WWR I*, 392). These qualities allow Schopenhauer to assert an asceticism beyond virtue.³¹ The ascetic loses the need for any negative moral imperative and acts out of love for all, in perfect accordance with goodness, because, once the fire of will has been extinguished, one's actions are no longer motivated selfishly by one's

²⁹ Certainly, even the experiential path to resignation involves knowledge, but it is only *after* the experience that knowledge comes to the individual. In the other path, it is *solely through* knowledge that the denial of the will is achieved.

³⁰ “The man who sees through the *principium individuationis*, and recognizes the true nature of things-in-themselves, and thus the whole ... sees himself in all places simultaneously. His will turns about; it no longer affirms its own nature, mirrored in the phenomenon, but denies it. The phenomenon by which this becomes manifest is the transition from virtue to *asceticism*” (*WWR I*, 380).

³¹ The resemblance of Schopenhauer's ascetic, who is beyond virtue, to Nietzsche's overman, who attains a posture “beyond good and evil,” is fertile ground for comparisons of the two thinkers' ethics.

egoistic desires. Undoubtedly, Schopenhauer uses language implicated in traditional discourses on morality or virtue, but he certainly has in mind in the ascetic an individual whose actions are remarkable and extraordinary in their goodness and love. He sometimes refers to action of this type as “purely moral” or “holy.”

In order to understand the ascetic, I think it prudent to remind the reader of a central tenet of Schopenhauer’s notion of aesthetic experience that our discussion up to this point has mentioned only in passing, namely, the loss of individuation. Without the sense of self, of ego, the pure will-less subject does not feel the will’s urge to consume or expand its influence. Likewise, the ascetic, whose ego has been quieted, does not pursue the will’s ends. Rather, the ends of a will-less subject, since they are not motivated by will, *deny* the appropriation of others to the gratification of one’s will. Schopenhauer argues that this posture consists, positively, in love and in purely good action toward others. Furthermore, as one recognized oneself as the supporter of the phenomenal world in aesthetic contemplation, the ascetic recognizes *all the suffering in the world* as one’s own (*WWR I*, 392). Thus, as Schopenhauer says, “individuality is inherent in the will only in its affirmation, not in its denial” (*WWR II*, 608).

In the posture of the ascetic and in the attributes it possesses, we see Schopenhauer’s idealism in its fullest expression. It is an ideal, perhaps overly ideal, solution to living in a world that is completely lost to mankind’s selfish desires. It is, in fact, the only means of *salvation* from this world. However, what concerns us here, is that this ideal is revealed in aesthetic contemplation, in the encounter of the sublime, understood traditionally as the double moment, for Schopenhauer, of annihilation and subsequent elevation—elevation above and away from the will, the in-itself of the world.

III. Nietzsche: *Nature Redeemed*

The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword, are portions of eternity too great for the eye of man.

—William Blake

Nietzsche's sublime, described in *The Birth of Tragedy*, is revealed through a commingling of two distinct and opposite "tendencies" (*Triebe*)—the Apollonian, the drive responsible for the plastic and pictorial arts, and the Dionysian, the drive responsible for music.³² Nietzsche sees tragedy as neither exclusively Apollonian nor exclusively Dionysian, but as the integration of the two. Tragedy, specifically the tragedy of the ancient Athenians, exists as a unique art form in which the two art deities, and the arts that their influences produce, converge to create something never before seen or experienced. In his later writings, Nietzsche will speak of a *solely* "Dionysian insight" or "Dionysian wisdom." These are terms that, for him, name the sublime. Though the Dionysian itself is characterized specifically by music, neither the Apollonian, nor the subject matter of the Athenian stage—Greek mythology—is forsaken in his overarching

³² Whereas Kant limits his discussion of the sublime to nature, because the sublime in art is always limited to the conditions of art (see *CJ*, 98), and Schopenhauer finds the sublime expressed in both nature and art, Nietzsche's discussion takes place exclusively in the context of tragedy. Kant does, however, in §52, mention tragedy in verse as one of three fine arts in which the sublime can be exhibited (the other two are didactic poetry and oration). It bears pointing out that both Schopenhauer and Schiller grant to tragedy a privileged place within the arts for its unique capacity to depict the sublime. For Schopenhauer, tragedy stands at the apogee of the represented arts, and he states, "our pleasure in tragedy belongs ... to [the feeling] of the sublime; it is, in fact, the highest degree of this feeling" (*WWR II*, 433). As for Schiller, in addition to his other essays mentioned in this discussion, see Friedrich Schiller, "On the Art of Tragedy," in *FS*.

notion of Dionysian wisdom. Both are integral to tragedy and to Nietzsche's understanding of the sublime.³³

The Birth of Tragedy is a text greatly indebted to Schopenhauer, whose influence is evident in Nietzsche's descriptions of the two drives that tragedy comprises. The Apollonian is the apotheosis of the *principium individuationis*, which retains Schopenhauer's meaning and use of the term.³⁴ The Dionysian, expressed in music, apart from and opposed to all plastic and pictorial arts, harkens back to Schopenhauer's understanding of music, which expresses the will *directly*, without the intermediary objectification into an Idea that all other art forms require. Schopenhauer's allegiance to music is so profound that he even states that it is just as appropriate to "call the world embodied music as embodied will" (*WWR I*, 262).

In the Apollonian arts, the *principium individuationis* receives its most sublime expression (*BOT*, 36); Apollo is the deity associated with sculpture and all other plastic and pictorial arts—the Apollonian is the ultimate *form-giving* principle. Nietzsche criticizes this. He claims that, through Apollo, the world is merely "redeemed through illusion" (*BOT*, 45). Nietzsche maintains that man has made a metaphysical assumption that the truly existent world is constituted by eternal suffering and contradiction, and thus feels compelled to search for pleasurable illusions, through which he can continually redeem an otherwise worthless existence. He then considers this illusion as that which does not *truly* exist, i.e., the phenomenal world (in contrast to that which does *truly* exist,

³³ After *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche uses the term *Dionysian* to refer to a number of complex ideas. The aesthetic experience of the sublime in tragedy, which is *always* a commingling of the plastic arts and music and, hence, of Apollo and Dionysus, along with the *wisdom* that one gains in that experience, all continue to fall under this broader term. The Apollonian and the aesthetic experience of the sublime in tragedy are simply inscribed within the later formulation.

³⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 45. Henceforth cited at *BOT*.

namely, the thing-in-itself).³⁵ Nietzsche asserts that the Greek knew well the terror and horror of existence and, in order to endure this terror, “had to interpose between himself and life the radiant dream-birth of the Olympians. ... It was in order to live that the Greeks had to create these gods from a most profound need” (*BOT*, 42). The creation of these exalted, beautiful figures—beautiful illusions of the Greeks themselves—makes life not only bearable, but even *desirable*. Thus, out of the Titanic divine order of terror emerges an Olympian order of joy (*BOT*, 42); through the Apollonian existence is given meaning by surrounding man with a higher beauty and a higher glory—the pantheon. The eternal suffering and contradiction of existence is transfigured into a joyous desire for life and all of its beautiful forms, for marble sculptures of gods and epic poems about heroes. Instead of being gripped by the meaninglessness of life, the Greek is able to assuage his terror by contemplating the beautiful forms he has conceived.

The creative force of the Apollonian is responsible not only for the Olympian gods, but also for Homer’s epic poetry and the heroes who eventually occupy the tragic stage. In fact, Homer’s poetry is the “complete victory of Apollonian illusion” (*BOT*, 44). Thus, Odysseus steers not only his ship, but also Greek consciousness, safely past terrifying monsters; he quells the terror that clutches the sailor in the face of Scylla and Charybdis, and the horror that seizes the listener in the face of *life*.

Nietzsche sees the Apollonian as the natural human proclivity for illusion that helps to assuage the pain and suffering of human existence. The Apollonian delights in this world of representation, this world of individuation, by elevating the forms that exist therein to their most beautiful expression. Nietzsche’s Apollonian becomes a cure for

³⁵ We have seen this “metaphysical assumption” at work, to varying degrees, in both Kant and Schopenhauer, and it is recognized by the latter as the great coincidence between Plato and Kant that sparks his own philosophy. See *WWR I*, 172.

individuated existence—a cure, however, that does nothing to overcome or eliminate individuation but only transfigures it.

The Dionysian, on the other hand, is music, which stands “in symbolic relation to the primordial contradiction and primordial pain in the heart of the primal unity [of existence], and therefore symbolizes a sphere which is beyond and prior to all phenomena” (*BOT*, 55).³⁶ Nietzsche likens the Dionysian to a state of intoxication. It occurs as the abolition of the *principium individuationis*, during which one feels a blissfulness, accompanied by terror. Here again, we hear mention of the double moment. All illusion is overcome in the Dionysian state, and the union between oneself and others, as well as one’s union with life itself, is celebrated. It is said that all individuation is here obliterated, but, for Nietzsche, the individual now embodies a new sense of unity. Despite the appearance of being a separate individual, among other separate individuals, one finds that one stands, shoulder to shoulder, with all else in life; one feels oneself connected with all the willing in the world—with all men and with the whole of nature. This restoration of primal unity that occurs when one is given access to the Dionysian is the “state” of existence prior to the *principium individuationis*.

³⁶ This formulation seems to indict Nietzsche in performing the same “metaphysical assumption” that he criticizes not only in the Apollonian, but also, in his later thought, in the long history of metaphysics, dating back to Plato. See, for example, his invective against the “metaphysical prejudice” in Book One of *Beyond Good and Evil* in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989). Nietzsche is not unaware of this tendency in his first book (written in 1872). In his 1886 preface, “Attempt at a Self-Criticism” (*BOT*, 17-27), written and appended some fourteen years after the original publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*, as in the section dedicated to *The Birth of Tragedy* in *Ecce Homo* (written in 1888), Nietzsche refers explicitly to the book’s shortcomings, calling it “an impossible book,” and criticizes its all-too close association with the “decadence” of Schopenhauerian and Hegelian philosophy. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968). Henceforth cited as *EH*.

Unlike the Apollonian, which aims to offer, through its beautiful forms, an illusionary panacea for the pain and horror of human existence, the Dionysian, by *dissolving* all forms, offers insight into that pain and horror. It breaks through the *principium individuationis*, shattering the individual, and establishes the mystical metaphysical restoration of primal unity, allowing one to see the true heart of world—though still seemingly contradictory and meaningless—as *sublime*. The spectator feels terror in the face of the destruction of the *principium individuationis*. Now, however, having been exposed to the Dionysian, he also feels a “blissful ecstasy that wells from the innermost depths of man, indeed of nature” (*BOT*, 36). The depiction of terrible suffering apparent in tragedy sparks the feeling of intoxication. This feeling is exemplified by the celebratory singing and dancing of the chorus, who is saturated with the very knowledge that underneath all that is governed by the *principium individuationis*—society, culture, and man—sits unindividuated, uninhibited, indestructible life; indeed, tragedy’s revelation of the Dionysian shatters the individual and causes his “fusion with primal being” (*BOT*, 65). Nietzsche argues that this double moment of terror and ecstasy ought to be affirmed, savored, and celebrated. He sees in it the expression of the way the destruction of individuals is a testament to the vitality of the will. Thus, the Dionysian evokes the “affirmation of passing away *and destroying*” (*EH*, 273).

The Dionysian offers a “metaphysical comfort—with which ... every true tragedy leaves us—that life is at the bottom of things, despite all the changes of appearances, indestructibly powerful and pleasurable” (*BOT*, 59), in contrast to the *apparent* comfort that the Apollonian provides. Yet the Dionysian can only be experienced in synergy with

the Apollonian. The Apollonian means to deceive. It hides the Dionysian, but it hides it under a veil—concealing while simultaneously revealing.³⁷ Because the Dionysian takes account of and affirms the suffering at the heart of existence, access to it is at once terrifying and blissful; one experiences first the loss of individuality, and then the restoration of primal unity and the pleasure that life ceaselessly abounds. Thus, the concert of the Apollonian and the Dionysian allows one to experience the double moment, without sensing physical danger.³⁸

It is significant that Nietzsche associates the Dionysian—and hence the sublime—with music. Music is a mode of communication that is universally intelligible, yet that remains always just beyond the translatable. It affects us in a way that we *recognize*, but have difficulty expressing sentimentally. True, music has a mathematical foundation, but understanding the formal qualities of music are not the same as the aesthetic experience of listening to it.³⁹

³⁷ Recall Schopenhauer, who often finds recourse to the Buddhist concept—the *veil of Maya*—to describe the overlaying of mere phenomena that conceals, for him, the will. The dual nature of the veil, as concealing *and* revealing, is important for both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, for both of whom *art* offers redemption from life. Art must be *perceived*. Hence, mere phenomena must be capable of *revealing* what they simultaneously conceal. Compare this to Plato, whose *eidoi* are the subject solely for an abstracted *nous*, or Kant, who denies (almost all) access to the noumenal realm. Nietzsche is critical of the “metaphysical assumption” precisely because of its desire to seek “otherworldly” consolations for life. Schopenhauer, despite his emphasis on art and perception, still succumbs to this metaphysical prejudice when he posits an ascetic who is *detached* from will, rather than affirmative of will, as Nietzsche would prefer. Nietzsche’s opposition to this prejudice and emphasis, rather, on becoming and on affirming life, become transparent in works like *Twilight of the Idols*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. We can begin to see the complex metaphysical triad that Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche compose, and which make their accounts of the sublime, when seen together, *in einem Augenblick*, so intriguing.

³⁸ This is concordant with what we have seen in both Kant and Schopenhauer.

³⁹ Schopenhauer proclaims a de-emphasis on music’s mathematical foundation in favor of its philosophical import with the following parody of Leibniz: “*Musica est exercitium metaphysicis occultum nescientis se philosophari animi*” (*WWR*, I 264). Leibniz’s original assertion is, “music is an unconscious exercise in arithmetic in which the mind does not know it is counting.”

Furthermore, Nietzsche connects myth to the experience of the sublime, saying that tragic myth “expresses Dionysian knowledge in symbols” (*BOT*, 103). The mythological world of the Greeks offers a store of contradictions, confusions, and riddles, yet all of these help the Greek relate to the world around him—a world that is seen as contradictory, painful, and inexplicable. Myth offers an image of the world, *as it exists in truth*, as revealed by the Dionysian insight.⁴⁰

Dionysian wisdom, by extension, is that which one gains when one experiences a tragedy. It is the insight into the primal unity that one receives from an aesthetic

Schopenhauer has substituted “metaphysics” for “arithmetic” and “philosophizing” for “counting.”

⁴⁰ Aeschylus shows us that the worlds of the human and the divine are both simultaneously just and unjust, and equally justifiable in both cases (see *BOT*, 72). The poet could not have expressed that insight, which is utterly Dionysian, through any better media than that of myth and music, i.e., tragic drama. Oedipus’ fate is as equally just and unjust. His crime is *the* antithesis of nature, reversing the reproductive cycle. (Another common theme in ancient Greek mythology is the eating of one’s own children, an act which can be seen as an example of reversing, or perverting, the natural order not only of procreation, but also of hereditary in a genealogical succession. It is this horrific crime that precipitates the ongoing strife in the house of Atreus.) Yet (ignoring for the moment the Freudian assertion that this act is *perfectly natural*), it is perfectly natural how Oedipus comes to fulfill his fate. He attempts to avoid his parents for fear of his prophecy, but deceived with regard to their true identity, unknowingly fulfills the words of Apollo. Oedipus does not sleep with his mother because he is perverse, immoral, or in some way deviant. He commits this act of *hubris* because he was deceived by the gods and by his own ignorance, and he is *justifiably* punished for both. A facile interpretation reads Oedipus as a pawn in a divine chess match who must be pitied for the fate that has befallen him. Dionysian insight, however, teaches that, despite his lack of knowledge of, or control over, his situation, Oedipus’ fate was *his own*, and so, he must be held accountable for it. Oedipus’ courage and resolve reveal his human dignity and demand our esteem, and yet, we abhor him and look at him as a monster – he is *both* the noble king and the wretch of humanity. Contradictions, which lie at the heart of the sublime, do not lend themselves to rational discourse, unless one has a sort of Heraclitean courage, but even he had to resort to aphorisms, as does Nietzsche in his later thought.

Myth is also *creative*—both in form and in content. There are numerous versions of the same legends, about the same heroes. We all know the depiction of Odysseus as he is portrayed by Homer, for example. But other variations of his story exist, in which Odysseus never makes it home to Penelope. Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, for example, shows an Odysseus who is neither noble nor courageous, but rather unctuously selfish and deceptive. The myths used in tragedy were not *new*, they were used, re-used, and re-created. Every audience member knew the fate of Oedipus *before* entering the theater, but he did not know how Sophocles would re-create Oedipus’ world on the stage. The variegated nature of Greek mythology is one reason it attracts Nietzsche, whose philosophy can be considered one of perspectivism, which values that life consists of different, often opposed, vantage points from which to view its significance.

interaction with the sublime in tragedy. Nietzsche maintains that this evokes a positive embrace of “life in all its excess.” But what is embraced in this sense of life is decidedly *not* the notion of an exalted self, the likes of which we found in Kant or Schopenhauer. The Dionysian insight reveals our primal unity with one another and with life, and so, prompts the *dissolution* of self. Indeed, what is attested is *life itself*—life as indestructible, unrelenting, always becoming, always creating. Nietzsche claims that, through the Dionysian, nature cries out: “Be as I am! Amid the ceaseless flux of phenomena I am the eternally creative primordial mother, eternally impelling to existence, eternally finding satisfaction in this change of phenomena!” (*BOT*, 104). It seems we could say that, whereas Kant and Schopenhauer, see attested in the experience of the sublime *eternal and unchanging* existence, Nietzsche sees eternal and ceaselessly changing *existence*.

Life is *essentially* meaningless for Nietzsche, and it is an intoxication to realize that life, at bottom, lacks either an underlying, or overarching, purpose. And so, Nietzsche suggests that one play with it, create it, re-create it. Life is a mystery. The categories through which one understands the world, through which the world attains meaning, cannot always hold. The sublime is the occasion in which one sees the meaningless that underlies existence. Rather than avoiding the abyss, Nietzsche advises that one embrace it, become part of it, be as life is, be like Zarathustra, who carries his “Yes into all abysses.”⁴¹ The Dionysian insight, the experience of the sublime, therefore, offers an immediate justification for existence. Life might be meaningless insofar as the

⁴¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1978), 161. Henceforth cited as *Z*.

human perspective is concerned, but it is also overflowingly powerful and pleasurable. All one can do is embrace the flow and overflow.

The comfort that the Dionysian insight affords is *this*-worldly, ephemeral, transitory, and most importantly, artistic. Nietzsche explains that one must devote oneself to postures of creation that care nothing for lasting effects. Aligning oneself with nature means *being* like nature—excessive, unjustifiable, ceaselessly moving, striving, creating, and destroying. One must submit to the delicious abandonment of the cycle of nature and of life. Just as life brings forth and destroys without rule, without justification, without *reason*, one must be unflinchingly willing to destroy one's creations, or pass them by, only to create once more. This is what Nietzsche means when he says that life can only be justified *aesthetically*.⁴²

This posture is expounded throughout Nietzsche's later writings. In *Twilight of the Idols*, for example, Nietzsche characterizes the Dionysian in the following manner:

Saying Yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems, the will to life rejoicing over its own inexhaustibility even in the very sacrifice of its highest types—that is what I called Dionysian, that is what I guessed to be the bridge to the psychology of the *tragic* poet ... in order to be *oneself* the eternal joy of becoming, beyond all terror and pity—that joy which included even joy in destroying.⁴³

The Dionysian is the energy for creating, becoming, dancing, laughing, for *amor fati*, flying, singing, and all of the imagery that Nietzsche employs in his attempt to encircle the posture of *affirmation*—the principle by which Zarathustra goes under; it is that insight into the heart of existence that allows man to become *overman*; it is akin to the

⁴² This is a phrase uttered repeatedly in *The Birth of Tragedy*. See *BOT*, 52 and 141.

⁴³ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1982), 562.

healthy expression of the will to power.⁴⁴ The will, for Nietzsche, is always expressed as action, but what is expressed is power, and here we are to understand power as *vitality*, *strength of spirit* or even *courage*. Self-expressive form-giving, which is always creative, is a way in which the power *that is one's very being* is expressed. Nietzsche repeatedly asserts the necessity for us to think of destruction as a *part of* creation in the expression of a healthy will to power. Recall above that Nietzsche characterizes the Dionysian as an affirmation of the dissolution of individuals, of passing away and destroying. Hence, "if a temple is to be erected *a temple must be destroyed!*" (*GM*, 95).

This kind of creativity is *not* a wild release of energy but a discharge of will into a distinct expression and, consequently, relates to the importance that Nietzsche places on art. The artist becomes a paradigm for the overman. We saw that the Dionysian insight that tragedy brings forth incites a thirst for creativity as well as destruction. There is a kind of "mirroring" that exists between Nietzsche's most highly-valued posture of his later writings and the experience of the sublime described in *The Birth of Tragedy*: Both consist of the duality of creation and destruction, going under to go over, dissolution and revaluation. We have called this duality the double moment of the sublime. In a sense, then, the overman is continually living the sublime moment, each instant that the overman expresses a healthy will to power. All of these formulations, and many others within Nietzsche's corpus, congeal in "that Dionysian monster who bears the name of Zarathustra" (*BOT*, 26).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1989). Henceforth cited as *GM*. The "Second Essay" and Nietzsche's discussion of *ressentiment* offer insight into the distinction between healthy and unhealthy expressions of the will to power.

⁴⁵ Nietzsche writes, in the section of *Ecce Homo* devoted to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, that "the fundamental conception of [*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is] the idea of eternal recurrence, this highest

IV. Heidegger: *Sublime Anxiety—The Sublime in Phenomenological Ontology*

The weighty resolution [*der schwer gefasste Entschluss*] is at one with the voice of Fate (“*Es muss sein!*”); necessity, weight, and value are three concepts inextricably bound: only necessity is heavy, and only what is heavy has value.

—Milan Kundera

The kinship between the sublime and Heidegger’s account of anxiety, as articulated in *Being and Time*, pivots formally on the double moment constitutive of each, as well as on the revelatory character that each exhibits. Just like the experience of the sublime, the feeling of anxiety shakes the foundations of one’s complacency and everyday concerns. One is moved out of and away from oneself in this experience, which initially causes a negative reaction and feeling of loss. This loss of security and foundation is resolved, as if immediately, into a newly-found realization of the significance and possibilities of one’s life. Groundlessness, then, becomes the ground out of which one finds one’s freedom to exist *authentically*, whether it is as an impenetrable supersensible self, a life-denying ascetic, a life-affirming super human, or, as this chapter shall illuminate, an anticipating and resolute possibility.

Anxiety (*Angst*) is entrenched in the unfolding of the Heidegger’s project in *Being and Time*: The renewal of the question of the meaning of Being. Heidegger asserts that

formula of affirmation that is at all attainable” (*EH*, 295). The eternal recurrence is a widely critiqued notion in Nietzsche, but if we take Nietzsche here on his word, as I believe we should, and we understand the eternal recurrence as a “formula of affirmation,” then we may conclude that the eternal recurrence *is an instance of the sublime*. I shall not defend this claim here, though I suggest the reader look at the original formulation of the eternal recurrence in *The Gay Science*, §341

this questioning takes the form of “universal phenomenological ontology, and takes its departure from the hermeneutic of Dasein, which, as an analytic of *existence*, has made fast the guiding-line for all philosophical inquiry at the point where it *arises* and to which it *returns*.”⁴⁶ Dasein, as the being for whom Being is an issue, is the entity who enacts this simultaneous hermeneutic-analytic inquiry, as well as the object of that inquiry. In this way, the text can be read, in its totality, as an arduous unpacking of this initial notion of Dasein. But to unfold Dasein’s Being, some paths are better than others: “The possibility of proceeding towards Dasein’s Being ... is the greater, the more primordial is the phenomenon which functions methodologically as a disclosive state-of-mind. ... [A]nxiety performs some such function” (*BT*, 230).⁴⁷

In the first few pages of *Being and Time*, Heidegger tells us that Dasein is characterized by *possibility* (*Möglichkeit*) and, in each case, by *mineness* (*Jemeinigkeit*). These two aspects of Dasein allow Heidegger to distinguish between two modes of Being—authenticity (*Eigenlichkeit*) and inauthenticity (*Uneigenlichkeit*).⁴⁸ Dasein does not simply *have* possibilities, as though its decisions and attributes (e.g., studying philosophy or being fluent in German) were merely appended to a subject or a substance.

⁴⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 62. Henceforth cited as *BT*.

⁴⁷ “State-of-mind,” or *Befindlichkeit*, is seminal for Dasein’s understanding of its world. Heidegger writes, “Dasein’s openness to the world is constituted existentially by the attunement of a state-of-mind” (*BT*, 176). We shall see that the attunement of anxiety will force Dasein back *toward* itself in a manner that discloses to itself its ownmost possibility of existence. In addition to reaching Dasein’s Being *primordially*, Heidegger’s analysis demands that Dasein be disclosed as Being-a-whole, and so, insists that, through anxiety’s unique disclosive power, we are able to “grasp the totality of [Dasein’s] structural whole ontologically” (*BT*, 235). This demand plays a prominent role in Dasein’s authentic posture—anticipatory resoluteness—as we shall soon see.

⁴⁸ “In each case Dasein is mine to be one way or another. Dasein has always made some sort of decision as to the way in which it is in each case mine [*je meines*]. That entity which in its Being has this very Being as an issue, comports itself toward its Being as its ownmost possibility. ... And because Dasein is in each case essentially its own possibility, it *can*, in its very Being, ‘choose’ itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself” (*BT*, 68).

Rather, Dasein *is* its possibilities; it exists *as* possibility. When inauthentic, Dasein is lost to itself; authentic Being, on the other hand, is Dasein's realization of its uttermost possibility for existence. Heidegger is careful not to mark this distinction in terms of a quantitative or qualitative difference of Being: "The inauthenticity of Dasein does not signify any 'less' Being or any 'lower' degree of Being" (*BT*, 68). In fact, in order to analyze the ontological structures of Dasein, Heidegger begins not with one of Dasein's differentiated, concrete possibilities, but rather, with that mode of existing that is *undifferentiated*—that mode which Heidegger calls Dasein's "average everydayness" (*durchschnittliche Alltäglichkeit*).⁴⁹ Thus, Dasein's inauthenticity proves to be the "venue" of the unpacking of the Being of Dasein. This is significant because it is out of this average everydayness, out of inauthenticity, that Dasein's authentic Being is disclosed. Recall that the emergence of the most highly valued postures in Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche emerge within the quotidian complacencies that initially obscure those postures.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ "At the outset of our analysis it is particularly important that Dasein should not be interpreted with the differentiated character [*Differenz*] of some definite way of existing, but that it should be uncovered [*ausgedeckt*] in the undifferentiated character which it has proximally and for the most part" (*BT*, 69).

⁵⁰ It will be important for the reader to keep in mind that authenticity and inauthenticity are neither possibilities that Dasein chooses, nor do they exist on separate "levels" of reality. To the first point, Dasein *is* its possibilities whether it exists authentically or inauthentically; it is no less concerned with itself in its inauthentic mode: "here too Dasein's Being is an issue for it in a definite way; and Dasein comports itself towards it in the mode of average everydayness, even if this is only the mode of fleeing *in the face of it* and forgetfulness *thereof*" (*BT*, 69). Secondly, it is true that Heidegger distinguishes between the existential and existentiell, the ontological and the ontic, and these, in some ways, reflect the difference between the authentic and inauthentic, however, it would be a mistake to think, as was warned above, that authentic Being is somehow "closer" to Being than is inauthenticity. Heidegger writes, "even in the mode of inauthenticity, the structure of existentiality lies *a priori*" (*BT*, 69). One must be careful not to overlay traditional metaphysical distinctions upon Heidegger's technical terminology, for instance, that of "being" for authenticity and "becoming" for inauthenticity. That having been said, there are certainly some grounds for reading *Being and Time* from a more traditional and metaphysical (even theological) perspective, as we are doing, to some extent, with our interpretation of anxiety.

Dasein normally engages its environment (*Umwelt*) as sets of regional ontologies, which cohere to form referential totalities of involvements. Contextually and inter-textually, these involvements have significance for Dasein, who structures the world according to the assignments with which it is *concerned*: The entities encountered within the world are either ready-to-hand (*zuhanden*) or present-at-hand (*vorhanden*), that is, they are either proximately available and manipulatable, or existentially remote and analyzable. The totality of Dasein’s involvements, references, and assignments comprise its Being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*). Moreover, other entities, whose Being is also that of Dasein, are found within the world, and so, Dasein is additionally comprised of Being-with and finds itself in the context of a social world (*Mitwelt*). Being-in-the-world as a totality is “essentially care” (*BT*, 237). Care (*Sorge*), for Heidegger, is a “primordial structural totality [that] lies ‘before’ [‘vor’] every factual ‘attitude’ and ‘situation’ of Dasein, and it does so existentially *a priori*” (*BT*, 238).⁵¹ The average everyday manner

Without entering into that debate *per se*, we shall at least read authenticity as the existential mode that Heidegger *values* as highest and best.

⁵¹ Dasein’s care structure is of elemental importance to the project of *Being and Time*; it is the fundamental ontological structure of Dasein. A full treatment of it here, however, is impossible. It will be illuminated as needed for a working knowledge, and only further insofar as it is relevant to our topic. Hence, I offer the following summations. In terms of Being-in-the-world, concern (*Besorgen*) properly refers to entities that are ready-to-hand, and concerned Dasein is characterized as Being-alongside (*Sein bei*), while the Being-with of Others is called solicitude (*Fürsorge*) (see *BT*, 237). A more complete discussion of Dasein’s Being as care can be found in *BT*, Division I, Chapter VI, especially ¶41, yet the triadic care structure can be distilled in the chart below:

The Care Structure:

State-of-Mind (<i>Befindlichkeit</i>) (already in)	Language (<i>Sprache</i>) (alongside)	Understanding (<i>Verstehen</i>) (ahead of itself)
Facticity	Fallenness	Existentiality

Dasein is always already characterized by this structure—“ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in(the-world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world)”—which is *a priori* (*BT*, 237).

in which Dasein engages its social context is as *das Man*, the “they-self” or “impersonal one.” As *das Man*, Dasein is lost to itself within publicness (*Offentlichkeit*) and idle talk (*Gerede*), which hide Dasein from realizing itself authentically as its ownmost possibility. Heidegger writes, “Dasein’s absorption in the ‘they’ and its absorption in the ‘world’ of its concern, make manifest something like a *fleeing* of Dasein in the face of itself—of itself as an authentic potentiality-for-Being-its-Self” (*BT*, 229). This fleeing in the face of itself, turning away from itself, is called Dasein’s *falling* (*Verfallen*). The turning-away of falling consists in turning away from itself, which means that Dasein turns *toward*, and absorbs itself in, the “they” and the “world.”⁵²

When Dasein is anxious, it is not in the face of some distinct entity or possibility within the world. Heidegger explains that, in anxiety, “the totality of involvements of the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand ... is, as such, of no consequence; it collapses into itself; the world has the character of completely lacking significance” (*BT*, 231). This insignificance, in its indefiniteness, seems to come from nothing and nowhere, yet is as oppressive as it is vague.⁵³ Dasein’s realization that the entities within the world lack significance does not result in the conclusion that the world is vacant, however. Rather, Dasein understands that these entities lack significance in *themselves*. This leaves

An example can be seen if we look at conscience, which shall be of paramount importance to Dasein’s authenticity, and which is characterized by an *anxious* state-of-mind, *reticent* language, and *uncanny* understanding (*BT*, 342 and see below). I owe the conception of the chart given above to Professor Calvin O. Schrag, who, both in classroom lectures and private discussions, elucidated much of this material for me.

⁵² Heidegger writes, “‘fallenness’ in to the ‘world’ means an absorption in Being-with-one-another, in so far as the latter is guided by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity” (*BT*, 220).

⁵³ The indefiniteness of anxiety is what distinguishes it from another state-of-mind, fear, which Heidegger discusses in *BT*, ¶29, and again, specifically in contrast to anxiety, in ¶40. Essentially, fear is a state-of-mind that has, as its object and cause, some definite entity within the world. Heidegger takes time to distinguish anxiety and fear because, he claims, throughout history they have been confused and mistakenly used interchangeably. This need for clarification on Heidegger’s part reinforces the centrality of anxiety in his analysis of Dasein.

revealed only the world in its *worldhood*. Being-in-the-world *as such* is not only that in the face of which Dasein is anxious, but also that *about which* Dasein is anxious. It is possibility *in general* that oppresses Dasein when crippled with anxiety, not any specific entity. Its relation neither to the ready-to-hand and present-at-hand, nor to the social world, have anything to offer, and Dasein is bereft of the possibility both of involvement in the world and of understanding itself in terms of the ordinary public interpretation to which it had been accustomed.

This is the first half of the double moment operative in the sublime. Anxiety brings Dasein face-to-face with its naked Being-in-the-world, ripping it loose from its dependence on the structured totality of its referential involvements within the world, as well as from the idle public chatter of *das Man*. In this way, Dasein is unsettled, jettisoned from its customary manner of understanding the significance of itself and its relationship to the world it inhabits. Hence, the very means by which Dasein encounters Being-in-the-world and Being-with-Others vanish, and all that remains is Dasein, but Dasein who now feels *uncanny* (*unheimlich*), which Heidegger clarifies as the feeling of “not-being-at-home” (*das Nicht-zuhause-sein*) (*BT*, 233).⁵⁴

As we have seen in the case of the sublime, this initial negative moment is resolved not just into something positive, but into something *essential*. Because Dasein is forced outside of its contextual and inter-textual structure of the world, it has no recourse but to itself. Thus, says Heidegger, “anxiety makes manifest in Dasein its *being towards* its ownmost potentiality-for-Being—that is, its *Being-free for* the freedom of

⁵⁴ The importance of the uncanniness cannot be overemphasized. It is an indicator of Dasein’s finitude and an incisive instrument for revealing Dasein’s authentic possibilities. Simply said, “in uncanniness Dasein stands together with itself primordially” (*BT*, 333). This notion will emerge again in our discussion of conscience below.

choosing itself and taking hold of itself. Anxiety brings Dasein face to face with its *Being-free for the authenticity of its Being ... as a possibility which it always is*" (BT, 232).⁵⁵

Dasein's ownmost potentiality-for-Being is called *anticipatory resoluteness*. Both anticipation (*Vorlaufen*) and resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*), according to Heidegger, reveal to Dasein its "lostness in the they-self" (BT, 311 and 345). Anticipation is Dasein's authentic Being-towards-death (*Sein zum Tode*) and allows Dasein to remain open to the constant, yet indefinite, threat of its own finitude.⁵⁶ Death is the possibility of the impossibility of existence—that possibility, which is "one's ownmost, non-relational, and not to be outstripped" (BT, 294). All other possibilities are subsumed under the one that shows itself as the nullity of all possibilities whatsoever.⁵⁷ Given that Dasein exists as its possibilities, the prospect of death shakes Dasein's very foundations. However, if Dasein interprets death as *das Man*, that is, through the idle chatter of the public, it does not take over this possibility *as its own*. Rather, Dasein

⁵⁵ The themes of "choosing" and "freedom" keep emerging on the way to authentic Dasein. These characteristics of authenticity may offer rich fodder for a comparison with our previous thinkers, whose notions all involve, to varying degrees, the concept of *freedom*.

⁵⁶ The analysis of anticipation also brings to light Dasein's possibly Being-a-whole: "The existential structure of [Being-towards-death] proves to be the ontologically constitutive state of Dasein's potentiality-for-Being-a-whole [*Ganzseinkönnen*]" (BT, 277).

⁵⁷ "The more unveiledly this possibility gets understood, the more purely does understanding penetrate into it *as the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all*. Death, as possibility, gives Dasein nothing to be 'actualized', nothing which Dasein, as actual, could itself *be*. It is the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself towards anything, of every way of existing. In the anticipation of this possibility it becomes 'greater and greater'; that is to say, the possibility reveals itself to be such that it knows no measure at all, no more or less, but signifies the possibility of the measureless impossibility of existence" (BT, 307). The "measureless impossibility of existence" that Heidegger describes here (and which is, we shall see below, basically anxiety itself) resonates with the postmodern sublime that we shall treat in Chapter Five. In fact, Lyotard universalizes, to a cosmological register, the notion of the "impossibility of existence" with his thought of the "solar catastrophe," which is a thought of the sublime, with which *The Inhuman* begins. Many of the seeds of Lyotard's sublime are sown in Heidegger. Nothing evinces this more than the former's adoption of key Heideggerian terms, such as *Ereignis* and *es gibt*, in his discourse on the sublime.

considers death as just a “‘case of death’ in Others—an everyday occurrence which, if need be, gives us the assurance still more plainly that ‘oneself’ is still ‘living’” (*BT*, 298). This evasion, this “falling and fleeing,” in the face of death constitutes Dasein’s inauthentic Being-towards-Death. It is only as *anticipation* that Dasein can recognize death as its *ownmost* possibility. This occurs through a radical individualization of Dasein, who, rather than assuming that death “merely happens” to Others, takes up death as a distinctive possibility, as something that can, and *shall*, happen to itself.⁵⁸

What is germane to our inquiry is that anticipation—authentic Being-towards-Death—is revealed in anxiety. The following passage illustrates the deep connection between anxiety and anticipation:

The state-of-mind which can hold open the utter and constant threat to itself arising from Dasein’s ownmost individualized Being, is anxiety. In this state-of-mind, Dasein finds itself face to face with the “nothing” of the possible impossibility of its existence. Anxiety is anxious about the potentiality-for-Being of the entity so destined [des so bestimmten Seienden], and in this way it discloses the uttermost possibility. Anticipation utterly individualizes Dasein, and allows it, in this individualization of itself, to become certain of the totality of its potentiality-for-Being. For this reason, anxiety, as a basic state-of-mind belongs to such a self-understanding of Dasein on the basis of Dasein itself. Being-towards-death is essentially anxiety (BT, 310).

If Being-towards-death is *essentially* anxiety, it is because anxiety is the state-of-mind that opens, and keeps open, Dasein’s realization that death is something that must be affirmed and accepted, not only as some actual possibility, but as that *one* distinctive possibility that individualizes Dasein—as that unique *Möglichkeit* that reveals, in

⁵⁸ In ¶53, entitled “Existential Projection of an Authentic Being-towards-Death,” Heidegger offers what I see as the five characteristics of Dasein’s distinctive possibility that anticipation discloses: 1) death is Dasein’s *Ownmost* possibility, 2) death is *Non-Relational*, 3) death is *Not to be Outstripped*, 4) death is *Certain*, 5) death is *Indefinite* (as regards its certainty). Here one finds some of the greatest weight for a decidedly existential reading of *Being and Time*, offshoots of which we see, most poignantly, in Sartre.

complete transparency, Dasein's *Jemeinigkeit*.⁵⁹ To anticipate this uttermost possibility is to exist authentically within the world, and the ability to reside anticipatorily before death is only possible when Dasein is *anxious*. The indefiniteness of the threat that anxiety initially disclosed intensifies and concretizes when Dasein realizes its authentic Being-towards-death. The possibility of death is still indefinite, in terms of its *when*, but anticipation reveals to Dasein, in no uncertain terms, that the *that* of death is indubitable and not to be outrun—the best Dasein can do is *run-ahead* (*vorlaufen*) of this possibility. In this posture, Dasein gains a certain freedom to “choose” and “win” itself, as Heidegger says elsewhere.⁶⁰ He describes anticipation as an “*impassioned freedom towards death—a freedom which has been released from the illusions of the ‘they’, and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious*” (*BT*, 311).

Anticipation of death, however, is only half the story. At the end of Division II, Chapter I, after the discussion of anticipation that we have just examined, Heidegger tells us that “the question of Dasein’s authentic Being-a-whole and of its existential constitution still hangs in mid-air.” The analysis of anticipation of death, “*hitherto projected only in its ontological possibility,*” must prove to have an essential relationship with “*that authentic potentiality-for-Being which has been attested*” (*BT*,

⁵⁹ Anxiety, too, individualizes Dasein: “In anxiety there lies the possibility of a disclosure which is quite distinctive; for anxiety individualizes. This individualization brings Dasein back from its falling, and makes manifest to it that authenticity and inauthenticity are possibilities of its Being. These basic possibilities of Dasein (and Dasein is in each case mine) show themselves in anxiety as they are in themselves—undisguised by entities within-the-world, to which, proximally and for the most part, Dasein clings” (*BT*, 235).

⁶⁰ See our initial reflections on authenticity at the outset of the present chapter, as well as *BT*, 68.

311). What Heidegger is looking for is the existentiell attestation of Dasein's authentic potentiality-for-Being.⁶¹

This attestation is satisfied when Dasein understands and responds to the call of conscience (*Gewissen*), which is a call of care (*der Ruf der Sorge*), and a mode of discourse through which Dasein is summoned to its authentic possibilities. Conscience, like anxiety, is disclosive—it “gives us ‘something’ to understand” (*BT*, 314). As Heidegger says, “the call of conscience has the character of an *appeal* (*Anruf*) to Dasein by calling it to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self” (*BT*, 314). The “voice of conscience” (*Stimme des Gewissens*) is both issued to, and comes from, Dasein itself.⁶² The *caller* is Dasein, who, from the depth of its uncanniness, which itself is revealed authentically in anxiety, *calls upon* Dasein, but upon the Dasein who is lost as *das Man*. *What* Dasein reports from its uncanniness does not come in the form of individual precepts or admonitions. All that is left to Dasein at this point is its own potentiality-for-Being (*BT*, 322). Because the call of conscience literally has “nothing” to say, its mode of discourse is *reticence* (*Verschwiegenheit*) or *keeping silent*, because the caller does not want to lure the called back into the public chatter of *das Man*.⁶³ Thus, reticence proves to be a more authentic mode of discourse, and the mode that safeguards Dasein from

⁶¹ In authentic anticipation of death, the totality of Dasein's ontological structure was developed *existentially* (*BT*, Division II, Chapter I). However, its authentic concrete, *existentiell*, possibility as yet remains obscure. Dasein will only be disclosed properly as a whole once its totality has come into view. This is the task of Chapter II—analyses of conscience and resoluteness.

⁶² “*In conscience Dasein calls itself*. ... ‘It’ calls, against our expectations and even against our will. ... The call comes *from* me and yet *from beyond me and over me*” (*BT*, 320). Heidegger is quick to clarify this last sentence is not meant imply that conscience emanates from some higher power, such as God. In ¶59, Heidegger makes the crucial distinction between his ontological, existential interpretation of conscience and its ordinary or traditional interpretations.

⁶³ The indefiniteness of conscience's call should remind the reader of the indefiniteness that Dasein experienced when in the clutches of anxiety. Like anxiety, conscience discloses to Dasein only itself: “The call of conscience fails to give any such ‘practical’ injunctions, solely because it summons Dasein to existence, to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self” (*BT*, 340).

remaining lost to itself in inauthenticity. Heidegger writes, “the call comes from the soundlessness of uncanniness, and the Dasein which it summons is called back into the stillness of itself, and called back as something that is to become still” (*BT*, 343).⁶⁴

The appropriate response to the call of conscience is not merely that Dasein now accept that it *has* a conscience. Rather, the authentic response is *wanting to have a conscience* (*Gewissenhabenwollen*), which consists of a sort of “choosing” of oneself.⁶⁵ Heidegger says, “hearing the appeal correctly is tantamount to having an understanding of oneself in one’s ownmost authentic potentiality-for-Being—that is, to projecting oneself upon one’s ownmost authentic potentiality for becoming guilty” (*BT*, 333-34). It is this becoming guilty (*schuldig werden*) that the call gives us to understand. But Heidegger does not mean guilt (*Schuld*) here in any traditional sense.⁶⁶ Rather, guilt, in its existential conception, is something that belongs to the Being of Dasein—“so far as any Dasein factually exists, it *is* also guilty” (*BT*, 326). For Heidegger, Being-guilty (*schuldig sein*) denotes the inevitable conclusion that Dasein cannot enact each potential possibility available to it. In this way, Dasein’s Being-guilty is defined by a lack, by a “not,” which, when clarified in existential terms, must be considered “*as a ‘not’*” (*BT*,

⁶⁴ Notice the resemblance of this passage to “The stillest Hour” in *Zarathustra*. There Zarathustra’s “stillest hour” tells him the following: “Your fruit is ripe, but you are not ripe for your fruit. Thus you must return to your solitude again; for you must yet become mellow” (*Z*, 147).

⁶⁵ “In understanding the call, Dasein is in thrall to [*hörig*] its ownmost possibility of existence. It has chosen itself. ... What is chosen is *having-a-conscience* as Being-free for one’s ownmost Being-guilty” (*BT*, 334). We have been tracing the “choosing” and “freedom” that characterize authentic Dasein. Here the notion of Dasein “choosing” itself is what determines the *wollen* in *Gewissenhabenwollen*.

⁶⁶ In the course of his discussion, Heidegger dismisses two common usages of the notion of Being-guilty. One is guilt in the sense of “having debt” [*Schulden haben*]; the other in the sense of “being responsible for” [*schuld sein an*] (*BT*, 327). Both of the conceptions of guilt relate to things that concern one as possessions.

329). Thus, Heidegger defines the formally existential idea of guilt as “*Being-the-basis of a nullity*” (*BT*, 329).

What does this mean? Dasein always lags behind its possibilities—this is what Being-the-basis means. Dasein is thrown into the possibilities onto which it can project itself. However, in choosing among these possibilities, Dasein necessarily forsakes other possibilities. At the very basis of its Being, then, Dasein is powerless to take over its thrown basis, and thus, nullity is the basis for the possibility of inauthentic Being—of the falling of *das Man*. When Dasein hears, and genuinely responds to, the call of conscience, it is ready to take on its Being-guilty *authentically*, as something that it is already. The call, as the call of care, comes from the depths of Dasein’s uncanniness that “brings [Dasein] face to face with its undisguised nullity, which belongs to the possibility of its ownmost potentiality-for-Being” (*BT*, 333). In wanting to have a conscience, and thus, in becoming guilty authentically, Dasein is prepared to take over its thrown basis.⁶⁷ This posture of wanting to have a conscience is one way that Dasein understands itself, in which Dasein has been disclosed. Here, Dasein’s state-of-mind is anxious. It understands itself as a projection of itself upon its ownmost Being-guilty. It discourses with itself in reticence.⁶⁸

The name that Heidegger gives this “distinctive and authentic disclosedness [*Erschlossenheit*]” is “resoluteness” (*Entschlossenheit*), defined as Dasein reticently projecting itself upon its ownmost Being-guilty (*BT*, 342-43). Resoluteness is not only

⁶⁷ “Conscience is the call of care from the uncanniness of Being-in-the-world—the call which summons Dasein to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-guilty. And corresponding to this call, wanting-to-have-a-conscience has emerged as the way in which the appeal is understood” (*BT*, 335).

⁶⁸ I remind the reader to notice the triadic care structure apparent in the posture that comes out of the call of conscience, which is, of course, the call of care.

that which “first gives authentic transparency to Dasein” and “the authenticity of care itself,” but also ensures the existentiell attestation for which Heidegger’s account of conscience had always been tending (*BT*, 346 and 348). Resoluteness is always resoluteness of some factual Dasein in some factual Situation (*Situation*): “Only in resolution is resoluteness sure of itself” (*BT*, 345).⁶⁹ If “authentic existence is ... only a modified way in which [everydayness] is seized upon,” then it is essential to Heidegger’s task that, beyond the existential, ontological structures of Dasein, the concrete possibility of Dasein *taking action* in the world needs to emerge (*BT*, 224). Though resoluteness is the concrete, existentiell attestation of authentic Dasein, we have not yet reached the apogee of Dasein’s authenticity.⁷⁰

Dasein’s authentic Being-towards-death is *anticipation*, and authentic potentiality-for-Being, in its existentiell attestation, is *resoluteness*. Heidegger asks whether these notions can be brought together: “*Does resoluteness, in its ownmost existentiell tendency of Being, point forward to anticipatory resoluteness as its ownmost*

⁶⁹ Resoluteness brings Dasein into the Situation (*Situation*) of its “there,” which stands in contrast to *das Man*’s familiarity of the situation (*Lage*), which can only ever be the “general situation” (*allgemeine Lage*) in which things are interpreted by idle chatter and common sense. As such, *das Man* is decidedly irresolute (*Unentschlossenheit*). See *BT*, 345-47. Macquarrie and Robinson differentiate between *Situation* and *Lage* by capitalizing the former.

⁷⁰ The following discussion can be found in Division II, Chapter III. This chapter can be described as truly pivotal with regard to the text as a whole. It is in these pages that Heidegger finally formally introduces his notion of temporality, which propels the analytic of Dasein into uncharted territory. Naturally, the beginning of any *new* topic, especially in an *analysis*, implies the ending of the previous one. In many ways the reader receives this “ending” in the posture of *anticipatory resoluteness*, which is not only Dasein’s authentic potentiality-for-Being-a whole, attested in an existentiell manner, but also guarantees that Heidegger’s ontological Interpretation is a *primordial* one by virtue of having brought the *whole* (as well as the *authenticity*) of Dasein into its fore-having. Though the Interpretation has brought Dasein as a *whole* into its fore-having, its fore-seeing also demands the *unity* of this entity. This will be accomplished through the analysis of the temporal structure of Dasein, which is begun at the end of this chapter. This shift of focus from totality to unity, as the fulfillment of the fore-structure of Interpretation, is representative of the pivotal nature of this chapter. For the fore-structure of Interpretation, see *BT*, ¶32, specifically pp. 190-92.

authentic possibility?” (BT, 349). “What if it is only in the anticipation of [zum] death that resoluteness, as Dasein’s *authentic* truth, has reached the *authentic certainty* which *belongs* to it?” (BT, 350). With these questions, Heidegger wonders if resoluteness brings itself into authenticity only when it projects itself, not upon random possibilities that are close by, but upon Dasein’s *ownmost* and *uttermost* possibility, a possibility that lies ahead of every factual potentiality-for-Being of Dasein—death.⁷¹

Once we work out *anticipatory resoluteness* as a potentiality-for-Being-a-whole such that this potentiality is both *authentic* and possible in an existentiell way, *anticipatory resoluteness* becomes the mode “whereby Dasein is liberated *for* its uttermost possibility of existence” (BT, 350). And yet, Heidegger asks, “can this resoluteness undergo an *existentiell modalization* through Being-towards-death?” (BT, 353). Resoluteness is defined as reticently projecting oneself upon one’s ownmost Being-guilty. Taking over the guilt in resoluteness in an existentiell manner is accomplished authentically only when “that resoluteness, in its disclosure of Dasein, has become *so* transparent that Being-guilty is understood *as something constant*” (BT, 353). This *understanding* is possible only insofar as Dasein discloses to itself its potentiality-for-Being and does so “right up to its end” (*bis zu seinem Ende*)—right up to its death. Existentially, Being-at-an-end (*Zu-Ende-sein*) for Dasein is Being-towards-the-end (*Sein zum Ende*). But Being-towards-the-end, *which understands*, is anticipation of death. Thus, “as anticipation of death resoluteness becomes authentically what it can be.” Heidegger’s conclusion from these reflections is that there is no “mere” connection

⁷¹ Heidegger reminds his reader here, as I remind my own, that every step in his analysis and Interpretation of Dasein must be guided by the idea of *existence*. Therefore, the question of the connection between anticipation and resoluteness demands that we “project these existential phenomena upon the existentiell possibilities which have been delineated in them and ‘think these possibilities through to the end’ in an existential manner” (BT, 350).

between anticipation and resoluteness. Rather, “[*resoluteness*] *harbours in itself authentic Being-towards-death, as the possible existentiell modality of its own authenticity*” (BT, 353).

Having established the interplay between anticipation and resoluteness, Heidegger next elucidates this connection in phenomenal terms. Resoluteness is characterized by letting oneself be called forth to one’s ownmost *Being-guilty*. *Being-guilty* belongs to the Being of Dasein, which itself is characterized as a potentiality-for-Being. To assert that Dasein is *constantly* guilty means that Dasein maintains itself in this Being either authentically or inauthentically; *Being-guilty* is the *existentiell possibility* of *being* authentically or inauthentically guilty, which itself *is* only in the particular and current factual potentiality-for-Being (BT, 353). Thus, *Being-guilty* must be thought of *as a potentiality-for-Being-guilty*.

Resoluteness projects itself upon this potentiality-for-Being-guilty and understands itself in it, as a *primordial possibility of Dasein*. But Dasein’s primordial Being towards its potentiality-for-Being is Being-towards-death, which is disclosed *as possibility* by anticipation. “Thus, only *as anticipating* does resoluteness become a primordial Being towards Dasein’s ownmost potentiality-for-Being. Only when it ‘qualifies’ itself as Being-towards-death does resoluteness understand the ‘can’ of its potentiality-for-Being-guilty” (BT, 354).

Furthermore, resoluteness authentically takes over, in Dasein’s existence, the fact that it is the null basis of its own nullity. Death, conceived existentially, is the possibility of the impossibility of existence—the utter nullity of Dasein:

The nullity by which Dasein’s Being is dominated primordially through and through, is revealed to Dasein itself in authentic Being-towards-death. Only on

the basis of Dasein's *whole* Being does anticipation make Being-guilty manifest. Care harbours in itself both death and guilt equiprimordially. Only in anticipatory resoluteness is the potentiality-for-Being-guilty understood *authentically and wholly*—that is to say, *primordially* (BT, 354).

Thus, we can characterize *anticipatory resoluteness* as “that understanding ... which frees for death the possibility of acquiring *power* over Dasein's *existence* and of basically dispersing all fugitive Self-concealment.” Anticipatory resoluteness “brings one without Illusions into the resoluteness of ‘taking action’. ... Along with the sober anxiety which brings us face to face with our individualized potentiality-for-Being, there goes an unshakable joy in this possibility” (BT, 357-8).⁷²

Anticipatory resoluteness in Heidegger, thus, exemplifies the second aspect of the double moment, as an elevated, empowered significance of oneself is established, and a renewal of one's understanding within the world is affirmed. Heidegger writes that anxiety “signifies that one is letting the possibility of an authentic potentiality-for-Being be lit up. ... Anxiety merely brings one into the mood for a *possible* resolution ... [and] holds the moment of vision *at the ready* [*auf dem Sprung*]” (BT, 393-4). The moment of vision (*Augenblick*) is the moment of anticipatory resoluteness in which one is ready for action, for taking on one's ownmost Being-guilty and Being-towards-death, and for realizing one's ownmost possibility for existing *authentically*. As Heidegger says,

⁷² That Heidegger talks about *joy* here is striking. Kant's experience of the sublime involves *pleasure*, and Nietzsche's account brims with language and metaphors that evoke feelings of bliss, joy, and ecstasy. The sublime is an *aesthetic phenomenon*, and so, we would expect to hear descriptions of the *feelings* it produces. Should this imply that anxiety or anticipatory resoluteness should be considered as an aesthetic phenomenon, or that Heidegger's understanding of state-of-mind, *Befindlichkeit*, is an aesthetic feeling? Some of these questions shall be entertained at the end of this chapter. Here, I merely mean to highlight another instance in which Heidegger's description manifests the kinship that exists between his notion of anxiety and what we find in the sublime.

“anxiety liberates [Dasein] *from* possibilities which ‘count for nothing’ [‘*nichtigen*’], and lets him become free *for* those which are authentic” (BT, 395).⁷³

⁷³ The last two quotes were extracted from Heidegger’s *temporal* account of anxiety, an account that we purposefully leave unexamined. Temporality is, of course, fundamental to the project of *Being and Time*. Heidegger informs his readers, in the Introduction, that he shall frame the “Interpretation of Dasein in terms of temporality” and asserts that “the explication of time [is] the transcendental horizon for the question of Being” (BT, 63). Furthermore, the three aspects of the care structure correspond to the three aspects of time: the past is factual (already in), the present is fallen (alongside), and the future is existential (ahead of itself). In general, Division II’s task is to show how Dasein’s ontological structures are to be understood as *temporal* structures, and temporality is, therefore, constitutive of Dasein. Even Dasein’s modes of inauthenticity and authenticity are made possible by temporality (BT, 377). Our analyses of anticipation and resoluteness (Chapters I and II of Division II), however, manifest the temporal character of Dasein’s existential structures, even without our having to delve into an explicit discussion of their temporality in *Being and Time*. For instance, Dasein’s authenticity is futural [*zukünftig*], and primordial time proves to be finite (see BT, 378). Both anticipation, *Vorlaufen*, which has a futural aspect already inscribed within it, and resoluteness, which is a recognition of finitude in a concrete way, imply the temporality toward which Heidegger eventually turns his hermeneutic. Furthermore, the *Augenblick* is a *moment* in which authentic Dasein takes hold of its ownmost possibility. Thus, though a full discussion of Dasein’s temporality is too lengthy to engage here, these observations suffice to reveal its importance and complicity in our endeavor.

One note on anxiety’s temporality worth mentioning is that anxiety brings Dasein back to “repeatability” (BT, 395). In a 1924 lecture, entitled *Der Begriff der Zeit*, in which Heidegger discusses, in a concise yet still quite sophisticated form, the temporality of Dasein, he remarks that only the “how” of time (never the “what”) can be repeated. The manner in which Dasein comes back to its “how” is conscience (see Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, trans. William McNeill (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 1992), 19). This lecture is noted by Heidegger at the beginning of Division II, Chapter II (BT, 313), as a venue in which the ideas concerning conscience were previously “communicated” (see BT, 495 for the note itself). Though it predates *Being and Time* and thus offers a less extensive discussion of time, I mention it for two reasons. First, the notion that Dasein is authentically temporal when it understands that its “how” can be repeated reminds me of Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence, which is a formula for overcoming man’s “ill will against time and time’s ‘it was’” (Z, 140). That the content of time cannot ever be unwilled is a cause for despair and a symptom of the spirit of gravity, which is the very spirit, in the form of the dwarf, that the gateway of the “moment” and the affirmation of the eternal recurrence are invoked to destroy. It seems, then, that when Dasein takes over its temporality (which itself *is*) *authentically*, it is engaging the past in a similar fashion. That is to say, accepting the “what” of the past *as past*, frees Dasein to be authentic in *how* it engages the world—authenticity is nothing other than a way of Being, a “how.” Secondly, the term *Jeweiligkeit* (translated as “specificity,” or “temporal particularity”) appears throughout the 1924 lecture, but is not used in *Being and Time*. In the former context, the term is constitutive of Dasein and acts to individualize Dasein, much like *Jemeinigkeit* does in the latter work. However, *Jeweiligkeit* contains a temporal significance that *Jemeinigkeit* lacks (*Weile* means “while.” McNeill’s notes provide an extensive discussion of the etymology of the word). *Jeweiligkeit*, then, might prove an intriguing characteristic of Dasein in which to “locate” anticipatory resoluteness, insofar as *Jeweiligkeit* particularizes Dasein in a specific moment, and

Our analyses of Kant's, Schopenhauer's, and Nietzsche's sublimines have revealed that the modern/metaphysical sublime is, like Heidegger's anxiety, a "primordial principle of far-reaching disclosure." The experience of the sublime, like that of anxiety, is disclosive of a manner of being in and with the world that is highly valued, regardless of specific content, by those thinkers who find value in those disclosive experiences. In Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, we see that this experience, because it is a decidedly *aesthetic* experience, holds a privileged place in the whole of their philosophies. The creator and appreciator of art, in Schopenhauer, becomes the prelude to the ascetic and, thus, to salvation. The artistic creator finds never-before seen power in Nietzsche's hands and becomes emblematic of the overman, for whom creation becomes a way of life. In Kant, aesthetics is not the focus, but a means to greater ends. The autonomy of reason and will are exposed or symbolized in aesthetic experience, but the former are of a nobler origin and standing. *Being and Time*, however, is devoid of any aesthetic content, but we must ask ourselves: If anxiety and the sublime have such close ties, is anxiety an aesthetic phenomenon?

There seem to be two courses we could follow here. The first is to ask about the relationship between aesthetics and anxiety. On the one hand, we might conclude that anxiety is aesthetic, and thus, what Heidegger is describing, though couched in different terms and proffered as a piece of fundamental ontology, is essentially the same thing that our other thinkers have called the sublime. On the other hand, we might say that anxiety is *not* an aesthetic phenomenon, but something altogether different. A standard reading of *Being and Time* seems to favor the second option, especially if we recall the

it is only in the *specificity* of a moment—in an "at *this* moment"—that concrete action can take place.

primordially of *Befindlichkeit*, which, along with understanding, constitutes Dasein's Being-in. In order to describe anxiety as aesthetic, then, we would have to show that *aisthesis* is somehow a similarly primordial constitution of the human being.

A second path would be to ask whether the sublime is a kind of *Befindlichkeit*. If it is, then we might conclude that anxiety and the sublime are two names for the same phenomenon, both being that specific state-of-mind that discloses one's most genuine posture (through the double moment as we have described it here). If the sublime is *not* a type of *Befindlichkeit*, then we are forced again to wonder how *aisthesis* and *Befindlichkeit* might relate to one another that they include, separately and independently, virtually synonymous experiences.

In attempting to reveal the nature of their concordance, we might be inclined to show all of the similarities between anxiety and the sublime, like the *freedom* that both provide; or the similarities between the Kantian *Stimme* of reason and the Heideggerian *Stimme* of conscience; or those between the *Augenblick* in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and the *Augenblick* in *Being and Time*; or we might venture close etymological analyses of *aisthesis* and *Befindlichkeit*, looking for similarity of usage in their ancient Greek and German contexts, respectively; and so on.

We shall elaborate the issue along *none* of these vectors, however. Instead, let us look at the "analogy" (which I call it for, as yet, a lack of a better term) between anxiety and the sublime along the lines upon which we originally conceived it. It is as an interruptive, incisive, and disclosive experience that they are analogues, and their analogy holds on a structural, formal level, with respect both to the double moment and to that which is disclosed through this moment. Our analogy has never rested on *content*. Nor

has it revolved on the hopes of clarifying terminology, which is, in truth, all that the aforementioned possibilities could ever offer. Surely, we could make arguments *simultaneously* for and against calling “anxiety” the “sublime,” or “the sublime” a “*Befindlichkeit*.” It is in *principle*—as disclosive, far-reaching, and primordial—that the sublime and anxiety find themselves brought to bear on one another. It would make no difference to the purpose of our inquiry whether or not we determined the relationship between anxiety and aesthetics, for our inquiry rests on the nature of the disclosure that anxiety and the sublime provide—the disclosures that each, themselves, *are*. We might just as well conceive of a new term to describe this phenomenon—and we would be better suited to do *that* than to bend either anxiety or the sublime to conform to one another. Such an action violates each term and the context in which it was given birth and is tantamount to interpretive hubris.

Keeping our inquiry at the level of structural similitude, then, we may freely and respectfully assert that anxiety is *like* the sublime, and that anxiety conforms to the same formal structures as the sublime does. Anxiety can rightly be considered a *case* of the sublime, but so too is the sublime a *case* of anxiety. *Anxious* is a way to describe the sublime experience, and *sublime* a way to describe anxiety. Heidegger is *not* doing aesthetics in *Being and Time*, and Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche are *not* doing phenomenological ontology in *The Critique of Judgment*, *The World as Will and Representation*, and *The Birth of Tragedy*, respectively. And yet—in each, the double moment occurs, and, in each, some kind of truth emerges in that occurrence.

That we have found something like the sublime in phenomenological ontology is the point. And this point will be made sharper in Chapter Five, in which we shall see

Lyotard's sublime leave aesthetic experience and dwell in the realm devoted primarily to *thinking*. We are motivated by the appeal of the sublime as a principle of disclosure that opens up modes of living and novel ways of thinking about existence. Like Plato's "summoners of the understanding," Husserl's "abnormals," or Deleuze's "claws of strangeness"—all of which cause thought to have to "step in" and "take over" for sense-perception's complacency—like these, but more powerful and pleasurable, the sublime offers to us something *more*. The heart of existence beats continuously but inaudibly.⁷⁴ In the double moment, however, we are given the occasion, in a glimpse, to *hear* it, and, in hearing and feeling it, we realize that we *are* it, that it beats not only *for*, but *as*, ourselves. And we do *feel* it; the sublime is a feeling, as is anxiety. These experiences, which can genuinely be called life-altering—*sans* the clichéd and banal meaning that this term regularly connotes—occur in the heart, in the bowels, in the entrails—not in the suspended mind or detached *cogito*. Lyotard is fascinated with Kant's third *Critique* because he finds there, in reflective judgment, in what is otherwise a desert of cognition, a feeling, though not simply feeling in general, but thought feeling itself thinking—which is, for Lyotard, a scent of the sublime.⁷⁵ Deleuze makes the same point, stressing the reflexivity of the faculties, in the third chapter of *Difference and Repetition*.⁷⁶ Life as *truly livable*—felt as livable—is what is offered in the experience of the sublime. Dasein does not only realize its ownmost possibility when anxious (or, we can now say, when faced with the sublime), but realizes, for the first time, that it *is* possibility. The freedom

⁷⁴ Nietzsche states that "the greatest events ... are not our loudest but our stillest hours. ... [The world] revolves *inaudibly*" (*Z*, 131).

⁷⁵ Lyotard's complex take on Kant's reflective judgment can be found in the first chapter of *Lessons* and shall be discussed in Chapter Five below.

⁷⁶ See "The Image of Thought" in Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 129-167.

that comes in this realization is not that of making decisions, but that of *feeling oneself free* to make decisions. *Das Man* has as much effective will to carry out any of its quotidian tasks as authentic Dasein, but it is only the latter who understands, in the primordial depths of its Being, that it is *free*, and that it is only ever as free, that it *is*. The sublime not only lights up a life that one can take over as one's own, but also illuminates Being itself. Pointing towards Being, the sublime exceeds (as sublime, how could it not exceed?) merely aesthetic consideration; it is as ontology—as *onto-aesthetic*—that the sublime needs to be (re)considered.⁷⁷ Heidegger's anxiety already points us in that direction, even in the case of the modern/metaphysical sublime, in which the Being that is illumined is that of Dasein, that of the human. Out of the double moment emerges the power of the human will to overcome its lostness and complacency and to be—in a general sense that applies to all four thinkers—*more* human. Thus, the modern sublime is still very much a *humanist* sublime. Its postmodern account shall evince the sublime's intimacy with Being to an even greater degree, but whether or not it is thereby relieved of its humanity, however, we shall have to see.

⁷⁷ The experience also certainly points to *how* to be, which involves an “ethical” aspect—in the broader sense of the Greek *ethos* (hence the quotation marks). The “ethical” is a fundamental piece of the sublime in all the thinkers we have considered. The sublime has, throughout its history, been linked to “ethics.”

V. Lyotard: *From Erfahrung to Ereignis—Onto-aesthetics and the Postmodern Sublime*

The value of a thought is measured by its distance from the continuity of the familiar.

—Adorno

What the sublime is, Lyotard never explicitly tells his reader. Rather, he tells us *that* it is; he offers *instances* of the sublime, of the sublime's *happening*. Because the sublime escapes characterization, Lyotard never attempts to characterize it; he merely points to moments in which we find ourselves *there*, where *it happens*, whatever it *is*, “before” it is *anything*. Lyotard does not write long, exhaustive treatises on aesthetics, the likes of which philosophy has found in Burke, Kant, and Schopenhauer. His texts are short. They avoid definitional or essentialist accounts of the sublime. It is as though Lyotard, in each essay or paper, takes up a different and analogous *moment* of the sublime. In the end, what he offers is not a theory, but a reticulation of the numerous interstices that he deems belong to and make up the sublime.

Lyotard's treatment of the sublime transgresses the limits of aesthetics, to which the sublime has always been confined. Indeed, I shall describe how Lyotard's enumerations expand the domain of the sublime into the realm of ontology—and even beyond. Modern/metaphysical articulations of the sublime valorize the metaphysical sureties that emerge from an *experience* of the sublime. Lyotard's sublime, in contrast, is not given in experience, nor does it *reveal* truth to its viewer. It is not merely a *means* to truth. It *is* truth, in a sense, because the occurrence of the sublime brings its viewer into

an intimate proximity, for an instant, with Being. This is what Lyotard calls “ontological dislocation.”⁷⁸

Though the postmodern sublime does not completely sever its ties to the modern account to which it owes its origin, it radically rethinks the categories that apply to the sublime experience. At times, Lyotard seems, emphatically, to denounce the sublime as an aesthetic phenomenon. In *Heidegger and “the jews,”* in fact, he describes the sublime, due to its essential unrepresentability, as *anaesthetic*, and owing more to *pathos* than to *aisthesis*.⁷⁹ At other times, however, he is prone to discuss the sublime in terms of painting or music, which clearly demand at least some aesthetic consideration. Our inquiry, however, shall maintain that Lyotard’s sublime prompts *thinking*—thinking the limit, thinking the differend, thinking the un-inscribable.

We can sort out *pathos*, *aisthesis*, and *noesis* if we look at Lyotard’s admittedly unorthodox reading of Kantian reflective judgment in *Lessons on the Analytic of the*

⁷⁸ Rodolphe Gasché, in *The Honor of Thinking*, points to the ontological import of Lyotard’s sublime in the following passage: “Lyotard’s understanding of the sublime is inseparable from his understanding of the ontological. Rather than referring to the question of self-preservation of the individual, or the integrity and power of reason, Lyotard’s sublime implicates the possibility of Being and the concomitant possibility of non-Being.” Rodolphe Gasché, *The Honor of Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 321. Henceforth cited as *HT*. In a chapter entitled, “A Stupid Passion,” Gasché uncannily captures the ontological significance of Lyotard’s sublime that interests us. Throughout he refers to Lyotard’s “ontological sublime” and ends the chapter with the assertion that the sublime “must abandon aesthetic categories in favor of ontological ones. . . . The abyss of non-Being, of the nothing, and the senseless, is only truly and properly acknowledged in a feeling of sublime stupor” (*HT*, 326).

⁷⁹ “The problematic of the unrepresentable as such emerges, a long time ago, with the notion of the sublime.” Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and “the jews,”* trans. Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 34. Henceforth cited as *HJ*. Lyotard links the problematic of the unrepresentable, not with the Greeks, but with Christianity and Judaism. *Aisthesis* is at stake in the problematic of the sublime, as is “a world that touches, [an] aesthetic world. For the unrepresentable is the in-tact, that which will have preceded all touch, and will not have been of the world nor in the world” (*HJ*, 34). Lyotard continues, “*Aisthesis* can only repress the truth of *pathos* (which is not pathetic) like the splendor of the church represses the presence of Jesus in the heart” (*HJ*, 34). I refer the reader to Gasché’s chapter, “A Stupid Passion,” in *HT*, in which Gasché, as his title indicates, picks up on Lyotard’s emphasis on the sublime *pathos*.

Sublime. Reflective judgment, he argues, is the life vein of critical thought, which “has at its disposal in its reflection, in the state in which a certain synthesis not yet assigned places it, a kind of transcendental pre-logic. The latter is in reality an aesthetic, for it is only the sensation that affects all actual thought insofar as it is merely thought, thought feeling itself *thinking* and feeling itself *thought*” (*L*, 32).⁸⁰ The thinking involved in the sublime is reflective—it is thought *feeling* itself thinking, so it is both feeling and thinking—and this auto-affective thinking is “in reality an aesthetic.” But auto-affective thinking is not merely a synonym for “reflective judgment” or another way to articulate Kant’s notion of aesthetics. Lyotard understands it as transcendental, in the Kantian sense, for all of philosophy. That is to say, Lyotard’s unorthodox interpretation of reflective judgment consists in the importance Lyotard places on reflective judgment as a proleptic capacity, or, as he calls it above, a “transcendental pre-logic,” that is the precondition for *doing* philosophy at all.⁸¹

Kant’s sublime, in the hands of Lyotard, allows the mind to feel a “soul-stirring delight,” a *begeisternde Wohlgefallen*, which is itself nothing but the voice of reason, *die Stimme der Vernunft*, calling thought to its destination, its *Bestimmung*: to think the absolute. Because the absolute itself exceeds presentation, the delight in being called upon is *felt* to be absolute, and so, “sublimity [predicates] the *Geistesstimmung*, the

⁸⁰ Nancy, in “The Sublime Offering,” similarly finds a deeply-rooted aesthetic element within Kant’s cognitive, faculty framework.

⁸¹ “I would argue that an importance of an entirely different order [than that of the “thematic” reading] may be accorded the ‘Analytic of Aesthetic Judgment’, that of being a propaedeutic to philosophy, a propaedeutic that is itself, perhaps, all of philosophy (for ‘we can at most only learn how to philosophize [*höchstens nur philosophieren lernen*], but we cannot learn philosophy’). One must be able to see beyond the strictly thematic reading that I evoked and that Kant’s text strongly encourages. The thematic reading remains faithful to the concern for a system that haunts the Introduction to the third *Critique*. However, aesthetic judgment conceals, I would suggest, a secret more important than that of doctrine, the secret of the ‘manner’ (rather than the method) in which critical thought proceeds in general” (*L*, 6).

disposition of thinking, that experiences or reflects on itself” (*L*, 81). The sublime is aesthetic insofar as it is, essentially, the sensation of thought feeling itself thinking. The sublime may be anaesthetic in one regard—it cannot be something that one perceives through the senses—but its *pathos*, as we have just shown, is intimately bound to thought’s auto-affection. Because thought’s reflexivity is characterized not by self-consciousness, which would divorce it from feeling, but by self-affection, reflective judgment, as pathetic, is also aesthetic. The sublime, which is Lyotard’s name for the intersection of *aisthesis*, *pathos*, and *noesis*, is, then, a kind of *aesthetic reflection* that lies at the basis of all critical, and hence, all philosophical thought.⁸²

In light of these clarifications, we are justified in calling Lyotard’s sublime a *thinking*. In fact, we assert that the sublime is a moment in which *genuine* (aesthetic, reflective, auto-affected, critical, philosophical) thinking is sparked.⁸³ Such a characterization certainly ties the sublime to aesthetics, but in a manner that, rather than keeping the former constricted within the latter’s domain, frees both the notion of aesthetics and the sublime to apply, in a primordial and far-reaching manner, to the entire manifold of philosophical inquiry. Lyotard’s postmodern/non-metaphysical sublime accomplishes, explicitly, what we have begun to show exists, latently, in the modern/metaphysical sublime.

Lyotard’s sublime is the “place,” both temporal and spatial, in which the mind is suspended in the sheer face of itself. At that moment, *there is*. That is all. Nothing further takes place. No hidden truths are revealed in this experience. *It happens*.

⁸² The title of the first chapter of *Lessons* is “Aesthetic Reflection.” Lyotard writes that “with reflection, thinking seems to have at its disposal the critical weapon itself. For in critical philosophy the very possibility of philosophy bears the name of reflection” (*L*, 31).

⁸³ Again, Gasché concurs: “In [sublime] stupor alone, philosophical thinking is true to its task” (*HT*, 326).

Not only is the mind suspended in the moment of the sublime, but also all of quotidian, subjective, human *experience* is suspended. There is nothing but *there is*. Lyotard teaches us that the instances in which we are brought into “contact” with *there is* can occur—do occur—in our myriad engagements within the world and with one another.

In this chapter, I shall attempt to weave together Lyotard’s variegated explications of the sublime. The various terms that I am analyzing, all of which *name* the sublime, are not offered as an exhaustive list, but rather illustrate how far-reaching the sublime can be. Extending past the limits of aesthetics, the sublime, in its non-metaphysical/post-modern articulation, is an event that has far-ranging implications for multifarious domains within philosophy, as well as within human life. The thread running throughout Lyotard’s polynomial sublime is the following: The sublime is an occasion that, because of the breakdown of quotidian thought and the ontological shock it induces—what the modern account might call the sublime’s *unheimlichkeit*—ignites genuine thinking; it is a generative occurrence, allowing for re-evaluation and re-articulation of already-inscribed philosophical concepts.⁸⁴ The sublime is, each and every time—in every instance of its happening—a rebirth, a *renaissance*, of philosophy itself.

“Is it happening?” (*arrive-t-il?* or *ereignet es?*) asks the fundamental question of the Lyotardian sublime. Gasché writes, “when we respond to the *is it happening?* thinking is intrinsically tied up with the feeling of the sublime” (*HT*, 323). The event, occurrence, the mere *happening*, is the moment of the sublime. All that one can ask of

⁸⁴ I should like to show, had we room enough to introduce Nancy into the discussion, that the sublime also proffers itself as a venue in which to reconfigure our postures of being-in-the-world and being-with-one-another.

this moment is whether or not it *is*, at that instant, *happening*. The force of this question can be felt in Burke's sublime, to which Lyotard often refers. According to Lyotard, what is at stake in Burke's aesthetics (and what is missing in Kant's sublime) is that "the sublime is kindled by the threat of nothing further happening."⁸⁵ The terror that Burke attributes to the sublime is linked, argues Lyotard, to *privation*; for example, the terror that occurs in complete darkness. The privation of light, which is so crucial not only to our sensible, bodily comportment in the world, but also to our security and sense of well-being, causes a feeling of terror. The seeable becomes suddenly unseeable, and one fears that, possibly, one may never see again. In this moment, the *it happens* is felt to be in danger of *not happening*, and so this moment is sublime. Light is just one example, but Lyotard also mentions the privation of objects, of others, and of language, which would correspond, respectively, to terrors of emptiness, solitude, and silence (*I*, 99). In all of these instances, the privation of those things, people, and conditions that surround us and contextualize our world—the privation of all that makes our world comfortable, intelligible, and manageable—causes one to feel terror, but a peculiar terror that consists in the feeling that *nothing* further will *happen*.⁸⁶

When faced with privation of this sort, one eagerly asks the question: *Is it happening?* The "it" is the instant of the sublime that we find in Lyotard's notions of the event or the *there is (il y a)*, which cuts through the darkness and the terror and answers the question—yes, it is happening, but that is all. However, the mode of thought that

⁸⁵ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 99. Henceforth cited as *I*.

⁸⁶ One can already see an interesting connection brewing between Lyotard's emphasis, in the experience of the sublime, on the threat of "nothing" and Heidegger's understanding of *Angst*, which Dasein experiences in the face of nothing in particular, but by the simple fact of its being-in-the world.

responds to the event is, as Gasché reminds us, “the kind of thinking Lyotard characterizes as the most fundamental; it is the very task of thought” (*HT*, 323).

“Event,” in the sense that Lyotard employs it, is similar to what Heidegger called *Ereignis*. In *On Time and Being*, as the title indicates, Heidegger recasts ontology and temporality in an attempt to remove the difficulties of his earlier account of their relationship in *Being and Time*. In elaborating their co-determination, he says, “what determines both, time and Being, in their own, that is, in their belonging together, we shall call: *Ereignis*, the event of Appropriation.”⁸⁷ The event, Heidegger maintains, “is not simply an occurrence, but that which makes any occurrence possible” (*TB*, 19). *Ereignis*, then, contains the transcendental, or quasi-transcendental, as Derrida might say, element, which we have discussed in Lyotard’s sublime. Lyotard himself, in *The Differend*, reflects on *Ereignis*, not, however, in the context of *time* and Being, but of Being and *non-Being*. He asserts that the question of time “is called forth by a feeling: it is possible for nothing to happen. ... This feeling is anxiety or surprise: there is something rather than nothing.”⁸⁸ Though Lyotard is concerned with the question of *time* in this passage, it is clear from what we have already seen though Lyotard’s work on Kant’s sublime and his gravitation towards Burke’s sublime, that his words are equally applicable to the question of the sublime. The sublime terror that nothing will happen is

⁸⁷ Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 19. Henceforth cited as *TB*.

⁸⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. George Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 74-75. Henceforth cited as *D*. Less than a page after this passage Lyotard refers explicitly to Heidegger’s account of *Ereignis* in *On Time and Being*. See Hugh J. Silverman’s essay, “Lyotard and the Events of the Postmodern Sublime,” in *Lyotard: Philosophy, Politics, and the Sublime*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (New York: Routledge, 2002) for elucidative remarks on Lyotard’s debt to Heidegger’s notion of *Ereignis* and *es gibt*. Henceforth cited as *LPPS*.

not relieved when some particular event happens, but when, much more simply, *event* or *Ereignis* “happens.” One delights merely in the *quod of there is*.⁸⁹

Lyotard is drawn to Burke’s sublime due to its facility to illustrate the *sheerness* of the sublime moment, which *happens* on the very edge, or limit of Being and non-Being.⁹⁰ Rather than a feeling of elevation (which we see in Kant, for instance), Burke emphasizes the relief from the privation of Being. This allows the sublime to be, for Lyotard, a feeling of *intensification*. Intensification of what? Of Being. Lyotard writes, “intensity is associated with ontological dislocation” (*I*, 101). What Lyotard means by this “ontological dislocation” is that one is “moved,” “transported” by the “nearness,” for lack of a better term, of Being in the moment of the sublime.⁹¹ The sublime is incisive—it cuts through to the basic fact of *there is*, which involves an immediacy with respect to Being that is simply unattainable, because it is “covered over,” in mundane affairs. Herein lies the dis-location. One is transported to a “place” in which Being speaks directly, but in which it only ever says, “I am.” In our quotidian lives, “I am” is continuously hidden from us by whatever predicate commonly follows these words. “I am a student. I am tall. I am from the United States”—all of these “miss” the simple fact: *I am*. The use of the first person pronoun is not used to make any judgment or argument either for or against something like a Cartesian subjectivity. Rather, I want to contextualize the matter and bring the sublime to the heart of human experience, in which we are constantly affirming identities that ask “who” or “what” we are. The sublime

⁸⁹ Lyotard relies heavily on the distinction between *quod* (“that”) and *quid* (“what”) in *The Inhuman*. We shall discuss the distinction in detail below.

⁹⁰ Nancy, in *The Sublime Offering*, talks of this limit as the “place” where the sublime happens—the sublime “beats” (a recurring trope in Nancy’s corpus) along the limit-line between Being and non-Being.

⁹¹ Compare Lyotard’s notion of ontological dislocation and “nearness” to Being to Heidegger’s understanding of *Nahheit* and the “nearing nearness” of the original extending of time in *TB*, 15.

pierces the wall of identity, leaving bare *that* something *is there*, whatever *that* may be.⁹² Recall the words spoken by God, in the form of the burning bush, to Moses in *Exodus*, 3:14: “I am that I am.” This exclamation asserts, essentially, that God is the ground of Being, of the being-able to say *that* “I am,” as the foundation of the being (who is) able to say “I am.” Removed from its theological baggage, this is nothing other than the annunciation that *there is*, which, as we shall see elsewhere in Lyotard, is the annunciation of Being. The intensification that occurs in the instant of the sublime is that of Being, and of one’s “proximity” to Being, to which one has been re-located.

The fear that nothing further will happen is “absolutized” by Lyotard in his discussion of the solar catastrophe. He challenges his readers to consider the moment when the sun explodes, leaving *nothing* of the human world behind. He speaks of this thought as a limit, but not the kind of limit to which we are accustomed. The explosion of the sun is, so to speak, the limit of all limits—the limit of limit itself. Lyotard writes, “after the sun’s death there won’t be a thought to know that its death took place” (*I*, 9). This death is completely different than the one that existential philosophy heralds as that which must be owned and accepted, in order that one may begin truly to live. Rather, solar death is the death of all thought, “the death of death as the life of the mind” (*I*, 10). In other words, human death is a thought still thinkable, whereas solar death is *unthinkable*, insofar as, when *that* death occurs, thought *is* no more. Lyotard calls this “negation without remainder. Pure event” (*I*, 11). The exercise at work, reminiscent of

⁹² Paul Ricoeur, in an essay entitled, “The Question of the Subject,” and devoted to analyzing psychoanalytic and structuralist challenges to the Cartesian legacy of subjectivism, asserts the following: “I am, but who am I? That is what I no longer know. In other words, reflection has lost the assurance of consciousness. *What* I am is just as problematical as *that* I am is apodictic.” Ricoeur is acutely aware of the distinction, prevalent in Lyotard, between the “what” and the “that.” See Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 242.

the beginning of Nietzsche's celebrated essay, "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense," is meant to challenge thinking, to expand thinking to its limits, and then even *beyond* those limits. Lyotard realizes that to think a limit "you have to be on both sides of that limit" (*I*, 9), but the thought of the solar catastrophe is the eradication of thought, and with it, the eradication of limit as well. There is no "other side" to the thought of the sun's death. What we are pondering, then, is the thought of the *unthought*, or the *unthinkable*. This stretching of thinking happens in the moment of the sublime, in that instant in which mind is suspended—at the limit, *as the limit*—and glimpses the farthest reaches of what is both thinkable and non-thinkable. We cannot *think* the solar catastrophe, in any manner that allows it to *make sense* to us, but we may be capable of breaching, for a mere instant, its *unthinkability*. This is the privation of the Burkean sublime, the terror of the *nothing further*, taken to its limit, at which we find something like thinking the unthinkable in thought itself.

Lyotard describes the kind of thinking demanded in order to think the unthinkable: "Being prepared to receive what thought is not prepared to think is what deserves the name of thinking" (*I*, 73). The sublime experience allows one to think the occurrence as it happens and accept it as it is. "One does not prejudge it, and there is no security. Peregrination in the desert. One cannot write without bearing witness to the abyss of time in its coming" (*I*, 74). Time, for Lyotard, is seminal for understanding the *moment* of the sublime. Time is, in a sense, suspended at the moment of the sublime, but not as though one is outside of time at that moment. What could that mean? Rather, one relinquishes one's controlling grasp on time. Lyotard uses words like "resistance" to describe one's posture towards time at the instant of thinking and receiving the event.

This is not a resistance to time itself but the tendency to control, manipulate, calculate, and save time. Real thinking involves patience and a certain level of passivity—one must *let happen*, must open oneself to the *happening*.⁹³ Honest thinking also involves questioning: “To think is to question everything, including thought, question, and the process. To question requires that something happen that reason has not yet known” (*I*, 74). *Thinking*, in the strongest sense in which Lyotard employs that word, is necessarily a not-knowing; it is thinking the unthought—thinking even the unthinkable. Lyotard contrasts this type of genuine thinking with that which is guided by “the principle of reason,” which “is the way of questioning which rushes to its goal ... [and] involves a sort of impatience in the single presupposition that in any case one can always find a ‘reason’ or a cause for every question” (*I*, 74). The sublime experience engenders thinking that cannot rush toward its goal. In fact, Lyotard speaks of the contradictory feeling that accompanies the experience of the sublime—terror and pleasure (following the modern model)—as a “sign, the question-mark itself, the way in which *it happens* is withheld and announced: *Is it happening?* The question can be modulated in any tone. But the mark of the question is ‘now’, *now* like the feeling that nothing might happen: the nothingness now” (*I*, 92). The “nothingness now” is the abyss of time in its coming. The sublime engenders questioning that resists the “presumption of the mind with respect to time” (*I*, 107).

Lyotard claims the Judaic tradition as the only one in the West to have adopted this kind of attitude of thinking with respect to time. Non-Western traditions have long practiced the art thinking: “To be and remain questioned by [phenomena], to stay

⁹³ One is reminded of Nietzsche’s call for a return to philosophical *rumination* at the end of the preface to *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

through meditation responsive to it, without neutralizing by explanation its power of disquiet” (*I*, 74).⁹⁴ Judaism fosters “reading” and “studying” that remain attentive to *listening* and to *letting be* the event, the Word of God, the teaching of the Torah.⁹⁵ Time that resists *controlling* is the time of *thinking*, the time of philosophy, and the time that accompanies the experience of the sublime. One might say that thinking *takes* time, which is what one does say in order to stress the duration of time passing from one moment to another, were it not for the unfortunate verb in this phrase. Real thinking does

⁹⁴ On a few distinct occasions in *The Inhuman*, Lyotard finds recourse to Eastern philosophical traditions in his attempts illustrate his notion of the sublime. For example, appealing to one of Dôgen’s *Shobôgenzô*, the *Zenki*, Lyotard relates the metaphor of the “clear mirror”: “there can be a presence that the mirror cannot reflect, but that breaks it to smithereens.” One can stand in front of the mirror, and one’s image will be reflected in it. There is, however, a “clear mirror” that, if it faces the mirror, causes everything to “break into smithereens.” To clarify what this means, Lyotard quotes Dôgen:

“Do not imagine that is the first time in which the breaking has not yet happened, nor that there is then the time in which everything breaks. There is just the breaking.” So there is a breaking presence which is never inscribed nor memorable. It does not appear. It is not a forgotten inscription, it does not have its place and time on the support of inscriptions, in the reflecting mirror (*I*, 55).

There is—just the breaking. This passage highlights an important “name” for the sublime that we shall be introducing shortly—the un-inscribable. Dôgen’s “clear mirror” is utilized for the purpose of clarifying another moniker for the sublime, “anamnesis,” which Lyotard borrows from Freudian psychoanalytic thought. Anamnesis is, for Lyotard, the “obligation to stand up [*ana-*] towards the clear mirror, through the breaking (*I*, 56). Furthermore, Lyotard equates anamnesis with what “so-called ‘French thought’ has been calling *writing* for a long time” (*I*, 55). It is a “process” of passing beyond “the remainder of what has been forgotten. The point would be to recall what could not have been forgotten because it was not inscribed” (*I*, 54). “Rewriting, as I mean it here,” writes Lyotard, “obviously concerns the anamnesis of the Thing. Not only that Thing that starts off a supposedly ‘individual’ singularity, but of the Thing that haunts the ‘language’, the tradition and the material with, against, and in which one writes. In this way, rewriting comes under a problematic of the sublime” (*I*, 33). The importance of anamnesis, as well as other Freudian terminology, is crucial for Lyotard’s discussion of the Forgotten in *Heidegger and “the jews.”* I cite these other possible ways of talking about Lyotard’s sublime in a footnote because of their inherent complexity and because their sufficient analysis would diverge us too far from our projected purpose.

⁹⁵ Lyotard finds similar attunement in Derrida’s deconstruction and notion of *différance*, as well as in Deleuze’s principle of nomadism (*I*, 74). What Lyotard sees as valuable and similar in these two philosophers are their approaches to *time*, which is the key to the kind of thinking Lyotard (as well as Heidegger, Derrida, Deleuze, and others) espouses.

not *take* anything; it resists *taking* and concerns itself with *letting be*. Thinking relinquishes the controlling of time, it leaves time be, as it were, and lets *be* precisely what *is*, as what *is* announces itself.

Genuine thinking, which is prompted by the sublime, relates to what I call Lyotard's notion of the "un-inscribable." "Un-inscribable" is not a term that Lyotard uses, but clearly it is the un-inscribable toward which genuine thinking aims its view. Lyotard claims that one normally thinks in the "already-thought, in the inscribed" (*I*, 20). He says, "if you think you are describing thought when you describe a selecting and tabulating of data, you are silencing truth. ... Thinking, like writing or painting, is almost no more than letting a givable come towards you" (*I*, 18). What Lyotard means by the "inscribed" can be gleaned from the following passage: "'Inscription' means that the thing can pass, cannot not pass, but that the signs which signal that it was then remain there" (*I*, 145). As Lyotard explains, thinking finds comfort in thinking what has already been thought, in what *remains*, in what has been inscribed. But there is another kind of thinking in which Lyotard is interested—thinking that is prepared to think the unthinkable.

Another term he uses to denote this type of thinking is *anamnesis*, in the description of which he says: "The point would be to recall what could not have been forgotten because it was not inscribed" (*I*, 54).⁹⁶ This seemingly paradoxical

⁹⁶ The notion of the Forgotten is seminal in *Heidegger and "the jews."* In that work, Lyotard says, "the Forgotten is not to be remembered for what it has been and what it is, because it has not been anything and is nothing, but must be remembered as something that never ceases to be forgotten" (*HJ*, 3). The Forgotten, then, is the forgotten *as such*. If remembered, it can only be remembered as something that is constantly and repeatedly forgotten. Lyotard employs the term, "the jews," as an indication of the forgotten as such in Western thinking, as an alterity that is always *there*. In psychoanalysis, it is related to Freud's *Urverdrängung* and *Nachträglichkeit*, which Lyotard discusses as a metapsychological "hypothesis of an unconscious without

prescription, to recall what is not forgotten, points us away from inscription, toward what is *un-inscribed* or *un-inscribable*.

What is un-inscribable? This is undoubtedly a misformulated question. Yet we have been examining, and will continue to examine, numerous instances of the un-inscribable throughout Lyotard's discussions on the sublime. Nuance and timbre, for example, are un-inscribable; these "immaterial materialities" exist in the margins, *in-between*, identifiable, *inscribed*, vibrations of sound and light.⁹⁷ In fact, Lyotard employs color as an example of an un-inscribable:

Color, in its being-there, appears to challenge any deduction. Like the timbre in music, it appears to challenge, and in fact it undoes it. It is the undoing of the capacity for plot that I should like to call *soul*. Far from being mystical, it is, rather, material. It gives rise to ... an aesthetic of material presence which is imponderable (*I*, 150).

What Lyotard here calls the *soul* of color is that which does not allow the mind to name, to designate, or to classify it as a *something*. It is, in a sense, something, but not some one thing. To put it another way: it is a *quoddity* that resists *quiddity*. The soul of color renders presence, which disarms thought, and the mind's activity is suspended in this moment—"the mind breaks into shards (letting go) under the 'effect' of color" (*I*, 151).

This aspect of matter is not confined to conceptual determination because it is "rigorously (and not exactly) singular: its quality depends perhaps on a constellation of conceivable parameters, but *this* constellation, the one which takes place now, cannot be

'representational formations'" (*HJ*, 11,13). Lyotard discusses "the jews," as the ever-forgotten, in relation to the Jews, who were attempted to be "forgotten," in Nazi extermination camps, and to Heidegger, whose insistence on the "forgetfulness of Being" *and* collusion with National Socialism offer Lyotard a wealth of material with which to enrich these fascinating connections. For our present purposes, it is enough to realize that, when Lyotard speaks of "the jews" as the Forgotten, there is an element of the sublime in his meaning. See *HJ*, 5 for an explicit discussion on these matters.

⁹⁷ Nuance and timbre shall be discussed in detail below.

anticipated, foreseen”(I, 155).⁹⁸ The un-anticipatory and unique qualities of the *soul* of matter is crucial for Lyotard since he wants to maintain that there can be no transmission of “data” in these *moments*, no “repetition” and no “spatio-temporal transfer.” Inscription demands elements of communication, anticipation, and recurrence in order to operate. An event cannot be inscribed if it does not lend itself to repetition, and *vice versa*—for it could not be repeated if there is nothing left over, if there is no *remainder*.⁹⁹ That *soul* is unique, furthermore, means that the experience of it is *incomparable*, and thus, unrepeatable. Reflect on the differences that *always* accompany different live musical performances of the same musical piece. The notes played are identical—they are inscribed. But the *timbre* of the sounds, wherein lies the *soul* of the music, can *never* be repeated as such—they are un-inscribed and un-inscribable. The sublime is also of this nature—unrepeatable and un-inscribed. In fact, the sublime and the un-inscribable—they name one and the same *thought*—the thought that attempts to break through, by letting be, to the sheerness of the barely perceptible, scarcely material *soul* of experience itself.

Lyotard often talks about matter, and more specifically, about *immaterial* matter as an illustration of the suspension of mind. Listen to Lyotard as he describes “matter that breaks the mind”—matter that eludes the synthesis of thinking:

Matter, so tenuous that it is as though immaterial, is not repeatable ... this is because by being subjected to its seizure by that matter, the mind is deprived, stripped of its faculty—both aesthetic and intelligent—to bind it, associate it, I’d like to say to narrativize it (I, 156).

⁹⁸ See the distinction Heidegger makes between *rigor* and *exactitude* in “What is Metaphysics?” in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 94.

⁹⁹ The solar catastrophe, which Lyotard describes as “negation without remainder,” can be thought of as an example of this notion taken to its extreme.

The type of thinking that attempts to reach the sheerness of *there is*, of immaterial matter, or of whichever name of the sublime in the Lyotardian lexicon one chooses to use, this type of genuine thinking brings with it something like a stigma, and so this type of thought is placed in the ghetto. Lyotard says, “to inhabit the uninhabitable is the condition of the ghetto” (*I*, 200). This is the place to which timbre, nuance, *es gibt*, and all of the other names that name the sublime are consigned by the “megalopolis of mind.” The moment of sublime seizure is unpleasant to the mind, which would rather manage itself as it always has, in the friendly confines of the already-thought, already-inscribed, already-identified field of known and knowable objects, persons, and conditions. The sublime, however, rips us out of this comfort. As thinking approaches the limit of thinking itself, it can, at best, think of the *unthinkability* of that moment, at which point it will have been broken into shards. Borrowing Epicurus’ famous remark on death, “if it is there, I am not there,” we can say, on Lyotard’s behalf, that if the sublime moment *is*, the mind, in its active, synthesizing, determining function *is not*. It is, then, no wonder that the mind would relegate thinking the thought of its own non-existence to the ghetto and attempt, in effect, to exterminate it.¹⁰⁰

Throughout this chapter, we have found constant recourse to Lyotard’s distinction between *quid* and *quod*. The difference between the *quid* and the *quod* can be thought of as the difference between “what” happens and “that” (something) happens. This difference is important for Lyotard’s sublime because he wants to show that the moment of the sublime occurs with a kind of immediacy that “precedes” the *quid* and occupies the instant—it can only ever be an instant—of *quoddity*. The occurrence is not a matter of the senses or of thought bearing upon *what* happens or *what* the occurrence means.

¹⁰⁰ Again, I refer the reader to Lyotard’s discussion of “the jews” in *HJ*.

“Before asking questions about what it is and about its significance,” says Lyotard, “before the *quid*, it must ‘first’ so to speak ‘happen’, *quod*. That it happens ‘precedes’, so to speak, the question pertaining to what happens” (*I*, 90). It is true that the sublime engenders a posture of questioning, but here Lyotard is critical of a specific line of questioning that asks, “*what* is that? *What* is happening?” But we have seen that the sublime question, if I may put it that way, is: “*Is* it happening?” The questioning that comes out of the occurrence of the sublime “precedes itself, because ‘that it happens’ is the question relevant as event, and it ‘then’ pertains to the event that has just happened” (*I*, 90). The event is “infinitely simple” and pertains to an immediacy contained within the “experience” (which would have to be an un-experienceable experience, and so, *no longer* experience at all) that *there is*, that *it happens*. An event, a simple occurrence, is the *quod*, which “comes before” any question that asks “what?” or intends to discover the *quid*.

Lyotard offers a helpful discussion of the *quid* and the *quod* in a piece on Barnett Newman’s painting.¹⁰¹ Here he explores the paradoxical theme of *beginning* in Newman’s work. The idea of *beginning*, taken here in a creational sense, as in *Genesis* and *The Book of John*, as well as the act of creating a work of art, is paradoxical because of the difference between *quid* and *quod*. Lyotard writes:

The beginning is an antinomy. It takes place in the world as its initial difference, as the beginning of its history. It does not belong to this world because it begets it ... the paradox is that of performance, or occurrence. Occurrence is the instant which ‘happens’, which ‘comes’ unexpectedly but which, once it is there, takes its place in the network of what has happened (*I*, 82).

¹⁰¹ Wayne Froman’s essay, “The Suspense,” offers a concise, yet thorough, discussion of Lyotard’s philosophical indebtedness to Newman’s work and thought (*LPPS*, 213-21).

The network of what has happened is that of the inscribed, which is the network of “what” things are—a network of *quid*. The occurrence, however, when seen as a *beginning*, as an unexpected instant which *happens* and is *not yet* a part of that network. In the moment of *happening* that has not yet happened, a beginning is not a *quid*, but a *quod*. Lyotard states that “any instant can be the beginning, provided that it is grasped in terms of its *quod* rather than its *quid*” (I, 82). Newman’s paintings often consist of one solid color with a long, vertical stripe, which he calls a “zip,” that breaks the otherwise solid color field. The zip is like a flash of lightening in the dark sky, or the advent of light upon the void: “without this flash there would be nothing ... the flash (like the instant) is always there, and never there. The world never stops beginning” (I, 82). The instant of the occurrence of the flash is the world *as* it is beginning, “before” it is the world, at that moment when it is only the *happening*. Newman’s zips attempt to recreate this *now* of the instant of creation in painting. His work pertains to the sublime because it tries to bypass presenting *what* there is, in favor of showing *that* there is—the *quod* rather than the *quid*.

Lyotard has written a number of essays on the sublime in painting in general—and on Barnett Newman, the avant-garde painter “of” the sublime, more specifically. Newman is well known for exploring what he called the experience of “the sensation of time” in painting, which he associates with the sublime feeling. The titles of many of his paintings betray the conceptual frame and context of his art, as well as the relevance his paintings have for a philosopher “of” the sublime, like Lyotard. Consider these titles, for example: *Here I, Here II, Here III, Be I, Be II, Vir Heroicus Sublimus, Not Over There, Here*. He is also well known for his important and elucidative essay, “The Sublime is

Now.” In these works, Newman emphasizes the *hereness* and *nowness* of the experience of painting—the *here-and-now-ness* that the artistic (re)presentation of the sublime demands. In a word, Newman is interested in the question of presence, in how one presents *presence* in painting, which, for hundreds of years, has been dominated by an aesthetic of re-presentation.

How can a painter *paint* presentation *without* representation, without recourse to form and figure? In a sense, the painter of unadorned and unadulterated *presence*, must paint the non-representable, which is to say, the *unpresentable*. It is for this very reason that this problematic falls under the sublime—under the sublime that Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition*, calls “the presentation of the unpresentable in presentation itself”¹⁰²—and it is for this reason that Newman’s accent on here-and-now-ness is a perfect complement to Lyotard’s thinking on the sublime. Lyotard writes: “A painting by Newman is an angel. It announces nothing; it is in itself the annunciation ... Newman is not representing a non-representable annunciation; he allows it to present itself” (*I*, 79). What marks the distinction, the differend, between Newman and other avant-garde painters is that everything is *there* in his painting. He does not attempt to present a sign of the unpresentable, or an allusion to something that might provoke the thought of non-representability. A critic or viewer can say little about the painting that is not already given in it. “The best gloss,” according to Lyotard, “consists of the question: what can one say? Or of the exclamation, ‘Ah’. Of surprise: ‘Look at that’. So many expressions of a feeling which does have a name in the modern aesthetic tradition (and in the work of Newman): the sublime. It is the feeling of ‘there’ (*Voilà*)” (*I*, 80). The sublime *occurs*

¹⁰² Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 81. Henceforth cited as *PC*.

in a painting by Newman, in the *moment* one views it, and therefore it eludes any sort of critical examination or analysis (just like the sublime feeling-thinking). It is *there*. And if Newman is interested in the sensation of time, it is because, as Lyotard aptly states, “the feeling of the instant is instantaneous” (*I*, 80). The “message” of the painting is presentation that does not present anything.¹⁰³ It *is* presence.

“If, then, there is any ‘subject-matter’, it is immediacy. It happens here and now” (*I*, 82). This notion of sheer presence, the most minimal occurrence, *happens* “before” (read without mediation—*immediately*) one can identify, categorize, or conceptualize it. Lyotard says, “presence is the instant which interrupts ... which recalls, or simply calls out that ‘there is’, even before that which is has any signification” (*I*, 87).

This *there is* repeats other annunciations in philosophy, namely, Levinas’ *il y a*, Heidegger’s *es gibt*, and, I argue, Parmenides’ *esti* (which, though it is translated as “it is” and is the precursor to Socrates infamous question “*ti esti?*,” retains an ontological significance for Parmenides that is, I think it could be argued, analogous to the *there is* of his successors). Whether dealing with an ethics that precedes ontology, the ontological difference between Being and beings, or the antiquated notion of indivisible, eternal being, *there is* points to the sheer simplicity of existence—that *there is* existence. Newman wants to remind the viewer that “Man is present,” and Lyotard wants to remind the reader that being announces itself in the moment of the sublime, not in terms of *what* being is there, but *that* Being is there. This is the difference between the *quid* and the *quod*. The important thing to keep in mind is that the instant of the sublime calls out, announces: *There is*. That is all that *happens*, in the *moment* of its happening.

¹⁰³ I urge the reader to recall the meaning of the original Greek *angelos*, “message,” which becomes Christianized as *angel*, the bearer of God’s message, but also the annunciation of God Himself, *as* message. Hence, Lyotard’s use of the word “angel” to describe Newman’s paintings.

If we remain in the domain of painting a moment longer, we shall see the significance of Lyotard's "immaterial materiality," to which we have made allusion above. Lyotard recognizes that the history of Western thinking, as it pertains to art, has been dominated by a prejudice of hylomorphism. Lyotard believes that as the privileging of the link between matter and form declines (as it has in 20th century painting), the "aim for arts, especially of painting and music, can only be that of approaching matter" (*I*, 139). What is meant by art "approaching matter" is offered in Lyotard's very next sentence and leads us, headlong, into the sublime: "Approaching presence without recourse to the means of presentation" (*I*, 139). It is possible to determine both colors and sounds through mathematical calculations of the amplitude and frequency of waves, both of sound and of light. However, what interests Lyotard is what *cannot* be determined in this manner—what he calls *timbre* and *nuance* (both of which apply to both music and painting). He writes, "if we suspend the activity of comparing and grasping, the aggressivity, the 'hands-on' [*mancipium*] and the negotiation that are the regime of mind, then, through this ascesis (Adorno), it is perhaps not impossible to become open to the invasion of nuances, passible to timbre" (*I*, 139). Lyotard defines these terms in the following passage:

Nuance and timbre are scarcely perceptible differences between sounds or colors which are otherwise identical in terms of the determination of their physical parameters ... nuance and timbre are what *differ* and *defer*, what makes the difference between the note on the piano and the same note on the flute, and thus what also defer the identification of that note (*I*, 140).

Note that Lyotard describes nuance and timbre as "scarcely perceptible differences." Along with the notes or colors that can be identified and determined, there are *betweens* (in the robust, Derridean, deconstructive sense) that exist, but only in the most liminal

way, at the very edge of perceptibility. They are there but they defy, in a sense, the mind's ability to delineate them, to discriminate between them and that which they are *not*, namely, identifiable units along the sound or color scale. Lyotard calls the *between* that nuance and timbre "mark out," "a sort of infinity" that exists within the sound or color continuum.¹⁰⁴ They are the "distress and despair of the exact division and thus the clear composition of sounds and colors according to graded scales and harmonic temperaments" (*I*, 140). In other contexts, Lyotard calls the space "inhabited" by nuance and timbre "aura" or even "soul" (see *I*, 31 and 150, respectively), but what these all name is *immaterial* materiality.

The term seems a paradox. This is, however, exactly Lyotard's point. G. K. Chesterton said of paradox that it is "truth standing on its head to attract attention." Lyotard would modify this particular phrasing but would agree in sentiment. Paradox stretches the mind to its limits; that which is paradoxical stands "beside belief," as the original Greek tells us, but not belief in the sense of religious faith. The *doxa* beside which a paradox finds itself is the quotidian, mundane, "operational," as Merleau-Ponty would say,¹⁰⁵ manner of thinking that allows the mind to remain comfortable in what it

¹⁰⁴ Lyotard's use of the term "infinity" to describe nuance and timbre brings to mind the following passage in Hegel: "This simple infinity, or the absolute Notion, may be called the simple essence of life, the soul of the world, the universal blood, whose omnipresence is neither disturbed nor interrupted by any difference, but rather is itself every difference, as also their supersession; it pulsates within itself but does not move, inwardly vibrates, yet is at rest. It is self-identical, for the differences are tautological; they are differences that are none. This self-identical is therefore related only to itself; 'to itself' implies relationship to an 'other', and the relation-to-self is rather a self-sundering; or, in other words, that very self-identicalness is the inner difference." G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 100.

¹⁰⁵ See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Galen Johnson, trans. ed. Michael Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 122. Later on the same page, Merleau-Ponty declares, in a way curiously reminiscent of Lyotard's discourse on the sublime, that operational thinking, "a thinking which looks on from above, and thinks of the object-in-general, must return to the 'there is' which precedes it."

knows, in what is already-thought and already-inscribed. Immaterial materiality finds itself *para*, “next to,” those identifiable elements of matter. Attunement to the immaterial aspect of matter suspends thought in its “normal” function. Lyotard writes, “the matter I’m talking about is ‘immaterial’, anobjectable, because it can only ‘take place’ or find its occasion at the price of suspending these active powers of the mind. I’d say that it suspends them for at least an ‘instant’” (*I*, 140). Each time Lyotard begins talking about the *instant*, we can be sure that he is moving into a discussion of the sublime, and his discussion of immaterial materiality leads us to many of other “names” of the sublime that we have been examining:

So we must suggest that there is a state of mind which is a prey to ‘presence’ (a presence which is in no way present in the sense of *here-and-now*, i.e., like what is designated by the deictics of presentation), a mindless state of mind, which is required of mind not for matter to be perceived or conceived, given or grasped, but *so that there be* some something. And I use ‘matter’ to designate this ‘*that there is*’, this *quod*, because this presence in the absence of the active mind is and is never other than timbre, tone, nuance in one or other of the dispositions of sensibility, in one or other of the *sensorial*, in one or other of the passibilities through which mind is accessible to the material event, can be ‘touched’ by it: a singular, incomparable quality—unforgettable and immediately forgotten—of the grain of a skin or the piece of wood, the fragrance of an aroma, the savor of a secretion or a piece of flesh, as well as a timbre or a nuance. All these terms are interchangeable. They all designate the event of a passion, a possibility for which the mind will not have been prepared, which will have unsettled it, and of which it conserves only the feeling—*anguish and jubilation* [my italics]—of an obscure debt (*I*, 140-1).

Lyotard claims that all of his terms in this lovely, revealing, and unifying passage are interchangeable; indeed, they are all various signatures of the sublime. His notion of matter connects to other themes he elaborates in *The Inhuman*. Lyotard proclaims, on more than one occasion, “matter does not go in for dialectic” (*I*, 45 and see 142). Matter, thus, stands “outside” the functions of the rational, inquisitive mind; rather than existing, it “*insists*, it sists ‘before’ question and answer” (*I*, 142). Immaterial matter is another

instance of the sublime, which, regardless of whichever pseudonym one prefers to address it by, strips thinking of its comfort and security. Faced with the annunciation of Being—like the voice out of the whirlwind that addresses Job—one who encounters the sublime is ontologically dis-located to a “place” in which, for the first time, genuine thinking can take place.

Lyotard’s sublime disarms thought—even disintegrates it—by raising the possibility that nothing further might happen. Yet this struggle between Being and non-Being is also generative according to Lyotard. It prompts *genuine* thinking. Furthermore, Lyotard attributes this kind of genuine thinking to the fundamental inception of philosophical wonder—as we have seen, he calls the auto-affective thinking that the sublime generates a “propaedeutic” to all of philosophy. A “propaedeutic” is something that must be, literally, “learned before.” It is a prerequisite or precondition. The thinking that the sublime produces—this auto-affective thinking—is, therefore, the catalyst for *philosophizing*.

Lyotard’s sublime is polynomial. It is auto-affective thinking, the *there is*, the *quod*, it is *Ereignis*, an annunciation of Being, and many other monikers that Lyotard affixes to it. Regardless of name, however, there is one trait of Lyotard’s sublime that has emerged as central to its postmodern expression—the sublime is resolutely *un-experiential*. We have seen this in Lyotard’s reconfiguration of Kantian reflective judgment, as well as in his emphasis on the *quoddity* of the sublime moment. In the former case, auto-affective thinking is the beating heart of the critical project, a project whose aim it is to uncover the conditions that make experience possible. Therefore, these

conditions must, necessarily, precede experience. Likewise when dealing with Lyotard's original writings concerning the sublime, the sheerness that, simply, *there is*, is not capable of being adumbrated by any claims made by experience.

Lyotard's sublime is clearly, then, not a traditional aesthetic category. However, despite its intimacy with Being, neither is it an ontological category. In Lyotard, we have moved away from a description of an experience and into a *moment* that experience cannot contain. Rather than *Erfahrung*, we have *Ereignis*. This cannot be a matter of onto-*logy*, for there is no *logos*, no "account" or "study," possible here. Yet, the sublime is still a matter—in a sense *the matter*—of Being. Likewise, auto-affective thinking is still an aesthetic—the sensation of thought feeling itself thinking—but no longer an aesthetic *experience*. Thus, beyond or before aesthetics and ontology, Lyotard's sublime is *onto-aesthetic*. The sublime is thought feeling itself thinking, feeling *that* it is thinking, and this *that*, the *quod*, is Being. In the sublime, thought is brought face-to-face with Being, and it only "knows" this by *feeling* itself thinking.

The sublime is thought feeling *itself* thinking, but also, and simultaneously, feeling *Being*, in its *quoddity*. The sublime occurrence touches thought, and thought feels that touch, which is the touch of Being. Kant was not wrong to associate the sublime with the feeling of the absolute, and one might even argue that his description of the sublime in terms of an oppositional duality was an attempt to complicate an experience that, as Lyotard makes clear, was never, and can never be, *experienced*. The sublime is pre-experiential and generative of experience because it is, in short, the event of Being (*Ereignis*).

Permit me to make a brief detour back into Heidegger here to illuminate the importance of the onto-aesthetic sublime. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger famously defines Dasein as the being for whom Being is an issue—as that entity who stands in a unique position with respect to Being and can question the meaning of Being. I suggest that Lyotard’s sublime is inextricably related to this unique posture situated between Being and beings—at the site of the ontological difference. It is the sublime moment that gives to Dasein the initial motivation to question the meaning of Being, because the sublime is Being making itself felt to Dasein, that being uniquely capable of asking the question of the meaning of Being, of asking Lyotard’s sublime question: “*is it happening?*”

Here is another instance in which we find an affinity between Lyotard and Heidegger. In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger emphasizes the important role that *questioning* maintains throughout his inquiries into that artwork. His concern is not to argue in defense of a neat and tidy definition of the work of art. Rather, as he says in the first line of the “Epilogue,” he wants only to present the riddle that lies at the heart of the issue: “The foregoing reflections are concerned with the riddle of art, the riddle that art itself is. They are far from claiming to solve the riddle. The task is to see the riddle.”¹⁰⁶ Here, the primacy of questioning is emphasized and re-emphasized throughout the text and, the question itself becomes Heidegger’s *modus operandi* within the first few pages.

In addition to the question, Heidegger also introduces a theme that occurs and reoccurs throughout the text—the *circle*. Discussing the components of a work of art in

¹⁰⁶ See *The Origin of the Work of Art*, in Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 79. Henceforth cited as *OWA*.

order to determine whereby he should look for its origin, Heidegger's thought tends into three different circles concerning origin: 1) the artist is the origin of the work, *but* the work is the origin of the artist; 2) art is the origin of the first two taken together, artist and work, *but* the artist and work, taken together, are the origin of art; 3) the nature of art is inferable from the work, *but* the work is known from the nature of art. These circles cannot be resolved, and Heidegger admits that, in general, the circle violates logic, on which our quotidian understanding primarily rests. This is not viewed as problematic by Heidegger, who affirms the circle in its circling. He says, "thus we are compelled to follow the circle. This is neither a makeshift nor a defect. To enter upon this path is the strength of thought, to continue on it is the feast of thought, assuming that thinking is a craft" (*OWA*, 18). Lyotard and Heidegger see thinking in the same way; its truest, strongest, bravest form is resolved to *questioning*, to remain in the *circle*, to *linger*. Being prepared to think what one is not prepared to think, or thinking that feasts on the circle as it circles, name *the task of philosophy*, I would say, and this task is proclaimed in the moment of the sublime, which demands that one think the unthinkable itself. And it is a *demand*. Lyotard says, "Being announces itself in the imperative" (*I*, 88). Being announces itself in the sublime.

But these questions and this kind of robust questioning are the matter and substance—*die Sache*—of philosophy. I would like to think that this analysis of Lyotard's sublime helps us ask: How might philosophy begin? Under what conditions do humans philosophize? We have seen that the onto-aesthetic sublime, which is that moment of auto-affective, Being-affected thinking, is at least one explanation for the genesis of philosophical inquiry. The sublime has a transcendental capacity to affect

thought, because it is *the feeling of the event of Being touching thought*. This is an *unheimlich* feeling—a feeling of not-being-at-home—because thought is accustomed to the already-inscribed, the *quid*, the *déjà-là*. But this thinking prompts one to question, examine, wonder, or marvel at one’s existence. The sublime shakes one out of the assuredness and complacency with which one reliably operates within the world. The world, our lives, ourselves, must appear to us as bizarre, irreducibly strange, utterly terrifying, unknown or unknowable, in order to generate the wonder and marvel that beat at the heart of philosophy. This appearance, which does not appear at all, is the feeling that thought feels, when touched by Being, in the instant of the sublime. The Greek word, *deinos*, can be translated as “terrible,” “marvelous,” or “wonderful.” It is this Protean word, *deinos*, not *hupsos*—which is Longinus’ term, and connotes only “height”—that truly characterizes the sublime, and it is something *deinos* that characterizes the birth of philosophy. Long before there can be a realm of pure Being, categories of causality, polarized substances of mind and body, or the will to power, there is—I stress, *there is*—a feeling, a thinking, a feeling *of thinking*, that stretches thinking to its limit, at which it simultaneously recoils into and surpasses beyond itself.

Conclusion

The question of the sublime is passed down to us as the question of *presentation*. ... But the question of presentation is, in fact, nothing other than the question of existence (should one say: sensible existence?) as such. If you like: the question of *being-in-the-world*.

—Jean-Luc Nancy

Is it fair to attribute this weight to the sublime? This essay has been an attempt not only to rethink the weight that the sublime deserves within philosophical discourse, but also to illuminate that such weight has *always* been granted it. As I have shown, even in its modern expressions as an aesthetic category, the sublime is rendered as an unsurpassed moment of awareness, as epiphany, as revelatory, as a “primordial principle of far-reaching disclosure.” Lyotard’s work on the sublime makes explicit its fundamental connection to Being and, thought in terms of *Ereignis*, the postmodern sublime finds itself inscribed within one of the most important philosophical problems inaugurated by twentieth-century continental thought. Moreover, if we can take seriously Lyotard’s claims that the sublime is “propaedeutic,” which is nothing short of calling it “*a priori*” or “transcendental,” then we might find ourselves in a position to recognize the sublime as the basis for philosophical thinking. Certainly, Lyotard’s auto-affective thinking has prepared the way for this move, and, if I may offer a protreptic, it is the move I would like to see contemporary scholarship on the sublime make.

I would like to take a moment to remind my reader, too, that the modern/metaphysical expressions of the sublime in Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche are validated as primordial principles of disclosure when thought in unison with

Heidegger's notion of anxiety. Anxiety, then, as an exhibition of the Being of beings—the ontological difference—grants to the modern sublime an inroad to ontological significance that the sublime has always enjoyed, though perhaps not explicitly. Kantian autonomy, Schopenhauerian asceticism, and Nietzschean affirmation—though not strictly ontological categories *per se*, all point to what we might today call, simply, being-in-the-world. They are *postures of existence*. They are, necessarily, ontological. Their ontological importance, however, is often passed over in favor of *ethical* recognition. This is not surprising, as the sublime has long been associated with ethics, and likewise, has continually been entangled in humanistic, subjectivist discourses.

Lyotard, in contrast, makes the sublime an explicitly ontological category and shuns the notion of human subjectivity from the discussion. Heidegger sits somewhere in between. He is attuned to the problem of emphasizing a Cartesian *ego* as *the* central epistemological category, yet he often employs language reminiscent of the metaphysical discourse and concepts that the postmoderns eschew. For instance, in *The Differend*, Lyotard criticizes Heidegger for maintaining that it is man who is the recipient of the giving of Being in *On Time and Being* (D, 75). That Lyotard wants to move away from a strictly humanist reading of the sublime is evident from our discussion in Chapter Five, as well as evinced by the title of his most important work on aesthetics—*The Inhuman*.

This having been said, the sublime, regardless of its expression, is essential to human life and to human understanding—whether that understanding emphasizes the autonomy of human agency (modern) or the linguistic and social constructions that create “subjects” (postmodern). In this essay, what I attempt to show, above all else, is that the sublime is essential to *philosophy*. In the end, the sublime's value rests not only on its

polyvalence as a meaningful piece of aesthetic, ethical, ontological, or onto-aesthetic *theory*, but also, and more importantly, on its transcendental, or at least quasi-transcendental, character. Especially in its postmodern expression, the sublime takes on a pre-logical, pre-operational, even pre-linguistic, significance as the condition of possible experience.

I say that the postmodern sublime contains this transcendental principle, but even within the modern sublime, this element is not altogether lacking. As I have said, Heidegger's concept of anxiety, as an analogue of the sublime, demonstrates that the sublime has *always* been considered a primordial principle of far-reaching disclosure. This is not exactly the same as a transcendental principle in the strict Kantian sense, insofar as Kant's notion stands as the condition for any possible experience whatsoever. Rather, we might think of Heidegger's "primordial principle" in the fashion that Foucault posits an "historical *a priori*," which is nothing but a particular *a priori*, a relative *a priori*, rather than the *a priori*. In this way, anxiety, as a primordial principle, is, without a doubt, an *a priori*, existing as the condition for Dasein's authenticity. It is the force of this principal primordially that energizes my discussion on the modern sublime. In Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, the sublime operates in a transcendental capacity. For each, the sublime experience is the condition for a posture of existence that is higher, better, more profound, or deeper than, again to borrow from Heidegger, man's "average everydayness." Not only must one encounter the sublime *before* and *in order to* elevate oneself, but one's higher potentialities are revealed, for the first time, in that experience. In fact, these are one and the same capacity. The sublime is the condition for reaching an exaltation that is only glimpsed in that moment one experiences it.

Nietzsche utters, twice, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, that existence can only be justified *aesthetically*.¹⁰⁷ He clearly did not have in mind anything like a transcendental interpretation of the sublime as event, but it is not an overstatement to think that the sublime we have uncovered here reveals the importance of aesthetics for philosophy that Nietzsche's thought intended to convey. Indeed, we have rethought the sublime in a twofold sense—1) as a revelatory and disclosive structure of experience conceived in its modern formulations and 2) as a pre-experiential, even non-experiential, event that just might be the catalyst for philosophical inquiry in the first place. Given these considerations, which are by no means complete, we are at least on the way toward recasting the philosophical significance of the sublime as an event that exceeds categorization within aesthetics, ethics, or ontology alone. This enlivened, invigorated, and robust sublime enters the contemporary landscape of philosophy ready, not simply to disarm thought, but now to re-arm it, with the ammunition required of genuine thinking, in order that we may begin *to philosophize*—in order, in the pregnant sense of what this means, *to think* at all.

¹⁰⁷ See *BT*, 52 and 141.

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