Heidegger and Institutional Life: A Critique of Modern Politics

by

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ABSTRACT

HEIDEGGER AND INSTITUTIONAL LIFE: A CRITIQUE OF MODERN POLITICS

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This dissertation interprets Martin Heidegger’s work to understand the institutionally mediated character of our lives and the nature and effect of modern institutions, especially modern political institutions. Chapter One argues that our basic involvement in the world is culturally and historically specific, and that we experience its specificity largely as the sense of the world we take for granted, such that how we become effective and autonomous also gives rise to blind spots with respect to whether our projects measure up adequately to possibilities of our culturally and historically specific moment. Chapter Two argues that Heidegger’s accounts of Being-with and Solicitude allow us to understand our openness to one another as realized in institutions, themselves understood as sites in which we negotiate social roles in the determinate worlds we inherit and perform; relatedly, it argues that institutional criticism begins with an accurate assessment of the contingency of institutional life and that we live up to our constitutive openness to one another when we relate reciprocally in terms of the possibilities afforded to us by our shared institutions. Chapter Three argues that Heidegger’s account of modernity informs an account of distinctly modern institutions that are distinguished from those analysed previously by their instrumental character and their suppression of the significant experience that mediates our worldly interactions. It argues further that even as modern institutions suppress our capacity for meaningful experience, they present us with specific resources and with the possibility of
deciding responsibly how to orient them. Chapter Four considers modern political institutions by
drawing on G.H. Mead’s sociological work to argue that problems besetting modern politics can
be addressed by cultivating the appropriate attitude on the part on individuals, and that
Heidegger’s work on art and poetry allows us to understand this cultivation in terms of the
capacity of the experience of art, especially in the context of culturally rich community life, to
awaken us to our nature as interpreters, to the limits of our modern institutions with respect to
that nature, and with our responsibility for owning up to possibilities of meaningful life beyond
the confines of modern institutions.
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Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Chapter One: Equipmentality, Anonymity and Specificity 8
Section One: Dasein and Being-in-the-World 11
Section Two: Equipmentality 22
  (a) Equipmental Totalities 24
  (b) Manipulability 27
  (c) The “Towards-which” 29

Section Three: Equipmentality, Anonymity and Passivity 32
  (a) Merleau-Ponty and the Habit-body 35

Section Four: Equipmentality and Cultural and Historical Specificity 42
  (a) Cultural Specificity 43
  (b) Historical Specificity 48

Section Five: Work and Specificity 56
Section Six: Perspective and Determinacy 59
Conclusion 67

Chapter Two: Institutions, Significance and Human Relations 68
Section One: Self and Others 71
  (a) Being-with 72
  (b) Dasein-with 77
  (c) Worldly Involvement and the Determinacy of Others 79

Section Two: Solicitude: Indifference, Leaping in and Leaping Ahead 82
  (a) Indifference 84
  (b) Leaping in 86
  (c) Leaping ahead 87

Section Three: The Concrete World: Sociality, Social Roles and Critique 90
  (a) Indifference and Sociality 93
  (b) Leaping in and Social Roles 96
  (c) Leaping Ahead and Critique 102

Section Four: Institutions, Interpersonal Negotiations and Significance 106
  (a) Preliminary Introduction to Institutions 107
  (b) Rawlsian Institutions 108
| (c) Bourdieu and the *Habitus* | 111 |
| (d) The Combined Perspective on Institutions | 114 |
| (e) Encountering Institutions: “Building, Dwelling, Thinking” | 116 |
| (f) Gadamer and Play: Performing Institutions | 123 |
| (g) Section Summary | 127 |

Section Five: The “They” and Leaping Ahead

| (a) The “They” as Institutional | 128 |
| (b) Institutional Critique | 133 |
| (c) Leaping ahead with Others: Reciprocal Recognition | 135 |

Conclusion

Chapter Three: Modern Institutions: Threat and Promise

| Section One: Modernity | 148 |
| Section Two: Values | 155 |
| Section Three: Technology and Machination | 166 |

| (a) Technology | 166 |
| (b) Machination | 173 |

Section Four: Modern Institutions

| (a) The Art Museum | 180 |
| (b) The University | 185 |
| (c) Decision | 193 |

Conclusion

Chapter Four: Politics, Art and Intersubjectivity

| Section One: Mead and Modern Politics | 213 |

| (a) Institutions and the Social Self | 215 |
| (b) Modern Political Institutions | 217 |

Section Two: Heidegger and Politics

| Section Three: Heidegger, Art, Poetry | 228 |

| (a) The “Work” of Art | 240 |
| (b) The Modern Poet | 246 |
| (c) Art and the Modern World | 251 |

Conclusion

Conclusion: Responsibility and Possibility

Bibliography
Introduction

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger addresses the fundamental form of human experience and demonstrates that the presuppositions about human experience associated with a metaphysics of the subject fundamentally overlook both the way our experience is shaped by our involvement in the world and how we are ourselves constituted so as to be open to that involvement. His rich and ground breaking account relates our own understanding of the involved character of our experience to our possibilities of meaningful living and, thus, offers resources for thinking about the place of significance in human life as well as for developing a phenomenological and ontological understanding of what it means to be human. To this end, rather than conceive of human experience as fundamentally isolated and self-supporting, Heidegger demonstrates that human experience is a possibility of involvement that is realized and shaped in terms of the specific world in which it finds itself and, thus, that our possibility of being shaped is foundational to us. By emphasizing the place of possibility in human experience, Heidegger shows that all the ways we are involved in the world are themselves definite actualizations of ourselves, and, relatedly, that our way of being receptive to the world is both fundamental to us and to the world that we experience. At the same time, he demonstrates that the world in which we realize ourselves is the definite public world of everyday reality, and, thus, that we realize ourselves in terms of world that already has a given shape. Heidegger’s insight into our inseparability from the world is an insight into the fundamentally interpretive character of human experience; as possibilities of interpretation, we cannot be dissociated from the world. At the
same time, this insight into our nature is equally an insight into the nature of the world; through Heidegger’s work, we come to see that the world is an ongoing realization of our interpretive capacity such that the world in terms of which we realize ourselves as possibility is as much a function of us as we are of it. In short, Heidegger’s work allows us to recognize three basic features of human experience: we are always in world; the world in which we find ourselves has always been shaped in definite ways; and interpretation is foundational for both our experience of the world and the definite shape the world has.

Building upon these fundamental insights, I argue that the world is always historically and culturally specific as the result of its having been shaped by definite human practices, and, yet, that we tend to overlook the contingent character of the world and experience it as the natural condition of things. This misapprehension, I argue, is the result of a failure to recognize our constitutive role in the shape that the world has, and is related to how the world is shaped into definite structures of involvement. My claim is that the established institutions of social life have a necessary role in establishing these structures and that it is because of the way that these institutions shape our world that we tend to misapprehend our involvement in the world. By “institutions” I recognize both formal organizations such as banks, unions and governments as well as informal structures such as friendships and families. I demonstrate that institutions must be defined in terms of roles and rules that articulate our practices as well as in terms of the habits and interpretations that inform roles and rules, and that, as so constituted, they make it possible for individuals to inhabit shared frameworks of reality and to experience these shared frameworks as given. Further, I argue that recognizing institutions as these shared interpretations is necessary to our recognition of our own constitutive role in the shape our historically and culturally specific worlds have. I also argue that a study of institutions involves us in the issue of
owning up to the conditions of possibility of the world we experience, or fail to experience, in meaningful ways. In general, I aim to show that institutions are necessary for enabling the life of Dasein, though the enabling features can also have a disenabling effect. This focus on the simultaneously enabling and disenabling character of institutions will also function as a lens through which to undertake a critical analysis of modern institutions and, in particular, modern political institutions which I will define in order to show that there is something fundamentally important about them despite the ways in which they can be disenabling.

The dissertation basically has two parts: the first part in which I identify structures of meaning and the second part in which I look at these structures in the context of modernity. In the first part, I show the basic structure of institutions, and, in the second, the distinctive ways these structures are enacted in the modern world. In so doing, I draw mainly in Heidegger’s work in *Being and Time* and *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* as well as on his essays on technology, language and art. In order to relate Heidegger’s philosophical insights to the empirical character of institutions, I show that Heidegger’s work is related to Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological work. I also draw heavily on George Herbert Mead’s sociological work to connect the conceptual resources Heidegger offers to the demands of our current social and political realities. In what follows, I shall offer a more detailed account of each chapter, pointing to how each connects to the other and to the argument of the dissertation as a whole.

In the first chapter, I interpret Heidegger’s account of “equipmentality” to demonstrate that we experience the world meaningfully through the basic interpretations implicit in our habitual, equipmental ways of dealing with the world. Drawing on the work of Mearleau-Ponty to deepen and clarify aspects of Heidegger’s thought, I argue that these basic interpretations of the world are experienced by us as anonymous and impersonal demands, and that it is by way of
this experience of anonymity that we adjust to our culturally and historically specific environments. Next, I extend this basic analysis to an analysis of the influence of our environments on the specific goals we choose. In choosing our goals, I argue, we allow ourselves to be shaped by the world in particular ways, a shaping that includes both our capacities and our interpretations of what matters. I argue further that this shaping provides us with a degree of independence with respect to our world and that this independence can contribute to a failure to recognize and realize the possibilities afforded to us by our world.

In my second chapter, I develop an account of institutions drawing on Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein’s Being-with-others to show that Heidegger’s work contributes to a relevant account of institutions which highlights the necessity of our recognition of one another. Through Heidegger’s account of Dasein-with and Being-with, I demonstrate that our experience of ourselves is dependent on others, and that this dependence is actualized in the three modes of solicitude Heidegger identifies. Next, I demonstrate that the first two modes of Heidegger’s account of solicitude, “Indifference” and “Leaping in,” can be interpreted politically to show that they are responsible for giving rise to concrete features of our shared realities—their atmosphere and the roles and rules that govern them—while the third, “Leaping ahead,” demands that we take responsibility for and attend critically to those environments. While I argue that Leaping ahead requires that we respond to the concrete aspects of our recognition of one another, I also argue that Leaping ahead has the further demand of requiring us to recognize the singularity of the other, a recognition that is possible only when institutions themselves enable it. To establish this, I begin by defining institutions as explicit roles and rules through which we organize our shared realities, and as the implicit norms and interpretations that allow us to adjust to and realize these rules and roles as our shaped way of living together. Next, drawing on Heidegger’s
later work on language, especially the essay “Building Dwelling Thinking,” as well as on Gadamer’s account of play, I show that, as so defined, institutions always realize a significance that exceeds our determinate ways of behaving and that this significance is, therefore, necessary for the recognition of one another according to the demands of Leaping ahead, that is, as singular unique, institutionally constituted selves. Here, I support my claim that institutions are sites in which significance is realized by showing that Heidegger’s account of the “they” can explain our failure to recognize and acknowledge the very significance institutions realize, and by contrasting the attitude implicit in the “they” to the possibility of recognition that arises on the basis of collectively realized significance.

In my third chapter, I develop an account of modern institutions that demonstrates that they are shaped in response to the metaphysically groundless character of modernity. To this end, I begin by drawing on Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy to argue that objective representation and the modern subject are related to an experience of reality that, bereft of the traditional sources of social cohesion, remains coherent in a distinctively modern way. I argue for the distinctive character of this modern form of coherence by drawing on Heidegger’s account of systems in “The Age of the World Picture,” ultimately arguing that modern experience is characterised by an obviousness to which objective representation gives rise, and that it is perpetuated by the systematic unfolding of modern experience. Describing Heidegger’s account of the systematic character of modern experience, I argue that it is definitive of modern experience that its systematic character creates the illusion of the authority of a subject who is actually subordinate to the authority of a systematic presentation of reality and, further, that the subject’s misapprehension of her own authority creates a situation in which the subject’s implicit dependence on a system is connected to a refusal to question her self-understanding. Next, I
connect this analysis to an account of modern institutions by drawing on Heidegger’s assessment of the instrumental character of technology, on the publicity and dissatisfaction inherent in modern experience, especially as he describes it in Contributions to Philosophy, and on the connection between the modern experience of value and the ubiquity of economic value. I then turn to two modern institutions, the art museum and the university, and demonstrate that the previous analysis illuminates our understanding of these institutions in particular, and of the dangers and possibilities of our modern institutions generally. I conclude by observing that the risks that accompany the modern institutional form are: (1) The failure to acknowledge and respond to their own limitations and (2) The tendency to treat a particular situation as a universal one. Overall, this chapter establishes that Heidegger’s work contributes particularly effectively to our understanding of modern institutions, and that these institutions perpetuate themselves on the basis of our failure to recognize that we are subordinate to a system we take ourselves to control.

In my fourth chapter, I aim to accomplish two things: (1) I demonstrate that our modern political institutions are equally subject to the previous analysis and (2) I argue for the political relevance of culturally rich communities on the grounds that our modern institutions reduce our capacity to experience significance in a way that is adequate to the way in which it structures our existence. This final argument draws on the conclusions reached in Chapter One and Chapter Two—namely, that the self-interpretation we acquire by allowing ourselves to be shaped by our world may cut us off from the possibility of significance afforded to us by our world, on the one hand, and that a significance that exceeds our day-to-day tasks is what enables our experience of the singularity of the other, on the other hand—in order to demonstrate the relevance of this Heideggerian analysis of institutions for our current institutionally governed world. Since Heidegger does not offer a systematic account of modern political life, I begin by turning to G.H.
Mead’s analysis of modern politics and I illustrate that, for Mead, the characteristic features of liberal democracy are fundamentally a result of a misapprehension of the concrete underpinnings of the abstract character of modern political life. For Mead, a consequence of our misapprehension of the roots of modern political life is our discomfort with the idea that our institutions can govern effectively and shape our lives only when public opinion and habits support their claims. I argue that Mead’s insight into our basic distrust of “extra-institutional” measures reveals the place and relevance of Heidegger’s work for modern political thinking. Finally, I demonstrate the precise way that Heidegger’s work is relevant to political thought, first by turning to Heidegger’s scattered remarks about liberalism to demonstrate that his views are compatible with Mead’s and, next, by turning to Heidegger’s work on art and poetry to demonstrate that they deepen our understanding of the problems Mead identifies, while prescribing a way to respond effectively to them. More specifically, drawing on “The Origin of the Work of Art” and on “What are Poets For?,” I argue that, due to the effect of modern institutions on our experience of significance, we require the experience of art in order to recognize and realize our capacity to attest to the significance of our own projects. Finally, I demonstrate that we can realize this capacity only in the space of community, the space that exceeds the reach of our modern institutions and allow us to experience and revitalize our relationship to significance through the experience of art.

Overall, this dissertation offers an understanding of the implications of Heidegger’s analysis for an understanding of institutions generally, and demonstrates that this understanding has specific resources to offer for the critique of modern political institutions in particular and to our possibility of meaningful life within them.
Chapter One: Equipmentality, Anonymity and Specificity

While going about our daily tasks, we typically focus on what we need to accomplish. We may need to get downtown for work, or we may need to make it to a friend’s house by 8 p.m. Other sorts of necessary accomplishments could include tasks like getting the car fixed or responding to a pressing email. We orient our days around a myriad of possible goals which themselves require sets of actions and interactions that we do not typically bring to mind. In order to get downtown for work, for example, I must find my keys, lock the door behind me, walk down the sidewalk to the bus stop, locate my transit-pass, climb on the bus, find a place to stand, signal where I want the bus to stop and get off at the appropriate place. Once off the bus, I must enter the building in which I work by opening the main door and I must get to the right floor by using the elevator. While we organize our days around our goals, we implicitly accept and prepare to perform all the steps required for their accomplishment. Our day-to-day lives are filled with tasks necessary to our larger accomplishments, yet we rarely bring these tasks to mind. We perform such tasks competently and we could describe them as I did above, yet in the course of our busy days, we take for granted the fact that such tasks will have to be performed.

Taking these tasks for granted, we typically fail to consider the role they play with respect to our ordinary sense of ourselves as goal-oriented agents and how our very lack of attention significantly shapes our autonomy. We also often fail to consider how our typical sense
of autonomy can, in fact, be a source of alienation from our environment by inhibiting our ability to pursue meaningful goals within it; for example, an individual who developed her sense of autonomy when communication by telephone was prevalent in most professions and who fails to adjust her habits to the now-prevalent demands of email communication will find herself unable to perform tasks in professional ways and alienated from the very setting that once defined her as a capable and effective individual. When, however, we do consider the way our habits shape us and how this shaping can also alienate us from features of our environment, we find that our being shaped and our potential alienation are inseparable. To illustrate, when, for example, I decide to “go to work,” my unconscious ability to perform innumerable tasks allows me to, when necessary, negotiate a different route to work. Thus, my capacity to perform the inconspicuous tasks necessary for my day-to-day life simultaneously enables me to cease to act in predictable ways and to begin to carve out a different path for myself. This capacity, which constitutes my autonomy, also opens up the potential for blind spots in my engagement with the world such that the very habits that allow me to alter my behaviour may also be the reason that I fail to do so even when doing so would be to my advantage. For example, the same habit of taking the bus which, as we just saw, allows me to change my route when necessary may prevent me from recognizing when a different form of transportation would better suit my needs. My habits support my capacity to act but, in so doing, constitute an openness to the world that conceals other ways of being open to the world. Moreover, this concealment is not optional since it is only insofar as I fail to notice my habits that I can depend on them. In short, my habits allow me to “know” the world in a particular way and, because this mode of knowing remains implicit, my habits are also the reason that my very way of knowing the world closes me off from others possible ways of knowing it. If we are to come to understand the effect of habits on our ability to
act and on our blindness to our environment, we must study the inconspicuous features of our experience and the mode of knowing constitutive of them. In so doing, we shall come to see that it is encumbent upon us recognize and own up to the worldly signifigance on which we draw and to do so by ensuring that the possibilities we realize are adequate to such significance.

In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger analyses the role that the inconspicuous carrying out of tasks plays in the experience of everyday life. It will be the aim of this chapter to demonstrate the connection between Heidegger’s analysis, the possibility of autonomy we enjoy in everyday life, and the implicit aspects of perception that accompany this autonomy. We shall begin by familiarizing ourselves with Heidegger’s analysis, first by offering an account of *Dasein* and then by moving on to an overview of Heidegger’s account of equipmentality, drawing conclusions about the passive and anonymous character of everyday experience as well as its relatedness to a cultural and historical specificity. On the basis of these conclusions about the nature of our experience of everyday tasks and the necessarily culturally and historically specific contexts of this experience, we shall sharpen our focus to Heidegger’s analysis of the “towards which” or the work that forms part of our equipmental relation to the world. Through this focus we shall demonstrate that Heidegger’s analysis of work is related to the fact that it is in our very nature to posit and pursue goals on the basis of our inconspicuous familiarity with the world, that this pursuit implies a degree of autonomy with respect to the culturally and historically specific context of our engagement, and that this very autonomy can also be the source of blindness to changes our familiar contexts undergo and, by extension, to the demands and opportunities that accompany those changes. Let us begin by coming to understand Heidegger’s account of *Dasein*, of our way of existing in the world as singular perspectives on it.
Section One: Dasein and Being-in-the-World

Heidegger’s phenomenological analysis demonstrates that our day-to-day experience involves different types of focus and that our ability to distribute our attention effectively is rooted in our ongoing interpretation of our world. His analysis of the fundamental process of interpretation excludes any mode of explanation that has, as a premise, a subject who is separate from the world. Rather than understand us as subjects separate from the world, Heidegger argues that we are singular possibilities of interpretation always and inextricably invested in the world around us. His analysis reveals that the ideas that we typically hold about ourselves as discrete subjects who engage with a world apart from us themselves derive from the more basic interpretive mode of existence he explores. According to Heidegger, we exist for the most part in terms of and through a fundamental “know-how” that provides us with the sense of the world that allows us to interact with features of it without bringing these features to mind. This mode of knowing is interpretive, and the interpretive “know-how” that enables us to engage with the world in inconspicuous ways gives us the illusion of being separate from it. Thus, Heidegger’s challenge to the distinctness of the subject involves an account of a mode of knowing that necessarily precedes the kind of theoretical knowledge that is associated with a subject separate from the world: we only ever experience ourselves as separate from the world when we suppress the basic interpretation that allows us to negotiate it.

According to Heidegger, what we typically take to be our interactions with concrete aspects of the world around us are shown to be dependent on an engagement with the world in which neither agent nor object are autonomous with respect to one another and in which an interactive relation, a relationship of “know-how,” determines the nature of that which we would
typically identify as an object just as this same interaction shapes and constitutes that which we would typically identify as a subject. Instead of the relationship between subject and object, Heidegger focuses on the basic place of understanding [Verstehen] in human experience.

“Dasein,” the term Heidegger uses for the existence particular to human beings, is an existence defined by understanding and is, therefore, always associated with an interpretation of beings, an interpretation that, according to Heidegger, takes the form of a projection onto beings. Indeed, Dasein is essentially defined and named with respect to its being the site, the “Da” or “there,” of a projection onto objects. Since there is no individual or subject underlying it or its projection, Dasein is its self-projection. Only ever as self-projection, then, Dasein gives shape to its determinate involvement in the world into which it projects itself. Thus, Dasein’s experience of itself is inseparable from its experience of the Being of the entities it interprets and there is no experience prior to a comprehending projection onto objects.¹ In this way, Heidegger reveals the involved existence that necessarily underlies any experience of ourselves as a subject separate from the world.

Dasein’s understanding of entities does not end with a collection of understood objects in an alien or uncomprehended environment. Rather, when Dasein projects itself, its Being as projection constitutes the contexts in which individual entities are interpreted. Such a context is what Heidegger designates as “world”—the contextualizing projection that makes possible specific interpretations of things. Thus, the original relation of comprehension passes beyond the comprehension of particular entities to a comprehension of world as a background of significance in terms of which entities are understood. Accordingly, Heidegger calls Dasein

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¹ Richardson explains that Dasein’s original understanding of Being is connected to There-being’s dependence on beings which occurs as the “falleness” of Dasein and which is an essential component of There-being’s finitude (70). As finite, Dasein’s understanding is never complete and is, for that reason, projected out onto beings with the result that Dasein can make the mistake of interpreting itself as just another being instead of as the source of significance that it is.
―Being-in-the-World‖; Dasein is world insofar as it is the projection that always extends beyond and encompasses the particular things that it encounters, thus providing for those encounters the significant context in terms of which an interpretation of them can be meaningful. The “world” that Dasein is, moreover, is never a sphere of private experience; the world is always a public world. Dasein itself projects the contextualizing significance of its shared world and only in terms of such significance does it encounter objects and other entities. In Being and Time, Heidegger offers four different ways to understand world, concluding that most fundamentally his understanding of world is as follows:

―World‖ can be understood in another ontical sense […] as that ‗wherein‘ a factual Dasein is said to “live.” “World” has here a pre-ontological existentiell signification.

Here again there are different possibilities: “world” may stand for the “public” we-world, or one’s “own” closest (domestic) environment” (93/65).

The world is where we live, not as a spatial locale, but, rather, as the sense of familiarity or reality that sets for us the terms of our interactions; it is where we are at home. Our sense of home consists in the features of our life that we can take for granted, features we may be able to imagine if we compare what it might have been like to feel at home in, for example, Ancient Rome, and what it is like to feel at home in a contemporary Western city. In both cases, fundamental beliefs, basic expectations and specific customs are present and contextualize the day-to-day lives of individuals precisely by remaining implicit. According to Heidegger, these basic assumptions constitute the projection of world. To be at home in given contexts involves both interpretations of the things particular to it, and the sense of familiarity that sustains the

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2 In “Building Dwelling Thinking,” Heidegger explains that we realize ourselves by “building,” by contributing to our shared world on the basis of our inherited sense of familiarity, and that it is through the activity of building that locations, and subsequently spaces, come into being: “Building takes over from the fourfold the standard for all the traversing and measuring of the spaces that in each case are provided for by the locations that have been founded” (PLT 156/VA 160, emphasis in original).
implicit experience that contextualizes specific interpretations and interactions. As such contextualization, world is “wherein” Dasein finds itself, a “wherein” that informs its definite interpretations. World, therefore, does not precede Dasein, but is, rather, the immediate, given experience of the totality of significance that houses all of Dasein’s possible projections onto, or interpretations of, particular objects. It is, so to speak, an interpretive horizon: an always inaccessible, yet perpetually manifest, sense of Being at home, of belonging to, what is. Thus, world is an environment that issues immediately from Dasein to contextualize the definite engagements that themselves simultaneously constitute the experience of world. As Heidegger asserts, our involvement “is already as it is, because of some familiarity with the world” (BT 107/76). In short, a background sense of familiarity, of “knowing” where one is, accompanies all our interpretive engagements with things, and this sense of familiarity is what Heidegger designates as world.3

Inasmuch as the world exists as the background against which Dasein’s actions are meaningful, the world that is familiar to Dasein stands also as the background against which the actions of others are significant. As a result, the specific contexts that become familiar to Dasein are shared, public contexts. As Dreyfus notes, what Heidegger means by world is never a private experience; “It is important to note that all such ‘special worlds’, as he calls them, are public” (Being 90). Because the world is always public, the contexts with which Dasein is familiar are contexts with which others are also familiar, and the sense of familiarity that is constitutive of Dasein’s interpretive existence is always also a familiarity with a definite world.

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3 In Heidegger’s analysis, the sense of familiarity that contributes to an experience of world derives from Dasein’s fundamental attunement to Being which is disclosed through State-of-Mind [Befindlichkeit] or, more colloquially, mood. The fact that it is a public world with which Dasein is familiar and to which it is attuned has sparked some investigation into the collective character of mood, especially since Heidegger himself states, “The dominance of the public way in which things have been interpreted has already been decisive even for the possibilities of having a mood—that is, for the basic way in which Dasein lets the world ‘matter’ to it.” (BT 213/169-170). See also Dreyfus Being 171. Richardson, meanwhile, offers an account of mood without any reference to others (64-66).
According to Heidegger, it is the “ontological” constitution of Dasein that enables the projection of a public world to be manifest as the site of our own particular existence. The relation between the implicit and pervasive aspects of experience, on the one hand, and the concrete contexts and things with which we engage, on the other, is a relationship between Dasein’s “ontological” constitution and its “ontic” involvement. The ontological and ontic aspects of Dasein are inseparable; both the originary projection of understanding which gives rise to the single phenomenon of Dasein as Being-in-the-World and the concrete day-to-day tasks we perform in our familiar worlds are constitutive of Dasein’s Being. Thus, Dasein exists as an originary relation of understanding, even while it engages ontically with beings. The originary relation of understanding—which consists in the basic interpretations that give rise to the significance of a public world—can remain latent for us in our encounters with the ontic determinacies of our lives. As a result, our determinate encounters—the worldly projects that include our jobs, responsibilities, hobbies and relationships—seem to us to be our unique way of inserting ourselves in a separate world despite the fact that this world only ever exists for us through our own projection of its basic significance, the same significance in which others share. Thus, we can proceed in a way that Heidegger calls “inauthentic,” failing to acknowledge our own ontological constitution and, thereby, overlooking the preconditions of our everyday self-understanding and our understanding of the contexts, relations and institutions in which we engage; however, we can only do so because of the very way we are constituted ontologically as interpreters of our world. As Heidegger describes the fundamentally interpretive character of the existence that characterises Dasein, even in its ontic dealings with beings, it is ontological, i.e., it exists as an understanding of Being (BT 32/12).

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4 Heidegger addresses directly the relationship between understanding and inauthenticity, see BT 186/146.
While Heidegger designates as ontological the structure of our interpretive existence, he calls the understanding of Being co-extensive with a basic sense of awareness of our world a “pre-ontological” understanding of Being. Our pre-ontological understanding is the understanding of Being that is implicit in our basic interpretation of the world. Even without any explicitly thematized understanding of Being, our pre-ontological understanding of Being prefigures and gives rise to the specific ontic interpretations on which we tend to rely throughout the course of our existence—our interpretations of particular tasks, occupations and relationships as significant. Dasein would not be what it is without the pre-ontological openness to the totality of significance that contextualizes our specific engagements; pre-ontological understanding is deployed as Dasein’s originary understanding of entities and as the medium of Dasein’s ontological existence. Thus, inasmuch as it proceeds from a pre-ontological understanding, Dasein’s Being-in-the-World has both an ontological and an ontic dimension, but nevertheless occurs as a single phenomenon.

We can see more clearly how Dasein’s understanding of Being is a single phenomenon by following William Richardson’s interpretation of “There-being” [Da-sein] as a “transcending” comprehension of Being. Richardson describes Dasein’s tending towards world, both at the ontological and the ontic level, by explaining that Dasein’s experience of comprehending the Being of other entities always exceeds the comprehension of particular entities, and by identifying the excess of comprehension as the transcendence that Dasein is. In others words, Dasein is always in the process of going beyond, transcending, its definite interactions with, and comprehension of, definite entities. This “being in the process of

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5 Heidegger writes:
If Dasein is ontically constituted by Being-in-the-World, and if an understanding of the Being of its Self belongs just as essentially to its Being, no matter how indefinite that understanding may be, then does not Dasein have an understanding of the world—a pre-ontological understanding, which indeed can and does get along without explicit ontological insights? (BT 102/72)
transcending” is definitive of Dasein such that it is always constitutively beyond its everyday ontic interpretations and such that Dasein exists as the process whereby ontic meaning originates through its own pre-ontological understanding. Richardson writes;

As a radical comprehension of Being, There-being’s own Being, sc. that by which it is what it is, is to be concerned about Being. Hence the relationship to Being (the comprehending) constitutes the very ontological structure of There-Being [...] For There-being is a being whose structure is such that it comprehends the Being of beings. By this very fact, There-being passes beyond (therefore transcends) beings to the Being-process as such. (35-36)

The “Being-process,” as Richardson calls it, is Dasein’s ongoing involvement in the world which simultaneously subtends Dasein ontological and ontic engagement. Ontic beings exist through Dasein’s comprehension of them such that Dasein’s existence is the condition of possibility of ontic meaning; Dasein’s existence is the process or happening whereby ontic meaning arises and can seem to stand for itself. There-being, or Dasein, does not exist apart from its ontic relationship to beings, while it always transcends these beings by the very fact that it comprehends them.⁶

In passing beyond beings, Dasein is always in the process of enacting itself as world or as the “Being-process” whereby its pre-ontological understanding can be deployed in its

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⁶ While Richardson explains the unfolding process of There-being’s comprehension as transcendence and explains There-being’s attunement as a disclosure of its finitude (69), Sheehan explains that the finitude particular to Dasein derives from Heidegger’s appropriation of Aristotle’s notion of telos and is Heidegger’s way of describing the perfection intrinsic to Dasein, see “Dasein”. While both authors acknowledge that finitude and transcendence do not occur separately, Sheehan’s account emphasises the fact that transcendence occurs in its perfect form as finite; that is, according to Sheehan, Dasein is not transcendent and finite, Dasein is, rather, finite as transcendent.

⁷ In The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time, Kisiel connects Heidegger’s analysis in Being and Time to Heidegger’s 1919 lecture courses by demonstrating the connection between Being and Time and the issue of a worldview (44-47). Heidegger himself criticises both Dilthey and Jasper’s account of ‘worldview’ in his 1925 “Wilhelm Dilthey’s Research and the Struggle for a Historical World” (Supplements 147-176) and his 1920 “Comments on Karl Jasper’s Psychology of Worldviews” (Pathmarks 1-38).
comprehension of definite beings. In enacting itself as world, Dasein is manifest in terms of a sense of familiarity that orients it towards entities in terms of its pre-ontological understanding. Thus, Dasein is both ontic and ontological, and is so as a single phenomenon, because it is both its ontic engagements and the world in which they occur, and because each of these aspects of its existence are involved in a reciprocal constitution of the other. Since Dasein is both its ontic involvement and the ontological “process” that draws upon its pre-ontological understanding, it is capable of understanding adequately its own existence only when it understands that that very existence will have always been interpreted in the definite, ontic ways that accord with the public worlds familiar to it. Generally, Dasein does not have an adequate understanding of its own existence, understanding itself straightforwardly as, for example, an “I.” It can, however, come to understand its own Being-in-the-World, and, thereby, understand itself as that which integrates and makes meaningful the definite ontic aspects of its world that include its own inadequate self-understanding as an “I.”

Insofar as Dasein does not understand itself as an “I” and understands itself instead in terms of its definite involvement with entities in a world, Dasein understands itself as the site in which this involvement occurs. Dasein can, thus, recognize its own invocation of a pre-ontological sense of the world and, thereby, can understand itself as a being that, while constituting world and the significance of possibilities therein, is never foundational to itself, and never has a complete self-understanding: its self-understanding will always depend on an interpretation of Being of which it is not the source. Thus, Dasein can understand itself adequately only when it understands that the very incompleteness of its self-understanding is
constitutive of the Being that it is: a Being that draws upon a pre-ontological understanding of which it is not the source.  

Two more points remain to be explained about Dasein, and these points will clarify the structure of Dasein’s necessarily incomplete self-understanding. In section 9 of *Being and Time*, and thus at the outset of his analysis, Heidegger states that Dasein is a being whose Being is at issue for it, and that this being-at-issue has the following consequences: (1) Dasein is essentially futural in that, “The ‘essence’ [‘Wesen’] of this entity lies in its ‘to be’ [Zu-sein]” (BT 67/42), and (2) “Dasein has in each case mineness [Jemeinheit], one must always use a personal pronoun when one addresses it: ‘I am,’ ‘you are’” (BT 68/42, emphasis in original). These features, its essential futurity and its being “in each case” mine, are essential to the process through which Dasein integrates the totality of significance that constitutes world into the definitive meanings beings have for it. Further, it is as this interpretive process that Dasein’s self-understanding remains essentially incomplete. To expand, Dasein’s futurity consists in the fact that it will continuously be in the process of integrating the pre-ontological meaning that is not its own into the site of significance that it is, while the “mineness” that characterises Dasein is a recognition that this open-ended act of integration is its existence and, therefore, is what is “at issue” for it. To understand itself adequately, therefore, Dasein must understand the openness and contingency of its interpretations, must understand that it is in their very contingency that its interpretations, and thus its own existence, matter to it and are what it has to be. In effect, Dasein must understand that at stake in its own existence is the possibility of realizing the worldly significance that matters to it; Dasein is concerned with its “to be” as the process through which it may realize this significance in definite ways. Thus, Dasein is incomplete by virtue of its

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8 Richardson explains Dasein’s incompleteness, and the fact that it is not the source of itself, in terms of “thrown-ness” and “fallen-ness” (37).
dependence on, and continual realization of, a pre-ontological understanding, and by virtue of its structure as “to be” and at issue for itself; the definitive pre-ontological understanding that subtends and animates Dasein interpretive engagements is manifest only in Dasein, a being whose essential incompleteness requires a continual realization of that definite pre-ontological grasp.

Both aspects of Dasein’s incompleteness—its pre-ontological understanding and its significant, open-ended existence—define it as an interpreter. Its pre-ontological understanding means that its definite interpretations are ultimately grounded only on an indefinite sense of inconspicuous familiarity, while its “to be” and its “being an issue for itself” mean that all definite encounters are ultimately interpreted in terms of a significant but unknown future. Thus Dasein is an interpreter because it interprets out of an implicit pre-ontological familiarity and a never-to-be-present future, and does so in definite and finite ways. Dasein’s incompleteness thus corresponds to the essentially finite character of Dasein’s interpretations. Dasein is compelled to realize itself as an interpreter through a finite and definite number of possibilities: only as finite and definite can Dasein’s interpretations accommodate the immediacy of familiarity and the openness of the future. Thus, Dasein’s interpretive realization of possibilities, a realization that matters to it by virtue of its way of existing, always takes a specific and finite form, and this specificity and finitude correspond both to Dasein as an interpreter and to Dasein as an ontic participant in a shared world.9

9 Richardson’s description of the process whereby Dasein encounters the necessity of choosing definite possibilities shows this moment to be an ineradicable negativity in Dasein and ultimately necessary for Dasein’s own sense of itself as a whole (81-82). Richardson’s analysis picks up on this same theme in his account of Heidegger’s “The Essence of Ground” and shows it to be the ontological condition of ontic truth, thereby filling out the otherwise sparse account of logos in Being and Time (167-71). In his subsequent analysis of “On the Essence of Truth,” Richardson outlines the shifts that pertain to his understanding of “Heidegger II” by showing that the negativity that permeates Dasein, and enables its concrete worldly engagement, is the mystery that constitutes Being and that shows itself to be an increasingly autonomous phenomenon, thereby both “directing” Dasein into a definite possibility of significance and enabling the possibility of errancy (220-227, 230-237).
In keeping with the description of everyday life with which we started, we can now see that the ontic goals on the basis of which we organize our days are subordinated to the more basic meaning of the world in which we live. The ontic goals we pursue are only ever the realization of the more fundamental mode of existence that is Being-in-the-World. Thus, the basic worldly totality of significance to which our goals are subordinate is manifest only in the process that involves negotiating a pre-ontological interpretation of beings, on the one hand, and an existence that is futural and at issue for us, on the other. Whether we notice it or not, our “goals” are only ever the result of this negotiation. Consequently, “choosing” a goal is always implicitly an act whereby we realize in a specific and definite way the worldly significance in which we implicitly recognize ourselves to be implicated and to which we recognize our goals to be subordinate. As a result, our goals cannot be attributed to anything like an independently-existing world or to our particular and isolated selves; instead, they must be attributed to the original dynamic through which Dasein engages with common-place things precisely because it is through these interactions that the possibilities we may choose from arise. Thus, goals themselves appear on the basis of the total interpretive possibility that we apply to objects—to a “transit-pass” as my access public transportation, or to a bus as my way of getting to work—to provide ourselves with the definite means by which to realize our own significance. Accordingly, our sense of significance is realized through everyday interaction and is co-extensive with the sense of meaningfulness [Bedeutsamkeit] that corresponds to that of the world that houses the possibilities in terms of which we feel our own existence to be at stake, and in terms of which we identify goals and make our plans.
As we have seen, the most basic knowledge we have is the practical know-how that is inseparable from the interpretive grasp of objects deployed in our practical use of objects.\(^{10}\) This basic “knowledge” allows us to realize ourselves, ontically and ontologically, as interpreters. In what follows, we shall come to see that our know-how requires that we adopt a passive stance towards equipment, a stance in terms of which we understand ourselves to be behaving as “anyone” would, and that this experience of passivity and anonymity is always culturally and historically specific. We shall also come to see that we become specific, determinate individuals only through these basic, equipmental interactions, and that our specificity consists in our perspective on the world and our agency within it, both of which develop through our work. Finally we shall see that our very way of becoming specific and effective agents in the world relates us to the world in ways that allow us to fail to see when our projects no longer accord with the meaning we attributed to them.

**Section Two: Equipmentality**

When we work, relax, travel or study, we use, in various ways, objects in our environments and, according to Heidegger, we relate practically to them in the mode of “concern” [*Besorge*]. When we engage concernfully, our basic interpretive engagements involve

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\(^{10}\) As Dreyfus points out, Heidegger is not the only one to recognize the priority of practical knowledge in relation to theoretical or scientific knowledge: Thomas Kuhn, for example, addresses the fact that practical knowledge is necessary to any scientific discovery (*Being* 46). Interestingly, Dreyfus also refers to the Kuhnian analysis in his essay, “Heidegger’s Ontology of Art,” suggesting there that works of art function like paradigms in the sciences in that they embody exemplary presentations of a way of doing things. Dreyfus’ reading suggests that Heidegger’s 1938 lecture, which became “The Origin of the Work of Art,” deepens the connection between the experience of an equipmental reality and the experience of world. The idea that the analysis of *Being and Time* is deepened in the later work sits well with my interpretation and opposes readings of equipmentality that treat it as an overly instrumental account of Dasein’s worldly interaction. The possibility of this connection is attested to by Dreyfus in his “The History of the Being of Equipment” and is sketched by Andrew Mitchell in his *Heidegger Among the Sculptors* (3-9).
us in the world in concrete ways and we make sense of objects in terms of our particular projects—our projects are subject to the interpretations implicit in the kind of activity we perform. Moreover, through concern we relate to objects that do not have the character of Dasein and we do so in terms of the knowledge, or “know-how,” that enables us to interact with them. Heidegger identifies the objects with which Dasein is concernfully involved as “equipment” and, in §15 of Being and Time, describes the basic components of equipmental interactions, the very interactions in which Dasein’s basic interpretations are manifest. Again, these equipmental interactions are the site of Dasein’s basic interactions with its world such that it is in its interaction with equipment that Dasein is “there” in the first place; it enacts its “there” through the basic but always interpretive know-how that underlies all of its worldly involvement.

According to Heidegger, concernful relations are primary and include all the interactions with beings that do not have the character of Dasein through which Dasein experiences the world as the site of its activity. The kinds of activity that Heidegger has in mind include: “having to do with something, producing something, attending to something and looking after it, making use of something, giving something up and letting it go, undertaking, accomplishing, evincing, interrogating, considering, discussing, determining” (BT 83/56). In short, “concern” indicates various ways of being involved with beings, whether such involvement includes a proactive project or a neglect of certain projects in favour of others. Thus concern must not necessarily be industrious and proactive; it can occur in a deficient mode when we interact with beings by “[l]eaving undone, neglecting, renouncing, taking a rest” (BT 83/57). In all its various ways of being realized, concern is a basic possibility of orienting ourselves towards beings and is, according to Heidegger, an existentiale, i.e., that on the basis of which beings show themselves to Dasein. In other words, our concern makes manifest the ways the concrete aspects of our
world are relevant to us, in most cases by constituting our orientation towards relevant features of our world, but, in others, by constituting a disavowal of the significance of such features. Thus, most commonly, we realize our possibility of concernful involvement when we interact with objects in unconscious, everyday ways—when, for example, we grasp a cup or use a pen to write.

These encounters, Heidegger tells us, are encounters with “equipment.” In “equipmental encounters,” objects appear to us as practical and inconspicuous aspects of our environment. Indeed, while we act concernfully in a variety of ways, we encounter equipment only inconspicuously such that all our other practical modes of encounter are informed by an aspect of our experience that, by definition, remains hidden from us except insofar as it shows itself as our familiarity with our world. Let us now turn to Heidegger’s analysis of equipment.

(a) *Equipmental Totalities*

To describe our encounter with equipment, we must note its basic features. These include the fact that it is always encountered as a totality, that we experience it in terms of its “manipulability,” and that it is oriented by a “towards which.” To begin, equipment is never encountered as a single item, but is, rather, always experienced as a totality of equipment. Something that is useful to us is never useful on its own but, rather, in relation to the specific surroundings in which we employ it. When we engage with equipment, all objects around us, even those that escape our attention, take on an equipmental character, and any particular item of equipment is experienced in the context of the equipmentality of all other objects. As Heidegger writes, “To the Being of any equipment there always belongs a totality of equipment, in which it can be this equipment that it is” (BT 97/68). To illustrate, when coming across a large stream in the woods, if I see a fallen log as a potential bridge, it is not that log alone that is equipment; the
banks of the river which appear to me as supportive of that log, as well as other aspects of the environment, all appear to me in terms of my need to get over the stream. Objects, and the way in which they work together, constitute what Heidegger calls an “equipmental totality.”

Heidegger makes two further points about the fact that equipment always occurs as a totality. First, by the term “equipment” we invoke our way of relating to the objects by means of which we orient ourselves towards our goals such that that which stands out to us in a given environment are those objects that correspond to our goal, while the objects that fail to stand out do so also in relation to our focus. As a result, equipmental dealings are never foremost on our minds because they are subordinated to the more meaningful goals that hold our attention. The subordination of equipmental dealings to goals means that equipment is that which shows itself to be useful to us in light of our need to accomplish something, and shows itself in terms of that for which it is useful. Pointing to the specific usefulness that constitutes items of equipment, Heidegger writes, “Equipment is essentially ‘something in order to … ’ [‘etwas um-zu … ’]” (BT 97/68). It is this basic grasp of objects in terms of distinct purposes that is not preceded by any other way of encountering an object of use; an item of equipment is not first an object and then a specific item of equipment; it is, rather, an item of equipment through and through. In their usefulness, items of equipment are assigned to particular tasks and refer to one another in a coordinated manner based on their respective uses. As a result, the basic experience of objects as equipment is also an experience of reference or assignment [Verweisung]. As Heidegger writes, “In the ‘in-order-to’ as a structure there lies an assignment or reference of something to something” (BT 97/68). A hammer, for example, is meaningless without the implicit reference to something-to-be-hammered. The usefulness of equipment is always experienced as a relationship of reference or assignment between items of equipment in the context of the particular
equipmental totality that these relations constitute. These totalities are manifest in our environments and determine our experience of those environments; it is because of us that objects relate to each other in particular ways and that some objects are prominent and some recede. Finally, we may note that the inconspicuous dealings in terms of which a basic and interpretive know-how is deployed is goal-specific: the interpreted relations between items of equipment are particular to our goals. In short, equipment is defined by a goal, or an “in-order-to,” and appears as a reference to other items of equipment.

That equipment is oriented towards a goal, exists as a totality and is constituted by “reference” or “assignment” corresponds to the fact that only a particular way of interacting or dealing with equipment reveals it in its definite characteristics. Notably, the characteristics of equipmental involvement, though definite, are only ever implicitly revealed. Equipment cannot be encountered explicitly—we cannot encounter tools and other items as “equipment” if we pay attention to involvement with them—because equipment “reveals” itself as such only when it remains inconspicuous. Heidegger describes this:

Equipment can genuinely show itself only in dealings cut to its own measure (hammering with a hammer, for example); but in such dealings an entity of this kind is not grasped thematically as an occurring Thing, nor is the equipment-structure known as such even in the using. (BT 98/69)

Equipmental interactions allow us to grasp entities in a specific way and put them to use without explicitly bringing them to mind. Thus, our basic sense of things, and of our environments insofar as they are constituted by relations between things, are acquired by dimensions of activity that, by definition, remain implicit.

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11 There is some debate as to the degree of autonomy attributed to the self-showing of equipment in Being and Time which should, in the more traditional analysis, derive from Dasein’s Being-in-the-World, see Powell, 62-63.
(b) *Manipulability*

While the “equipmental” character of interactions remains implicit, we are, to one degree or another, aware of the things we encounter. According to Heidegger, while equipmentality remains veiled, what is revealed to us through it is the “manipulability” [“Handlichkeit”] of things. The manipulability of things appears on the basis of an equipmental interaction, and it is in it in which our interpretations are manifest. Through the equipmental dimensions of an environment, things appear to us as usable in particular ways. These ways accord with a goal—the hammering of a nail—and seem to do so automatically despite being interpreted. In sum, only as interpreted are things equipmental and at our disposal and only as such do we encounter their “manipulability.”

The encounter with equipment as manipulable has two aspects that allow us to highlight the interpretive dimensions of Dasein’s encounter with equipment. The first aspect is the implicit assumption that the items of equipment we need for our task are available to us. To illustrate, when I put my foot on a rock to bend down and tie my shoelace, I unconsciously incorporate the rock into my purposeful action because I automatically assume that this approach to things is possible for me. Here, the assumption is indistinguishable from the action I perform and is, for that reason, largely constitutive of that particular action. The second aspect of our encounter with the manipulability of equipment is that our experience of it takes the form of encountering something other than ourselves, of encountering a thing. Only by encountering a thing distinct from us do we discover the precise way that it calls for our involvement. Our experience of the manipulability of a thing, then, depends on how, despite being subject to our interpretation, it appears to us to be simply available and ready for us. According to Heidegger, when we discover
the manipulability of a thing, we discover the “readiness-to-hand” [Zuhandenheit] of that thing, and, in so doing, discover it in *its* being (*BT* 98/69). Thus, although all aspects of an equipmental reality are disclosed to us on the basis of *our* concerned engagement, things appear to us to have a being of their own to which we can respond.

The recognition of the ready-to-hand character of things is implicit, and is realized in an immediate responsiveness to their demands, a responsiveness in terms of which those things seem to dictate how they are to be used or “manipulated.” The rock, for example, supports my foot in a way that is helpful to me only if I choose the appropriate surface and angle my foot accordingly. Thus, encounters with the manipulability of things are realized in terms of two fundamental active assumptions: that we can act on things and that they determine how we must act on them. In other words, to encounter the manipulability of an item of equipment is to discover what it demands of us in order for us to do what we take ourselves to be able to do. This discovery is the basic form in which the possibility of interaction definitive of each of us arises. Only on the basis of it does “doing” becomes a possibility, a possibility always realized in terms of an implicit assumption that we can act and in terms of a responsiveness to the available and norm-giving character of things.

Dasein’s pre-ontological understanding shapes, and is realized through, its encounter with the readiness-to-hand of equipment and, in this way, shapes Dasein’s experience of itself. Through the “know-how” in which a pre-ontological understanding is manifest, Dasein discovers the manipulability of equipment as the form of the act of which it immediately experiences itself as capable. Thus, Dasein experiences the manipulability of equipment in terms of the know-how embedded in its own capacities and, thereby, experiences not only an object separate from itself, but itself too as an agent capable of acting. For example, it experiences “grasping,” an act that
conforms to the contours and weight of an object, as its own capacity. While in this capacity the distinctive features of equipment—its totality, its “in-order-to” and its having been “referred” or “assigned”—are embedded, equipmentality is, nevertheless, manifest to Dasein only in the fact that it can do something. As such, the equipmental structure of Dasein’s involvement makes possible Dasein’s doing, and give rise to its own sense of itself as an agent, without ever appearing explicitly. The manipulability of equipment is precisely the form according to which Dasein accesses things in an immediate way, thereby allowing the structure of equipmentality to structure Dasein’s experience without coming to Dasein’s attention. Thus, despite being shaped and enabled by specific equipmental totalities, Dasein’s equipmental encounters all function as disclosures of its ability to act in a world from which it is separate: what Dasein experiences as its ability or possibility is precisely an openness to the manipulability of things—an ability to conform.

(c) The “Towards-which”

While one’s experience of ability is immediate, such immediacy alone does not constitute the experience of doing. Rather, as noted above, that experience must have the further characteristic of leading to something, of purpose. According to Heidegger, by using items of equipment in an immediate way, we experience them in terms of the “towards-which” or the “work” [Werk] that we aim to accomplish (BT 99/70). The work towards which we are oriented maintains our focus while the experience of our own ability and of the related equipmental totality in which we operate continuously recedes or withdraws [zurückzuziehen]. Indeed, on Heidegger’s account the very readiness-to-hand of equipment itself must withdraw. Only through this withdrawal can the implicit and pervasive know-how that subtends all our interactions be deployed to provide for us a coherent experience of the world in which we act and provide for
us, on the basis of this coherence, the possibility of focusing on our chosen work. Thus, through the withdrawal of readiness-to-hand we are able to perform innumerable tasks as a matter of course because our equipmental interactions involve us with things that appear to us in terms of their own Being, and as such as subordinate to our goals. Heidegger writes;

The peculiarity of what is proximally ready-to-hand is that, in its readiness-to-hand, it must, as it were, withdraw [...] That with which our everyday dealings proximately dwell is not the tools themselves [...] On the contrary, that with which we concern ourselves primarily is the work. (BT 99/69)

The withdrawal of the readiness-to-hand of items of equipment is, as we have seen, the withdrawal of the Being that belongs to them, a Being experienced by us as the manipulability of specific objects. Equipment withdraws because its existence appears to us only in terms of the task at hand: it disappears into our experience of performing that task. It is this withdrawal that allows us to deploy the know-how that constitutes our ability to act while experiencing that know-how in terms of what we aim to accomplish. Our experience of goals is, consequently, always implicitly the experience of our own ability. We experience goals that are made possible by our know-how even though this know-how does not figure into our conscious experience of pursuit. Because the know-how that shapes our interactions is implicit in the pursuit of our goals, our explicit experience is fundamentally shaped by aspects that constitute it only by remaining concealed.

While the equipmental structure of our basic encounters with the world informs and contextualizes our goals, goals are not merely the “product” of equipmental encounters; they are inherent to the structure of these encounters as the means by which the aspects of these encounters that must remain veiled can do so. Heidegger refers to our goals as the “work” with
which we are involved. Our work maintains our focus, both sustaining and turning us away from basic relations of use and manipulation within our equipmental contexts by allowing them to recede into an experience of familiarity. As Heidegger writes, “The work bears with it that referential totality within which the equipment is encountered” (BT 99/70). The “work” stands out for us as an explicit goal, and, thereby, carries along with it and co-constitutes the equipmental reality in which we participate. Thus, although our experience is fundamentally a product of equipmental interaction, it is also, through our work, an engagement with the concrete, ontic world; worldly goals like getting to work, making dinner or going out to see a friend are the concrete, ontic aspects of the know-how that constitutes our understanding of equipment and our most common experience of ourselves and our world.

Our engagement with work explains how the world we share with others shapes the implicit dimensions of our experience and influences the goals we choose. While “world” consists in Dasein’s original projective and interpretive understanding of Being, it is also the site in which Dasein’s interpretive Being is realized in finite and concrete ways through its work. Our equipmental interactions connect our basic sense of the world to the specific work we do in it, and they do so as the site of our perpetually incomplete engagement. Thus, in Dasein’s constant and necessary engagement at the level of equipmentality, Dasein is also always perpetually investing itself in the total meaningfulness of the world. Dasein’s Being-in-the-World is both the source and the purpose of its Being, and remains so through the equipmental interactions that contextualize our work.
Section Three: Equipmentality, Anonymity and Passivity

Thus far, we have been describing Dasein’s basic state of Being-in-the-World in general, and the equipmental interactions constitutive of Dasein’s concernful orientation to the world, in particular. The focus has been on the way the various aspects of Dasein’s Being-in-the-World—its experience of equipment, of goals and of the world in general—relate to each other on the basis of Dasein’s originary understanding of Being. Through this focus, Heidegger’s aim in Being and Time is to gain an understanding of the meaning of Being through Dasein’s pre-ontological grasp of Being, and the way that grasp is articulated in the world. Relating his primary interest in Being to the necessity of his analysis of Dasein, Heidegger writes, “Dasein’s understanding of Being pertains with equal primordiality both to an understanding of something like a ‘world’, and to the understanding of the Being of those entities which becomes accessible within the world” (BT 33/13). Heidegger investigates Being by inquiring into the broad structures of experience and the specific experiences these structures envelop. In this way, Heidegger’s pursuit of the question of the meaning of Being has yielded a radical understanding of Dasein as the essence of human beings and of human experience insofar as such experience is determined by the structure of Dasein. By attending to this structure, we should be able to see that Heidegger’s analysis can also lead to ways of understanding concrete aspects of our daily lives, especially those aspects that pertain to the relationship between our specific and determinate actions and our experience of a world that matters to us. In this section we shall acquire a more developed understanding of the character of our concrete interactions and the goals associated with them by coming to see how and why these interactions are constituted by an experience of passivity and anonymity. Our investigation into the passive and anonymous
character of our equipmental engagement is important for coming to recognize explicitly aspects of our interactions to which we generally fail to attend, as well as for coming to recognize that our motivation for the pursuit of definite goals is context-specific, both of which are, as we shall see in the following chapter, aspects of our embeddedness in institutions.

As we saw above, when manipulating equipment we use it without calling attention to the fact of our use. At the same time, manipulation is something that we do, and, inasmuch as the small tasks through which the manipulability of equipment is encountered are subordinated to goals, manipulation remains concrete activity and cannot occur without some degree of explicit awareness of our surroundings. In what follows, we shall come to see that this awareness is characterised by anonymity and passivity. We shall also turn to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s work in the Phenomenology of Perception to understand why the anonymity and passivity characteristic of our everyday equipmental attitude is intrinsic to the enabling character of our habits. Further, we shall come to see that the passive and anonymous character of our interactions with equipment is linked to the fact that the form of our equipmental interactions is shared by those who inhabit the same worlds, as well as to our meaningful experience of specific worlds.

Let us begin by considering how the relationship between our performance of inconspicuous tasks and our experience of our goals is an experience of anonymity and passivity. The performance of inconspicuous tasks depends on the know-how that constitutes our basic ability to act. When we rely on our know-how, we do not experience the inconspicuous aspects of our day-to-day endeavours as sites of a personal sense of self-realization; our equipmental interactions are largely “impersonal” responses to what we take to be the demands of our world. This impersonal character is implied by Heidegger’s claim that, “The hammering itself uncovers
the specific “manipulability” ['Handlichkeit'] of the hammer” (BT 98/69). It is not because I want to hammer that the hammer shows itself to me in its manipulability. Insofar as manipulability is the experience of the demands that issue from a thing, manipulability is, in principle, the experience of that which the thing would demand of anyone attempting to perform the same task. Our dealings with equipment are impersonal acts that disclose nothing unique about us; nevertheless, because our goals form part of our equipmentally governed reality, this impersonal quality is related to our goals. When we achieve our goals by doing what is required of us, we act, in principle, as anyone would. Since we experience the impersonal demands of equipmental interactions as the very means by which we achieve our goal, the experience of having a goal is implicitly the experience of agreeing to conform to the demands of an equipmentally constituted world.

In addition to characterising goal-oriented activity, the impersonal character of equipmental interactions is related to the public character of the world. The “anyone” implicit in the experience of the impersonal demands of equipmental engagement could not form part of our experience without the sense that others exist and the sense that they can engage with the equipment with which we can engage. Moreover, the goals that always accompany equipmental interactions require a context, a world, in which they appear to be meaningful. It is as such a context that, for Dasein, “world” is always public; the world is the meaningful totality that contextualizes our goals. By pursuing goals in a public world, we find ourselves passive to certain demands and this sense of impersonal passivity is necessary for the pursuit of projects because it provides for us the sense that we are pursuing a goal that means something in a world shared by others. Thus, experiencing ourselves passively and anonymously with respect to the demands of equipmental interactions is enabling of our very capacity to act in a public world.
Let us now turn to Merleau-Ponty’s work in the *Phenomenology of Perception* in order to deepen our understanding of the importance of the impersonal character of our equipmental dealings for our meaningful, goal-oriented experience of a shared world. Merleau-Ponty’s analysis will allow us to come to see how the experience of impersonal demands has an effect on the goals we choose, and will, thereby, allow us to come to see how our basic know-how is constitutive of the basic equipmental contexts we inhabit, as well as our meaningful experience of the world.

(a) *Merleau-Ponty and the Habit-body*

In his account of the embodied character of our existence, Merleau-Ponty explains that all conscious acts in the world are enabled, and partially determined, by an impersonal “habit-body” and a corresponding sense of impersonal, objective reality. These two features, he explains, derive from the original co-constitution of body and world in which the body’s intentional movement towards the world defines what is encountered in it. Let us now consider his analysis of the habit-body and, thereby, come to see that the form of our equipmental activities is always shared by others.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the determination of the world on the part of the intentional body remains concealed from the acting agent. Merleau-Ponty writes, “when I move towards a world I bury my perceptual and practical intentions in objects which ultimately appear prior to and external to those intentions, and which nevertheless exist for me only in so far as they arouse for me thoughts or volitions” (82). I constitute objects through intentional activity. Once constituted, these objects appear to be separate from me and to call from me further responses, and these further responses confirm my original projection. To understand the projection and confirmation that characterises our experience, compare, for example, the difference between the
experience of the accomplished pianist who sees a piano and the experience of an individual without an education in music who sees that same piano. For the pianist, the sight of the piano can immediately call to mind the vast array of musical knowledge embedded in her know-how, thus eliciting a far more rich response from her than from the musically uneducated individual. Here, we can see that the pianist’s musical know-how is her root to the variety of responses the piano elicits. Different worlds are opened up by our basic intentional activity, and all such activity depends on an experience of the “thoughts and volitions” objects can arouse. Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, our developed sense of the world is dependent on how we can project our interpretations of things on to them without noticing that we do so.

Our original projection is maintained in our bodies. My own body, my “personal existence,” is surrounded by “a margin of almost impersonal existence, which can be practically taken for granted, and which I rely on to keep me alive” (84, emphasis in original). The impersonal dimension of “my” body serves to conceal the fact that I project my intentions into the world to determine what I encounter therein. The pianist does not experience the possibilities opened up by the piano as issuing from her, but from the instrument itself and the world of music available to her. Since, however, the world is never simply given and always the product of the body’s intentional acts, so too must be the impersonal dimension of bodily existence. Merleau-Ponty’s account of habituation is an account of the development of the impersonal dimension of existence that surrounds us, of our “habit-body.”

According to Merleau-Ponty, there is no “body” prior to the interaction between body and world; “I cannot understand the function of the living body except by enacting it myself, and except in so far as I am a body that rises towards the word” (75). The body begins as an active, “lived” relation to the world, and from this relation alone arises the impersonal strata on which
we rely. We enact our body by enacting ourselves as a lived relation to the world. Although we come to take for granted that our bodies exists as a separate entities in an impersonal world, this presupposition depends upon our lived encounter; we can only take something for granted and experience it as a given reality if we first know that it is there and can be relied upon (82). Thus, our experience of the impersonal dimensions of our bodily existence and of an impersonal world is an experience of the reliability of a world that we both discover and realize through our lived relation to it.

Merleau-Ponty argues that the impersonal strata of experience are the result of the repression of certain interactions with the world. Through this repression certain interactions cease to factor explicitly into our experience and survive instead “only as a manner of being and with a certain degree of generality” (83). Merleau-Ponty’s account of the nature of this repression, a repression that is the source of the habituated character of existence, will help us see why the impersonal character of our existence is enabling of our ability to pursue projects.

It is the “layer” of repressed personal experience that Merleau-Ponty refers to as the “habit-body” that, according to him, constitutes the impersonal sphere of our existence (82). The habit-body is comprised of the persistent features of our interactions with definite environments that have ceased to be experienced by us as specific acts and have become, instead, the general form of our experience of the world. To illustrate how the experience of our interactions is transformed into a general experience of the world, Merleau-Ponty compares it to the way the repression of a traumatic event shapes the traumatized individual’s experience of the present (83). When a traumatic event is repressed, it continues to shape an individual’s experience of a present reality without appearing to the individual to be doing so. Corresponding to the structure and effect of repressed trauma, our habits allow the world to appear to be constituted without us,
and do so as the capacities we can take for granted and as the experience of things with which these capacities are associated. The habit-body thus shapes our experience of things by constituting for us a repressed dimension of our bodily existence in which the relationship between our own bodily capacities and the world we encounter is enacted and maintained. Thereby, our habits transform an experience of the co-constitution of self and world into an experience of an objective world. When I have acquired a habit, the thing constituted through my lived relation to the world “[ceases] to be a thing manipulable for me and becomes a thing manipulable in itself” (82). By allowing us to experience a capacity that was discovered in the course of personal experience as a capacity demanded of anyone, our habits allow us to repress our unique investment in, and interpretation of, objects and to experience instead a world that is “objective.”

We can experience ourselves in terms of goals when specific actions become habitual and fail to appear explicitly. Accordingly, the impersonal experience of the world that develops with the developments of our habits enables us to experience the satisfaction associated with those goals rather than to experience our performance of rote tasks. Consider how much more satisfying it is, for example, to play a song, than it is to learn the notes of a musical instrument. Yet, playing a song is only ever the result of having made a habit of playing the notes one learns. Once we are capable of pursuing meaningful goals, our pursuit generally conforms to the established ways of accomplishing one thing or another. As a result, while failing to appear explicitly, our habits, and the worlds they constitute, nevertheless make manifest to us an implicit experience of an impersonal “what is done.” In general, because our habits are goal-oriented and because we find ourselves in our pursuit of goals, we behave like anyone who
perceives and pursues the same goals. Thus, our basic habitual, or equipmental, dealings have a form that is shared by others.

The world is the extension and reflection of the originary experiences of significance that constitutes our sense of self and our sense of a meaningful world. Likewise, our goals are reflective of the relationship between our self and our world—it is in them that self and world meet. Our goals, therefore, have their source only in our original lived relation to the world and, thereby, are manifest to us in terms of the subsequent experience of the distinctness of self and world. As Merleau-Ponty asserts, “the body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be interwoven with a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them” (82). Moreover, the body is the vehicle that provides “the natural momentum which throws us into our tasks, our cares, our situation, our familiar horizons” (81); the body enables our uninterrupted commerce with the world both by maintaining the impersonal dimension of existence that we experience only implicitly, and by maintaining for us the sense that our involvement matters. Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, the impersonal character of bodily reality makes possible our experience of the explicit pursuit of meaningful goals by allowing us to take certain bodily capacities for granted.

The habit-body allows us to experience a well-developed world as an external reality in which we act in ways that matter. Ordinarily, an individual experiences a situation calling for definite habitual actions—walking without losing one’s balance, for example—and can immediately perform those action without a “clear and articulate perception of his body” (81). In these cases, the absence of a clear and articulate sense of one’s body is not experienced as a lack, but, rather, as the experience of one’s body as the means by which one performs the bodily tasks necessary for the pursuit of goals made meaningful by a definite environment.
According to Merleau-Ponty, the individual’s habit-body puts “at his disposal” an “undivided power” (81) through which our bodily habits are inextricably linked to our worldly commitments. Merleau-Ponty thus explains that the immediacy of experience provided by the habit-body is enabling only as an equally immediate sense of the meaningful worldly goals we pursue, and that these two aspects of experience converge in the expectations and ambitions implicit in the habits and abilities that are related to the environments to which we first became habituated. As we have seen, the habit-body is not the site of an impersonal bodily existence, but of a repressed experience of the lived relation to the world in which we came to recognize ourselves as agents and in terms of which the world took on for us a determinate shape and significance.

The original relation of self-discovery is equally the discovery of the practical field in which one can act, and this field is significant to us because we know implicitly that what we are is an ability to act, and that the world we take to be meaningful is meaningful to us precisely in terms of our particular capacities. As we saw above, it is our lived relation to the world that constitutes the objects that then elicit from us further and more sophisticated responses and more articulated possibilities of action. Our more explicit worldly goals are, therefore, only ever the extension and realization of the self-discovery we repress, and they always express and confirm a world that matters to us. In our habits is the residue of the self-discovery in terms of which we experience ourselves first in terms of the goals that arise in our original lived relation to the world. Insofar as we continue to draw on our habits, we continue to experience ourselves as embedded in the world in a specific way.

By demonstrating that the experience of meaningful projects in a meaningful world fundamentally depends on an impersonal experience of the world, Merleau-Ponty’s analysis
helps tie together two features of Heidegger’s account of equipment: the experience of passivity and anonymity characteristic of our experience of the manipulability of objects, on the one hand, and the fact that equipmental interactions are always accompanied by an ontic goal, on the other. Together, these two features allow us to understand why specific equipmental interactions are shared by those who inhabit the same world and correspond to a meaningful experience of that world.

In effect, the equipmental contexts Heidegger describes are realized in lived relations to the world that, according to Merleau-Ponty, prefigure our more developed interactions. In terms of what Merleau-Ponty calls the habit-body, the know-how that corresponds to a particular environment effectively projects the totality of significance that constitutes a world. The goals that accompany our experience of equipmental totalities are always influenced by these totalities in terms of the habits acquired in particular equipmental environments; worldly goals come to be ours through our habitual interactions with specific environments. This is so because the totality of worldly significance is coextensive with the possibilities of action the world affords to us—what we feel is called from us by the world. Through what Heidegger points to with the experience of manipulability and what Merleau-Ponty describes through the process of habituation, the goals and possibilities associated with particular contexts appear to be just as natural to us as do the habits that constitute our abilities. As a result, we share with others in the basic sense that makes equipmentality available to us, just as we share with others basic habits that correspond to our particular worlds. It is through our habits, then, that the goals that appear to us are shaped and constituted by our equipmental environments, and it is the impersonal, passive and anonymous character of our interactions that keeps us from noticing the effect of our environment on our goals, thereby allowing us both to experience those goals as meaningful and
worthy of pursuit, and to experience their pursuit as the proper expression of our own unique selves. The passive and anonymous character of our equipmental interactions is thus necessary and constitutive of the most basic way we have of engaging in the world. Through these characteristics, we find ourselves ineradicably invested in particular concrete worlds and experience this ineradicability as the propulsion towards the completion of our tasks. Although those tasks themselves, and the reasons we perform them, issue fundamentally from us, a determinate world stands before us as the inevitable site of our self-realization.

Section Four: Equipmentality and Cultural and Historical Specificity

Heidegger remarks that, “Dasein has grown up both into and in a traditional way of interpreting itself” (BT 41/20). In this section, we shall come to see that Dasein’s traditional self-interpretation is always culturally and historically specific, and that this specificity permeates its equipmental interactions. We shall begin by coming to see that Dasein’s original openness to tradition consists in the pre-ontological understanding that is at work in Dasein’s equipmental engagement and that comes to constitute its cultural specificity. We shall also come to see that cultural specificity is always manifest in the sense of familiarity that pervades equipmental interactions, and that through our familiar and inconspicuous sense of being able to act, we acquire a self-interpretation that is also culturally and historically specific. Further, we shall see that, despite this specificity, we take our self-understanding and the form of our actions to be universal.12 Finally, by considering the fact that the contingencies that we take to be specific are maintained and reinforced by others, we shall come to see that we are always also historically

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12 Dreyfus explains that for Heidegger, cultures and institutions share Dasein’s “existence.” This means that the existence of each of these involves an interpretation of the meaning of its own existence. i.e., cultures exist with an idea of what it means to be a culture (Being 14-15).
specific. These analyses will allow us to see that it is only as culturally and historically specific that we are defined by possibility, capable of determining ourselves on the basis of our orientation towards the future.\textsuperscript{13}

(a) Cultural Specificity

What Heidegger calls our pre-ontological understanding is basically an inarticulable understanding of beings that colors even our most basic interactions. According to Heidegger, this sense is fundamentally interpretive and provides us with a preliminary sense of what a being is.\textsuperscript{14} Let us turn to an example to illustrate both what Heidegger means by such an understanding, as well as the cultural specificity of our pre-ontological grasp of the world. If we imagine someone who grows up in an environment characterized by a sense of scarcity and the need not to waste what resources are available, we may be able to understand that, for her, objects “are” necessary, scarce and valuable. By contrast, we may be able to imagine that someone who grew up in an environment characterized by wealth and overabundance would be likely to experience objects differently and, perhaps, as essentially unnecessary, replaceable and inadequate. It is the sense of the “Being” of objects that differs in these two cases, and our pre-ontological understanding amounts to the character that differentiates the two from each other. The pre-ontological understanding develops through our very interactions with objects as these interactions are shaped by the character of the world in which we grew up. As a result of its realization in specific environments, our pre-ontological understanding is always culturally

\textsuperscript{13} Consider the claim about the necessity of familiarity and possibility for Dasein’s choice of goal on p. 15 above.

\textsuperscript{14} The distinction between the interpretive possibility, or understanding, that Dasein carries with it and the way that possibility can extend into the world as an interpretation of specific aspects of it is addressed by Heidegger in section 32 of \textit{Being and Time}, in terms of the forestructure [\textit{Vorstruktur}] of interpretation. According to Heidegger this forestructure has three parts, forehaving [\textit{Vorhabe}], foresight [\textit{Vorsicht}], and foreconception [\textit{Vorgriff}]. For a brief account of Heidegger’s position, especially in relation to the differentiation between interpretation and understanding as that which remains supportive of interpretation but nevertheless unarticulated by it, see Blattner \textit{Ontology} 14.
specific and, as such, pervades practical activity to provide for us an original openness to something as “something” that can then be interpreted equipmentally in more specific ways.\(^{15}\)

This cultural specificity remains latent in the aspects of our equipmental interactions that themselves remain implicit. Accordingly, our concrete interactions do not appear to us to be the result of an interpretation, and appear instead, simply, as how things are done. Since our familiar, everyday experience is precisely the result of the withdrawal of its constitutive features, our culturally specific openness to an environment manifests itself in terms of an experience of familiarity. Despite their specificity, we interact fluidly and with minimal focus in our familiar worlds; we take their very specificity to be “the way things are” and our own actions to be expressive, simply, of “doing what is done.” This generally unnoticed fluid interaction is always the product of the process by which our “selves” and our worlds are co-constituted such that our fluid interactions are always the result of our having discovered ourselves in specific environments. As John Russon writes, “How we experience our reality is very much a reflection of how we are ourselves […] but this explicit experience of the subject’s role is absent in day-to-day experience, and in its place is precisely the comfort of experiencing the apparent indubitability of the apparent nature of things” ("Ritual" 511, emphasis in original). It is because we immediately take aspects of the environment to be a certain way and to demand certain actions that aspects of our environments become inconspicuous to us and that our worlds take on a sense of familiarity. Thus, despite the fact that our everyday sense of familiarity is fundamentally dependent on a culturally specific pre-ontological grasp and is, indeed, a realization of that specificity, precisely because this very specificity establishes itself as implicit assumptions and interpretations, and as habitual actions, it never appears to us to be specific. Our experience of reality has its “foundation,” so to speak, in the withdrawal of the contingency of its

\(^{15}\) For Heidegger’s account of the “as” structure of equipment, see BT §32.
constitutive features such that, in general, we fail to perceive the interpreted character of our experience despite the irreducible role of interpretation in our worldly involvement.\(^\text{16}\)

Together, our implicit interpretations of our environments and our implicit interpretations of ourselves establish for us the sense that our own understanding of who we ourselves are, as well as our sense of how the world works, are universal. As we have seen, we inhabit our worlds by making them familiar and do so largely through our interactions with equipment. According to Heidegger, because we understand equipment as “ready-to-hand” we always experience our own interpretations of equipment as belonging to equipment itself. In this projection onto objects, our cultural specificity is manifest. Consider, for example, how strange and unnecessary certain questions about our behaviour might appear to us. If someone asked us why, upon entering a public space, we sat down on the seating provided, we might simply answer “because there was a seat.” When we do so we assume that a chair, for example, \(is\) for sitting; we did not improvise a seat, rather we did what seemed obvious given the thing in front of us. Our pre-ontological understanding rests in this kind of immediate grasp of equipment; equipment is at our disposal only when we experience it as equipment in its own right and such experience has a culturally specific character despite appearing to be about a thing.

Having come to see the relationship between cultural specificity, equipmentality and familiarity, let us now consider the culturally specific character of Dasein’s self-understanding. While familiarity is constitutive of Being-in-the-World, it is not yet clear that our explicit experiences of ourselves as, for example, teachers, students, engineers, lawyers and so on are related to the implicit aspects of our equipmental interactions in world. In other words, it is difficult to see the connection between our experience of our developed and worldly identities,

\(^{16}\) As Charles Scott writes, contrasting Dasein’s everyday self to the self-understanding that arises with an understanding of our Being, “Heidegger uses \textit{self} to refer to ‘who’ dasein is. The term is meant to suggest not universality but the relative activity of a socialized, acculturated individual making its way in life” (105).
on the one hand, and the inconspicuous aspects of our experience, on the other. Establishing this connection will allow us to see that our public identities are founded on the implicit interpretations of what it is to be person that are manifest in our pre-ontological understanding and are, therefore, always related to the equipmental constitution of our world. Accordingly, we will come to see that something like an equipmental relation is at work in our interactions with entities that do have the character of Dasein, at work in, in other words, our interactions with one another. As a result, we shall be able to see that our public identities are culturally specific, and that they depend on a familiar experience of the world and the equipmental structures that support it.

Our experience of our culturally specific roles is related to the culturally specific character of our pre-ontological understanding. As above, objects can be implicitly recognized in the way characterized by scarcity or the way characterized by abundance. These distinct ways of recognizing objects extends to our possibilities of self-understanding: growing up in an environment characterized by scarcity might lead us to recognize ourselves as implicitly answerable to the value of things in our world while growing up in an environment of abundance might lead us to recognize ourselves as indifferent to and disconnected from the undeniable presence of things. Our sense of who we ourselves are, in other words, corresponds to what we take things to be even though our taking things to be one way or another remains implicit. To illustrate further, to understand a thing as necessary and valuable is to have an understanding of a specific way of relating to that thing. In the experience of a specific way of relating is a specific experience of who we are: someone who is fundamentally answerable or someone who is fundamentally indifferent. Who we take ourselves to be, in other words, depends on how we take ourselves to be able to relate to the world; as “answerable,” our implicit sense of ourselves as
actors would involve the sense that our actions should preserve available resources at all costs. Meanwhile, to understand ourselves as “indifferent” would involve an experience of ourselves that is characterised by the sense that aspects of world should conform to our desires and interests. Culturally specific pre-ontological understandings, then, correspond to culturally specific self-understandings, and the latter are manifest as an implicit sense of how we ought to relate to the world in which we find ourselves. Thus, both culturally specific “worlds” and culturally specific self-interpretations always accompany definite environments, even while these environments and the self-interpretations associated with them do not appear as interpretations.

Our culturally specific self-interpretations arise through our experience of others. The cultural specificity through which each of us engages is manifest to us in what we take to be the obvious ways of responding to the world, even despite the fact that the foundation of our engagement is precisely the unique cultural specificity that enables us to experience the world as familiar. In other words, cultural specificity is something that belongs to all of us and, even though it can be manifest in different forms, it is always experienced by us as the universality or obviousness of our own interpretations. The sense that our particular way of interacting is universal and that our worlds accommodate others is confirmed for us by the fact that our worlds are always shared. Although we take others to be others “doing what is done” when we see them responding to the world the way that we would, what we actually witness is the collective character of our culturally specific interpretations. Indeed, it is precisely because our culturally specific interpretations are contingent that they must be performed and confirmed by others.

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17 Dreyfus addresses the influence of social norms in his analysis of “coping.” His earlier accounts of coping admit of the influence of social norms, while his later accounts are more restrictive and locate the normative dimension of coping in the experience of failure and success. For an example of his later position see “A Hermeneutic Approach to Intentionality.” The issue, of course, is not whether social norms influence the behaviour of the individual, but whether they do so at the level of bodily coping or emerge only with deliberate action and speech. For an account of the irreducibly social dimension of our coping in a shared world see Rouse 26-27.
Without this confirmation, we would never experience ourselves acting as “anyone” or
experience equipment as existent in its own right. Thus, our very equipmental engagement
presupposes the cooperation of others and we become accustomed to particular worlds as
members of groups who act as we do. Describing this phenomenon, Russon writes, “Becoming a
member of society requires becoming habituated to a series of practices which do structure a
dynamic of recognition along intelligible lines, but which do not appear as such to the
practitioner” (“Ritual” 516, emphasis in original). Thus, the cultural specificity manifest in our
equipmental engagement is not founded on specific ways of acting but, rather, on shared
interpretations of the world. What might appear to be the static identity of a culture is, rather, a
mutually confirming embeddedness in a culturally specific interpretation that does not have to
adhere to any specific form or expression. Thus, while our cultural-specificity rests in the pre-
onontological understanding that opens us to the world, our actual interactions are specific
interpretations—they are our culturally specific interpretations as they are realized at a particular
moment. Let us now explore how cultural specificity interpreted at a particular moment
constitutes our historical specificity.

(b) Historical Specificity

Just as we were able to see that our cultural belonging derives from the cultural
specificity of our interpretive openness to the world and, through this, from our mutually
confirming equipmental engagement, we shall also be able see that our historical belonging is
related to our equipmental engagements. Distinguishing Dasein’s historicality from historiology
(the “science of history”) and from history as an object of study, Heidegger describes various

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18 Russon explains that the “ritual” basis of identity is the process through which, by acting as others do, an
individual acquires her sense of self only by acquiring the sense of the “we” to which she belongs (“Ritual” 13-14).
ways that we tend to understand history: as the effect on us now of entities with a past such as, for example, “the remains of a Greek temple”; as the context of our current situations understood in terms of their development; as the realm of distinctly human development; and as whatever we inherit from the past (BT 430-431/378-379). According to Heidegger, it is Dasein’s historicality that makes possible these various ways of experiencing history such that whatever is ontically historical is realized only through the ontological mode of involvement characteristic of Dasein—through the interpretive openness to the world that corresponds to our equipmental involvement.  

As specific and concrete features of the world, equipmental totalities appeal, so to speak, to Dasein’s interpretive involvement thus requiring that Dasein accord to equipment the ready-to-hand character appropriate to the world in which Dasein finds itself. Put otherwise, although what we encounter comes to be meaningfully part of a world through our interpretations, because our encounters are always contextualized by well-developed world, we afford to the “equipment” of our specific worlds the interpretations that accord with equipmental norms of our environment. Thus, it is on account of our own way of existing that the world generally retains its coherence and is historical specificity. As we have seen, however, our way of interpreting is complex: it is comprised of implicit dimensions of experience as well as our explicit goal-oriented focus and both of these are culturally specific. In order to understand the historical character of the equipmental features of our world, we must revisit our own involvement and come to better understand its temporal structure.

Although we have not considered Dasein’s temporal character directly, our previous analyses have already illustrated important features of it. We may recall that there are three basic features of our equipmental involvement: the implicit aspects designated by Heidegger as (a) the “in-order-to”, the equipmental “totality,” and the “reference” or “assignments”; (b) the “ready-
to-hand” character of equipment that is encountered in our use of it; and (c) the “towards which” or “work” that orients us. These features of our basic interpretive relations to the world can be understood, respectively, in terms of the temporal dimensions of past, present and future. Let us look at each of these in turn in order to understand the historical specificity of our equipmental engagements.

According to Heidegger, Dasein is never past in the same way that entities are because it has existence, and never merely “presence,” as its kind of Being. We are never merely “present” in our world because our existence is such that we are always in the process of constituting the world in which we are engaged. Our “pastness,” therefore, cannot be understood as a fact about our presence at one historical time or another; it must be understood in terms of our existence. Heidegger refers to our distinctive way of being past as Dasein’s “having-been-there” [da-gewesen], and explains that this dimension of our existence refers to the fact that our existence is always a worldly involvement—even if the world of the past no longer exists, insofar as we “have been,” we have always been involved in the world.\footnote{Ontologically, this pastness consist of one of Dasein’s three ecstatic temporal dimensions—“having been,” along with the “to be” and the present, are the medium of Dasein’s self-disclosure in the world through, respectively, mood, understanding and fallenness. For an account the ecstatic character of Dasein’s temporal constitution, see Scott 120-124.} Such involvement, moreover, never disappears in the same way that entities can; our “having-been-there” characterises us essentially and does not disappear with the disappearance of a world. Indeed, it always remains the case that we have been involved in the world in one way or another. The worldly character of our “having-been-there” corresponds to the implicit dimensions of equipmental engagement because it is these dimensions that constitute our involvement and that disappear with the passing of our world. We retain as our own past the implicit dimensions of the always articulated contexts in which we accomplish our tasks; these dimensions, and the know-how associated with them, stay
with us even when we cease, permanently or temporarily, to realize them. Moreover, because Dasein always acquires the know-how associated with particular contexts, it acquires a having-been-there that is shared by the others who engage in the contexts it does—it becomes embedded in tradition. Explaining Dasein’s embeddedness in tradition, Kockelman writes;

*Dasein’s “having been” far exceeds a person’s own life. Dasein’s essential historicity manifests itself here [...] Through history, which hitherto has been able to throw only a very defective light on everything that has preceded our existence, Dasein comes in contact with the “having been” in the most general sense of the word.* (Heidegger 88, emphasis in original)

Our existence is always contextualized by how we have done things; thus, our ways of doing embed us in the traditions whereby we acquire our shared histories.

Just as Dasein is never past in the way an entity is, its involvement in the present is also unique to the way that it exists. According to Heidegger, Dasein’s being present is constituted by its perpetual involvement the temporal relations of past, present and future, and follows from Dasein’s way of being futural. Accordingly, we shall consider the relationship between Dasein’s future and the “towards-which” characteristic of its equipmental involvement first, and, second, attend to the relationship between its present and the ready-to-hand character of entities. As we have seen, Dasein’s existence is defined by its “to be” and is, in this way, at issue for it. As entities who care about our existence, we are always oriented towards the future as the site, so to speak, in which the existence with which we are concerned will be realized. Our futurity is manifest in terms of our involvement, an involvement that is always fundamentally equipmental. According to Heidegger, then, just as much as our past is constituted by the implicit dimensions
of our equipmental involvement, our basic involvement in the world has futurity constitutive of it, and we exist for ourselves in this futurity in terms of the work we are trying to accomplish.

If the veiled dimensions of Dasein’s equipmental engagement correspond to its distinctive ways of Being past, and the work with which it is involved corresponds to the future in terms of which it is at issue for itself, Dasein’s present is realized in its encounter with the way equipment exists in its own right—with the ready-to-hand character of equipment. To recall, Dasein makes manifest the ready-to-hand character of equipment when it uses it in the way most appropriate to it. The hammer, for example, is ready-to-hand in the hammering. It exists in terms of how it is put to use such that the reality of our tools is confirmed in our very use of them. The confirmation of the reality, or the “Being,” of the tools corresponds to Dasein’s distinctive involvement in the present—what Heidegger calls Dasein’s “making present.” Our current “realities” are, therefore, dependent on our distinctive ways of being past and future: our goals are the explicit experience of our equipmental “having-been” and, oriented towards them, we realize our having-been in the use we make of the equipment at our disposal. Describing the dynamic through which Dasein comes to be aware of the stakes and temporal constitution of its present, Heidegger writes:

only an entity which, as futural, is equiprimordially in the process of having-been, can, by handing down to itself the possibility it has inherited, take over its own throwness and be in the moment of vision for “its time.” (BT 437/385, emphasis in original)

Dasein’s involvement in its own time is always also an involvement in its modes of being past and futural, and only the determinacy of its past and its vision of the future can inform its experience of the present.
Our equipmental engagement is historically specific, then, not simply because our ways of doing and making have a history, but, more essentially, because our ways of doing and making are our history interpreted in terms of the goals that matter to us. Our historical specificity consists in how we realize what matters to us in terms of the equipmental resources at our disposal. Thus, our historical specificity is always also our cultural specificity; both our equipmental engagement and our experience of what matters necessarily draw on the pre-ontological openness to the world that determines our encounters in culturally specific ways. Moreover, inasmuch as our equipmental dealings are always the realization of our pre-ontological openness, and are so as the site of our mutual confirmation of our interpreted realities, the making present that constitutes our historical specificity is always the realization of our cultural specificity. Thus, our cultural specificity and our historical specificity are inseparable from one another.

The familiarity and inseparability constitutive of our cultural and historical specificity allow us to understand that the definitive aspects of our world and, indeed, our existence, are those that are manifest in our basic experiences of familiarity; we are culturally and historically specific in terms of what we take for granted. What we take for granted, meanwhile, informs which goals we choose to pursue. Our projects, in other words, are the media through which our culturally and historically specific contexts are realized. A student who pursues an undergraduate degree in North America, for example, takes for granted a variety of contingent aspects of her world. To name a few, she likely understands herself as an autonomous individual capable of making rational decisions about her life; she assumes that her presence in the classroom is welcome and that she will be allowed to complete her degree; she assumes she can travel safely to and from school; and she assumes that when she applies for a job, there will at least be
regulations against discrimination on the basis of sex or race. While these assumptions are, roughly, specific to 20th- and 21st-Century Western life, they are generally taken for granted by the individuals who live in the world associated with this particular historical moment in this particular culture. Heidegger’s analysis has shown us that the cultural specificity we tend to take for granted is rooted in our equipmental engagement and, accordingly, that we must understand our equipmental contexts as the sites in which our cultural and historical specificity is realized.

As noted at the beginning of this section, Heidegger states that “Dasein has grown up both into and in a traditional way of interpreting itself: in terms of this it understands itself proximally and, within a certain range, constantly. By this understanding, the possibilities of its Being are disclosed and regulated” (BT 41/20). In terms of the specificity that is articulated in terms of what we take for granted, definite possibilities and projects appear to us and we realize our world precisely through the pursuit of these projects. In the goals we choose to pursue then,—the “towards-which” or work that defines our equipmental engagement—we present ourselves with what we take to be important and “who” we take ourselves to be and do so on the basis of the scope of significance afforded to our world and maintained in and through our own equipmental engagement.

Now that we have seen how our cultural and historical specificity is manifest in the equipmental dimensions of our world, both in their implicit dimensions and in the projects we choose, we will be able to understand the relationship between the specific identities we choose to adopt, our culturally specific pre-ontological understanding and our historical specificity. Developing our example from above, it should now be clear that only in a world in which objects are essentially understood as “replaceable and inadequate” is it possible to become a marketing expert or the employee of high-volume discount chain; human beings are defined in various
ways by the character of their commerce with entities and all these various ways share a fundamental and implicit understanding of “human being” that accords with and subtends any particular worldly identity. The historical specificity of equipment is thus manifestly related to the interaction of a pre-ontological sense of the world and the concrete world itself; the realization of familiarity—the relation that extends beyond a definite interaction—is always historical, just as is what matters to us and what prompts us to choose. In summary, the culturally and historically distinct, yet implicit, sense of the world embedded in equipmental totalities affects, in equal measure, Dasein’s own self-interpretation and its view of what goals and projects are available to it for a satisfying realization of its sense of itself. In effect, we derive a sense of ourselves both in relation to an embedded and cultural sense of the world and through the various ways that cultural sense has been deployed and developed in the course of world history.

Dasein depends on the cultural and historical specificity of equipment insofar as its own abilities and possibilities are only ever available to it in well-defined worlds. Meanwhile, Dasein most often fails to notice that it is, in fact, subject to any interpretation at all, i.e., it takes its sense of itself for granted. Despite this “self-oblivion,” so to speak, Dasein perpetuates that specificity through its worldly goals and its “traditional,” worldly self-understanding, both of which are the concrete and ontic realization of the interpreted and mediated character of Dasein’s originary understanding. Dasein thus stands perpetually in relation to its originary understanding because it is always in the process of realizing that understanding in the way it shapes the practices of its world. Our world houses the historical realization of an originary understanding through which, in our oblivion, or more generously, in our everyday interactions with the world, we carry forward the historical and cultural specificity without which we would be
unrecognizable either as individuals or as societies. That is, we carry forward this specificity because it shapes us and makes into the acting individuals that we are.

Section Five: Work and Specificity

We have now seen that our practical know-how is the ground of our engagement, and that we generally find ourselves oriented towards goals that are appropriate to our historically and culturally specific environments—to, that is, the possibilities we select from the scope of meaningful possibilities available in our world. In what follows, we shall consider how Dasein proceeds from the basic experience of familiarity to the pursuit of identity-defining goals. Through this analysis, which will draw primarily on Heidegger’ account of “work” [Werk], it should become apparent that we define ourselves in this process both in terms of our acquired perspective on the world and in terms of our capacity to act in the world.

As we have seen, everyday interactions become inconspicuous for us in our efforts to do something specific. When engaged in these efforts, our attention is fundamentally captured by the work we are trying to accomplish. As Heidegger writes, “that with which we concern ourselves primarily is the work” (BT 99/69). Equipmental engagement is experienced by us in terms of, to use Heidegger’s examples, the shoe or the clock we are in the midst of making (BT 99/70). By identifying the work as that which holds our attention, Heidegger demonstrates that the work we do ties us to the world at large; we are never focused exclusively on the task at hand because our focus on the task is always contextualized by our experience of the world in which that task is meaningful. As Heidegger writes, “The work bears with it that referential totality within which equipment is encountered” (BT 99/70), and does so by referring to the ““towards-
which’ of its usability and the ‘whereof’ of which it consist,” as well as “an assignment to the person who is to use it or wear it” (BT 100/70). The work determines our orientation within a context by opening contexts to us in terms of the definite and purposeful relations that constitute such contexts. We experience this orientation in terms of the sense, or logic, of our equipmental involvement—in terms of our sense of the purposeful orientation of our various contexts as a whole, and of how the various aspects of contexts correspond and contribute to that orientation. Accordingly, we experience some contexts as places in which specific work is done, and others as places in which we amuse ourselves. More essentially, we experience contexts in terms of the nature of the work required of us and the attitudes that correspond to them. Thereby, our work grants us access to the whole network of equipmental relations in the context of which our goal makes sense, and by which our experience of others is mediated. Thus, through our work, the familiar sense of how things are done acquires a sense of purpose and significance. Our work connects us to the uses, contexts, norms and roles that are specific to our world and orients us towards these in terms of our productive and purposeful place within them. In effect, the work constitutes our experience of our stake in the world and, thereby, allows us to adopt as our own the significance of the world as this significance is constituted by the possibilities of purposeful engagement available to us.

As that which constitutes our explicit experience of shared contexts, our work always has a shared significance that enables us to participate in the world we share with others. Expressing the necessarily shared or public significance of work, Heidegger writes, “the work that is to be found when one is ‘at work’ on something [das in Arbeit befindliche]—has a usability which belongs to it essentially; in this usability it lets us encounter already the ‘towards which’ for which it is usable” (BT 99/70, emphasis in original). The product or goal towards
which our work is oriented accords with how our work is interpreted in the world around us. Our work is always focused on producing a particular product that is useful in particular ways; shoes, for example, are made to be worn. At the same time, work is never merely instrumental; shoes may have a practical purpose, but our wearing them speaks generally to our involvement in a shared world. The practical goals or products of which our work consists, then, are the way we gain access to the overriding public context in which our work takes place. The “usability” of our work consists in its instrumental purpose, a purpose always contextualized by the world that allows us to make sense of it. Moreover, we gain access to that whole only through the particular, instrumental work we do—our own personal involvement in a meaningful world is opened up to us only through the specificity of our work. We engage instrumentally in our world; we produce things, organize events, and build buildings and roads, and yet all activities such as these are always more than they may appear to be. Our work affirms the way in which our world is shared because our commitment to our work is a commitment to it not merely as a task to be accomplished, but as something that has been interpreted and measured in the terms of our shared worlds. Our personal and professional commitments are, in other words, commitments to an interpretation of what matters in the world we share with others.

Having seen that our work is always specific and that, only as such, does it grant us access to our world, let us consider the way in which gaining this access involves making ourselves determinate. We shall proceed, first, by focusing on the determinate perspective our work affords us, and, next, on the specific agency we acquire in our work. We shall see that we become determinate individuals through the work we do, as well as that this determinacy relates us to our world productively, and in ways that tend to make us blind to changes in our worlds.
Section Six: Perspective and Determinacy

Let us consider what is involved in having a perspective. As we have seen, by holding our attention, our work ties us to the various dimensions of the public world. How we see the world, then, depends on how our work opens us to its significance; our projects and the conditions that enable or offer resistance to them are that in terms of which the various dimensions of the public world take on definite significance for us. Heidegger explains how the work that renders significant our existence shapes our perspective by defining our position with respect to the rest of our worldly reality:

Our concernful absorption in whatever work-world lies closest to us, has the function of discovering; and it is essential to this function that, depending upon the way in which we are absorbed, those entities within-the-world which are brought along [beigebrachte] in the work and with it (that is to say in the assignments or references that are constitutive for it) remain discoverable in varying degrees of explicitness and with a varying circumspective penetration. (BT 101/71)

Our perspective accords both with our sense of the world and with the particulars of our instrumental environments because our sense of the world is only ever open to us through our particular, equipmental involvement; it is this involvement that grants us access to the sense of the world that subsequently informs our experience of our particular tasks.

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21 The Being of entities that is disclosed in circumspection is, for Heidegger, a structure that can only be disclosed by his phenomenological analysis of Dasein’s existence:

As long as we take our orientation primarily and exclusively from the present at hand, the “in itself” can by no means be ontologically clarified. If, however, this talk about the “in itself” has any ontological importance, some interpretation must be called for. This “in itself” of Being is something which gets invoked with considerable emphasis, mostly in an ontical way, and rightly so from a phenomenal standpoint. But if some ontological assertion is supposed to be given when this is onically invoked, its claims are not fulfilled by such a procedure. (BT 106/75-76)
Insofar as our work initiates us into a world that makes sense, it initiates us into a significant whole constituted by particular interpretations of what is important and what is done. The sense of the world, in other words, is never a strictly logical grasp of how we meet the practical demands of life; rather, it is constituted by our cultural and historical specificity and includes important aspects of life that we take for granted. The features that we take for granted—for example, our sense of ourselves as autonomous individuals, a capitalist economic system, or basic human rights—constitute the world’s “sense” such that our experience of specific aspects of our world depends on a grasp of the sense of the world with which we become familiar only through the contexts in which we work and in which we discover for ourselves our possibilities of significant involvement in a meaningful world. As connected to our experience of work, basic features of the world that we take for granted are also constitutive of our perspectives.

Having a perspective is also associated with having a specific interpretation of ourselves and our own significance; to be oriented in the world in terms of the coherent structures of the ready-to-hand is also to be attached to a particular experience of worldly significance and to see ourselves in terms of that significance. As Heidegger tells us, the various relations that constitute our involvement lead back to the ultimate “for-the sake of which” that Heidegger identifies as “Dasein, for which, in its Being, that very Being is an issue” (BT 117/84, emphasis in original). In other words, our perspective on the world is acquired by our orientation within it, and this orientation accords with the meaningful experience of the world that contextualizes our meaningful experience of ourselves.

In sum, when we focus on what is required for the attainment of a goal, we develop the capacity to see the world as constitutive of the precise possibility with which we are engaged. In
effect, the work stands before us as a mirror reflecting to us the environment as one in which our self-realization becomes a possibility. Having come to see that we acquire definite perspectives through our work and that such perspectives accord with our experience of a meaningful world, as well as with our meaningful sense of ourselves as we are involved in that world, let us now consider how we become determinate in and through the abilities we acquire in order to accomplish our tasks.

While those of us who share a world have many habits and abilities in common, because we all inhabit specific worlds in addition to the general cultural and historical contexts we share, we can deal easily with the demands of some contexts, while others remain unfamiliar to us and prohibitive to our involvement. Which contexts we can negotiate easily and which confront us with an obtrusive lack of familiarity mark us as specific individuals. Becoming specific, meanwhile, involves familiarizing ourselves with different environment and such familiarization involves learning. Let us see how the process through which we familiarise ourselves with our environments involves learning.22

Since familiarity allows us to experience our environments with the immediacy necessary for equipmental engagement, familiarity requires that our experience of various environments be experience in which our basic expectations about how things function and where things are are confirmed. Our expectations arise and are confirmed in contexts we have come to know. A carpenter, for example, had to learn to use a hammer before she could predict how hard and at what angle to hit a nail to achieve the desired effect and thereby appropriated the hammer effortlessly into her activity. Engaging effortlessly with tools, as with other aspects of our equipmentally mediated concern, requires that we come to be able to use them skilfully such that

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22 Olafson argues that the process of learning to accommodate ourselves to the demands of “objects and situations” begins with our coming to be aware of the fact that others are never “fully at our disposal” (24).
an explicit knowledge of the steps necessary to our task and the technical capacity to perform them give way to a responsiveness and flexibility with regard to the task at hand. A skill has really been mastered when we no longer have to focus on it explicitly and have acquired instead a mode of responsiveness shaped by it. Learning is the process through which specific skills come to be at our disposal. Once at our disposal, such skills shape our responses both to ordinary occurrences and to that which interrupts our otherwise unimpeded efforts. Because the process of learning shapes how we are able to respond, learning makes us determinate: as possibilities of responsiveness, we are the very shape and nature of our abilities as they relate to the potential responses we have built up.

Let us now consider explicitly how the basic forms of responsiveness we acquire through learning shape not only our inconspicuous responsiveness but also the acts we consciously choose to perform. The relationship between the two becomes clear when we consider that the more difficult it is to perform our tasks fluidly and thoughtlessly, the more explicitly we find ourselves acting on the basis of the relations that constitute the equipmental environments that shape us. Heidegger illustrates most clearly our submission to the equipmental relations that constitute our world in his analysis of the way our otherwise smoothly functioning equipmental environments can be interrupted. He writes the following:

When equipment cannot be used, this implies that the constitutive assignment of the “in-order-to” to a “towards this” has been disturbed. The assignments themselves are not observed; they are rather “there” when we concernfully submit ourselves to them [Sichstellen unter sie]. But when an assignment has been disturbed—when something is unusable for some purpose—then the assignment becomes explicit. Even now, of course, it has not become explicit as an ontological structure; but it has become explicit ontically.
for the circumspection which comes up against the damaging of the tool. (BT 105/74, emphasis in original)²³

When the tasks that require our skilful involvement cannot be performed inconspicuously, the definite equipmental relations implicit in those tasks appear explicitly and inform how we respond to the interruption. Thus, for example, while I may not have recognized explicitly that I need lead for my mechanical pencil to work, when the mechanical pencil I am using runs out of lead, I see explicitly that I had been relying on a specific item of equipment. My basic reliance shapes my deliberate actions when I attempt to solve my problem. In general, our capacity to deal with broken or missing aspects of our equipmental engagement discloses the concrete ways in which our action is a product of the equipmental structure of our environments; even when disruptions occur, we continue act in accordance with the demands of our environments.²⁴ In effect, then, both our basic equipmental engagement and our decisions-based actions as self-recognizing agents in the world are founded on the sense of ourselves we acquire through our involvement in the world, and are, thus, indissociable from our sense of the significant world in which we find ourselves. We shall now see that a worldly sense of significance underlies our agency and that, as a result, inasmuch as our equipmental involvement is enabling, it can also be a source of our blind spots with respect to changing aspects of the world such that becoming specific individuals is both necessary, and necessarily risky.

Heidegger’s analysis of the disruptions of our equipmental contexts illustrates that such disruptions disclose the world by revealing to us the “pressure” asserted by the world on our

²³ According to Heidegger, “circumspection” [Umsicht] refers to the distinctive way we see entities in conformity with equipmental totalities (BT 98/69).

²⁴ To see how Dreyfus’ account admits of these more developed forms of behaviour see Rouse. Rouse’s position is important for my project because I am arguing that equipmental “coping” is the source of our more developed behaviour. Importantly, Dreyfus’ understanding of practical coping cannot be conflated with a pragmatic account of action; Dreyfus follows Heidegger in maintaining that the world is disclosed through practical coping and that items of equipment do not, consequently, stand out before the subject as means, see Rouse 12.
endeavours; they reveal the equimental structure to which the world ought to conform. As Heidegger explains, we experience the obstinacy of equipment when we have the sense that certain tasks must be attended to even when our concern is oriented elsewhere (BT 103/73/74); resisting the pressures of the world, we find the world in our very resistance. The contextualizing and normative phenomenon of world is, as Heidegger tells us, not an entity within the world, but, rather, a phenomenon constitutive of Dasein’s Being-in-the-World: “The world is not an entity within-the-world; and yet it is so determinative for such entities that only in so far as ‘there is’ a world can they be encountered and show themselves, in their Being, as entities which have been discovered” (BT 102/72). Although it is always the product of our interpretive projection, the world constitutes our always contextualized experience of ourselves, as well as our experience of the purpose and significance of the various equipmental contexts in which we engage. The world contextualizes our existence by providing for us implicitly our basic reasons for approaching our lives—our existence—as we do.

As we have now seen, our specificity consists in our perspective on the world and the shaped ways we are able to act within it. Our specificity is always a worldly specificity—it is contextualized by the culturally and historically specific sense of the world that we experience only ever inconspicuously as the necessity of behaving certain ways and adopting certain values and beliefs. Only by adopting our contextualizing norms, values and beliefs are we able to realize by equipmental means the projects that define us in significant ways. In effect, the total result of our determinate abilities and our specific perspectives is both a sense that the world as a whole is meaningful and the correlative capacity to live up to and realize that meaning by taking up projects in our environments. As shaped by a culturally and historically specific environment,
we carry that specificity forward and realize it in our efforts to realize the goals that represent for us a contribution to the totality of significance of which our world is comprised.

As Dasein, we bear our world with us in the projects we undertake. Precisely because of this, we always have the potential for a certain amount of autonomy with respect to the contexts in which we find ourselves and we always risk misreading such contexts and missing opportunities within them that might otherwise allow us to achieve our goals. In the following consideration of this sort of misrecognition, it should be kept in mind that it is our interpretive Being that has as a consequence the fact that it is our responsibility to ensure that our actions correspond to the significance on which we draw. While the sense of familiarity that contextualizes our engagements consists of the implicit understanding of personhood, and of the values and norms that contextualize our engagement, because we bear this normalizing familiarity with us whenever we engage in the world, we tend to associate our sense of ourselves with the particular activities and projects in which we involve ourselves rather than with the worldly significance in terms of which such projects make sense. Accordingly, we can engage in projects as though they offer to us the possibility of realizing worldly significance even when they do not. For example, an individual who chooses to pursue a certain kind of education in present-day North America likely invokes implicit assumptions about her capacity to choose her own career goals, and about the promise of meaningful employment that will follow from her education. In general, we tend to assume that acquiring an education will give us a certain amount of freedom and agency in our world and it is at least for these reasons that we do the work necessary to acquire a degree or certificate. It is possible however, that acquiring an education will not afford to us the resources we imagine it will: we may find ourselves unemployable or we may find that we have been encouraged to acquire skills that are out of date.
In cases such as these, our assumptions about what acquiring an education entails and our belief in its importance have enabled us to engage in a project that does not in fact provide us with what we though it should. Precisely because we bring our worldly assumptions to bear on our projects, we do not always notice that the particular way certain projects are organized and available to us is actually in opposition to the very values we hoped to realize through them.

While we always project a world in the sense that Heidegger describes, we are not bound by the explanations, assumptions, justification, opportunities or procedures that we encounter in the concrete world. Our worldliness is, in other words, the resource we have for criticizing and questioning our current world and, because the opportunities offered to us in our world do not always offer what they purport to, we must question and criticise these opportunities insofar as we are interested in engaging in projects that realize for us the implicit meanings in terms of which we matter to ourselves in the first place. As we have seen, we become specific, determinate individuals with specific perspectives and possibilities of acting through the work we do, and, in the course of this development, we make ourselves the determinate expressions of the very pre-ontological understanding that first opens us to worldly significance as such. This openness is, as we have seen, our way of participating in the tradition on which we depend, and we inherit it precisely as something to be realized in the historically specific contexts in which we find ourselves. We are, therefore, always in the process of realizing a tradition in specific ways and, because we may fail in our own self-realization, we may or may not succeed in realizing our traditions in ways that accord with the best they have to offer.
Conclusion

By considering the way in which the aspects of our experience that generally remain implicit for us are, in fact, sites of interpretation, we have come to see that our implicit interpretations of the things in our world give rise to our developed sense of ourselves and, thereby, shape in significant ways the specific individuals we become. Our analysis involved considering the anonymity and passivity that are integral to our experience of purposeful and meaningful equipmental engagement, as well as coming to see that what we experience as impersonal aspects of such engagement are always culturally and historically specific. The analysis also involved coming to see the important role played by our work in our developed experience of a meaningful world; our purposeful orientation towards our work opens us up to the world of shared significance that renders our work meaningful; and our dependence on the significance granted to our work by our involvement in a shared world revealed that our activity is never merely instrumental, but always, rather, a response to a realization of the fundamentally interpretive character of our existence. Finally, we considered the way we become determinate in order to consider how the involvement that renders us capable of acting in determinate and meaningful ways also creates in us the potential for blind spots with respect to our world. In the following chapter, we shall consider more directly our relations with one another, coming to see that such relations are always institutionally mediated and that, accordingly, it is only ever through our institutions that we are capable of realizing ourselves and relating to one another.
Chapter Two: Institutions, Significance and Human Relations

Our involvement with others is pervasive. We see others on the street, at work, and in the media; we look to others for entertainment, for guidance and self-justification. All our various, and variously motivated, experiences of others pertain to the shared public world we take for granted and express, in various ways, how we understand ourselves, our world, and our possibilities of relating to and recognizing one another. In this chapter, we shall consider both ontological and concrete dimensions of our relations with others. Thereby, we shall come to see how our ontological relatedness is related to our capacity to recognize and respond critically to the institutions that mediate irreducibly our relations with one another, and that doing so affords us the possibility of realizing ourselves through relations with others. In addition to an analysis of our relations with one another, this chapter will include an account of institutions that will allow us to consider the basic ways of relating to one another that Heidegger describes in his account of solicitude as contributing to a critique of institutions and to the recognition of institutions as sites in which we can own up responsibly to our essential openness to others. This chapter has five sections, each of which I will describe briefly below.

In the first section, we shall analyse Heidegger’s account of Being-with and Dasein-with to see that we are constitutively open to one another and that we experience this openness in terms of our sense of mattering to others. Further, we shall see that we respond to our sense that we matter to others, the sense that discloses to us that it is incumbent upon us to respond to the
singularity of the other, by interpreting others through terms of recognition afforded to us by our world, and that we come to understand ourselves only through the terms we attribute to others. We shall conclude that the dynamic of recognition that ties us to others reveals that our self-relation is inseparable from our other-relations and that this relational dynamic underlies all our modes of relating to others—inasmuch as we relate to ourselves as worldly beings, we draw on resources afforded to us only through cooperation with others. Moreover, such resources derive not only from practical cooperation, but from an irreducible sense of the world as shared by others who realize themselves in specific worldly terms. In the second section, we shall see that Heidegger’s account of solicitude articulates three distinct ways—Indifference, Leaping in and Leaping ahead—not only of relating to one another, but, concomitantly, of recognizing or failing to recognize that we share the world.

In the third section, we shall depart more explicitly from a straightforward interpretation of Heidegger’s work to interpret each mode of solicitude as it pertains to our experience of and involvement in a differentiated social world. To justify our analysis of social life, broadly construed, in terms of the three modes of solicitude Heidegger describes, we shall begin by considering the ubiquitous presence of the “they” for Dasein, thereby demonstrating that our particular modes of relating to one another pertain inevitably to our existence as it is always supported by and embedded in the traditions, norms and institutions in which we find ourselves. Next, we will identify three main features of our mediated, worldly existence: Indifference and Leaping-in will be associated, respectively, with a social atmosphere and with cooperation in

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25 Zimmerman’s comments about Heidegger’s descriptions of Dasein’s everydayness support our application of Heidegger’s account of solicitude to life in society. He writes, “While Heidegger claimed to reveal something essential about human existence in his account of everydayness, in fact many of his ‘descriptions’ were critical evaluations of everyday life in industrial-urban society” (Heidegger’s Confrontation 22). According to Zimmerman, Heidegger comes close to admitting this when describing everydayness as “a mode of Dasein’s Being, even when that Dasein is active in a highly developed and differentiated culture—and precisely then” (BT 76/50-51).
terms of social roles, while Leaping ahead will be understood as the effort to instil in the other a critical attitude towards our particular ways of sharing the world. We shall come to see that Indifference, construed as the manifestation of a social atmosphere, generally remains implicit; that Leaping in, construed as large-scale cooperation, is associated with specific risks; and that Leaping ahead is associated with a recognition of the necessity of both these aspects, as well as with resources for an effective and informed critique of them.

In the fourth section, we will develop an account of institutions that corresponds to our analyses of Indifference and Leaping in, arguing that institutions must be understood to be comprised of both explicit aspects and the implicit effect of these explicit aspects on the behaviour through which we conform to and realize performatively our institutions. We will draw on the work of John Rawls and Pierre Bourdieu to define institutions and to highlight their inherently social character and their consequent inseparability from our modes of solicitude. We shall also deepen our understanding of the necessary role played by institutions in our worldly existence by drawing on Heidegger’s essay, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” to see that our meaningful experience of the world depends on institutions that function for us as pre-established features of our world. Further, we shall draw on Hans-Georg Gadamer’s analysis of play to consider the necessity of institutions to our self-realization and to see that through such self-realization we are always in the process of performing our institutions. This section will have demonstrated both that institutions are always structures in which we negotiate with one another to determine the significance of our respective identities and that such sites always appear to be objective features of our world contributing to our possibility of coherent and meaningful life. Moreover, we shall have come to see that by realizing ourselves in
institutionally mediated ways, we always, at the same time, perform the very contexts in which our relations with one another are rendered determinate and significant.

In the fifth and final section, we shall return to Heidegger’s work in *Being and Time* and we shall interpret his account of the “they” [*das Man*] as contributing to a critique of institutions. We shall see that the account of the “they” amounts to a basic imperative according to which we ought not to understand as authoritative with respect to how we ought to live any specific aspect of our institutionally mediated lives. Further, recognizing that the imperative associated with the “they” fails to forbid any kind of behaviour, we shall come to see that Heidegger’s account of Leaping in contributes to an understanding of the inherent reciprocity constitutive of our relations with one another, and that such reciprocity constitutes a second imperative according to which institutions ought to be recognized as sites oriented towards our recognition of one another such that in our concrete relations we can come to live up to the dynamic of our ontological relatedness and, thereby, realize ourselves through our relations with others. Overall, this chapter will have demonstrated that the ontological relatedness to others Heidegger describes is not only compatible with an understanding of institutions, but is realized concretely only through institutions that contribute to our recognition of one another.26

**Section One: Self and Others**

In this section, we shall come to see (a) that our sharing a world with others is predicated on an irreducible relatedness to others; (b) that this irreducible relatedness is always realized in determinate ways; and (c) that our relation to ourselves is always mediated by our determinate

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26 For a critique of the overly individuated character of Heidegger’s account of authenticity, see Haar “The Enigma of Everydayness” 27.
ways of recognizing others. We shall begin by considering Heidegger’s account of Being-with [Mitsein] (how we are open to others), to see that our self-realization always occurs through others. Next, we shall consider Heidegger’s account of Dasein-with [Mitdasein] (how others appear to us), to see that our relatedness to others is always determinate, and contextualized, for the most part, by our co-participation in equipmental contexts. Finally, we shall see that we matter to ourselves in terms of our definite ways of encountering others such that our self-relation and our other-relation are inseparable and that both are always realized in determinate contexts.

(a) Being-with

According to Heidegger, our ability to encounter others like ourselves is founded in our ontological constitution. Inasmuch as we find ourselves in the world, we find ourselves open in principle to others who find themselves in the world just as we do. Heidegger calls our ontologically irreducible openness to others our “Being-with,” defining it as a constitutive aspect of our Being “there” in the world, an aspect that determines our experience to be characterised by an irreducible awareness of the existence of others.27 In principle, this openness to others is independent of their factual presence: we are not simply capable of recognizing others like us; rather, our existence is defined by openness to others on the basis of which our recognition of

27 Dreyfus argues that in positing a world that pre-exists any individual Dasein Heidegger overcomes the Cartesianism inherent in Husserl’s transcendent subjectivity (Being 146); by realising itself in terms of a worldly involvement that it did not invent, Dasein can remain “mine” without having to constitute the world as such. The insistence on the “mineness” of Dasein has led some scholars to argue that Heidegger is guilty of retaining the modern metaphysical idea of the subject, see Taminiaux, Project xix. Heidegger himself points to this difficulty in his 1928 course, The Metaphysical Foundation of Logic:

The basic question of philosophy, the question of being, is in itself, correctly understood, the question of man. It is, correctly understood, a question about man which lives hidden in the history of philosophy and in this history will move onward, but which will have to be brought to light afresh every moment. (16/[19-21]).

Explicating this tension in Heidegger, François Raffoul explains that the “I” that is identified as a remnant of Cartesianism is, in Heidegger’s analysis, Being itself, and that it is for that reason that the analytic of Dasein had to be undertaken as the site of the project of fundamental ontology (Subject 208-212).
particular others can occur. Heidegger explains that others are “disclosed within-the-world for a Dasein, and so too for those who are Daseins with us [die Mitdaseienden], only because Dasein in itself is essentially Being-with” (BT 156/120). We, qua Dasein, recognize others, and recognize others to be recognizable, only because of our fundamental openness to them.

In our very experience of the world we experience our relatedness to others because our recognition of others is the worldly manifestation and realization of our ontological relatedness. Inasmuch as we are structurally open to one another and inasmuch as our existence is always experienced by us as something to be realized, we experience, at least implicitly, our existence as something we realize with and through others. Accordingly, our orientation to the world is equally a directedness towards others as much as it is directedness towards things, and the openness to others Heidegger calls Being-with can be understood as an inclination towards others: “Being-with, like concern, is a Being towards entities encountered in the world” (BT 157/121, emphasis in original). Thus, we are not merely capable of recognizing others; if that were the case, Being-with would be more like “something which turns up in every case by reason of the occurrence of Others” (BT 156/120). Rather, others are disclosed to us from out of our own orientation towards them, an orientation that, according to Heidegger, is our very way of existing. We exist, in other words, in an openness to others that takes the form of an inclination towards them, an orientation towards them, in their otherness, as the beings that they are. Heidegger writes, “Being-with is such that the disclosedness of the Dasein-with of Others belongs to it; this means that because Dasein’s Being is Being-with, its understanding of Being already implies the understanding of others” (BT 160-161/123). Thus, as Being-in-the-World, as

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28 Jean-Luc Nancy caims that Heidegger’s account of our Being with others lacks an account of our “clinamen,” or inclination, to be with others (The Inoperative Community 6).
29 It is in this way that Heidegger’s account of our Being-with-one-another differs from the account of human relations Sartre offers in Being and Nothingness (301-303, 340-400).
entities who project ourselves into the world towards entities and others like ourselves, we are open to others whether we aim actively to recognize others or aim, implicitly or otherwise, to remain indifferent to them.

Inclined to others, we find ourselves involved, in principle, with them in the same way that we find ourselves projected into a world as the very site where we matter to ourselves. Since we have seen already that our existence is always at issue for us, we shall now come to see that the way our existence is at issue for us is always mediated by others. In §32 of Being and Time, Heidegger explains that “understanding” [Verstehen] underlies Dasein’s projection of itself onto worldly possibilities and that understanding always realizes itself as an interpretation of how Dasein’s existence matters to it in terms of the definite possibilities of significance available in its world.\footnote{It is worth noting that the constitution of the “there,” which Heidegger identities as constituted equiprimordially by understanding, state-of-mind, and discourse (BT 172/134), is itself inherently intersubjective inasmuch as a “co-state-of-mind” [Mitbefindlichkeit] is enabled by discourse and communication (BT 205/162).} Dasein’s experience of articulated significance is the experience of world. Our relatedness to others is thus manifest for us in that “world” is always experienced by Dasein as a significance available to others;

Dasein’s world frees entities which are not only quite distinct from equipment and Things, but which also—in accordance with their kind of Being as Dasein themselves—are ‘in’ the world in which they are at the same time encountered within-the-world, and are ‘in’ it by way of Being-in-the-world. (BT 154/118, emphasis in original)

Inasmuch as Dasein’s experience of itself is worldly, then, Dasein experiences its world as readily available to others, and experiences itself as projected into a world in which it will be perceived by others.

Dasein’s experience of itself as open to the perspectives of others, and of these perspectives as determined by the world, work together to disclose to Dasein both that and how it...
is invested in how others perceive it. Just as Dasein’s worldly existence matters to it, the perception of others does too—to be perceived by others is an irreducible aspect of our projection into the world. Our ontological inclination towards others is realized as an intrinsic and significant sense that how we are for others matters to us. Thus, our recognition of others pertains to how we are affected by others, and our affectedness by others is integrated into how we experience our existence to be at issue for us. According to Heidegger, this is so because we are constituted by an experience that is available only through others and because we experience this “self via others” as fundamental to our existence. Expressing this, Heidegger writes, “Being with Others belongs to the Being of Dasein, which is an issue for Dasein in its very Being. Thus as Being-with, Dasein ‘is’ essentially for the sake of others” (BT 160/123). To “be” for others is to be at issue for ourselves through others, to be projected into their reception, recognition and assessment of us.\(^{31}\) In effect, our experience of mattering to ourselves is always informed by others insofar as we encounter them as a site in which our existence matters.

How we are affected by others has a worldly dimension; it is our openness to others that allows us to experience the various resources that derive from our Being-with-one-another—language, culture, and tradition, to name a few. Inasmuch as these resources are manifest in our experience of world, and inasmuch as our experience of world is equally our experience of ourselves, the world opened to us by others is “where” we experience our existence to “be” for others. Because our experience of world is always related to the exclusive and originary experience of mattering to ourselves, so too is our experience of mattering to others related to our experience of mattering to ourselves. In effect, our experience of the world opened up to us

\(^{31}\) Guignon urges us to understand Dasein’s existence as “manifestationist”: “To say that we are what we do is to say that our very identity as agents—our ‘being’ as humans—is something that comes to be defined and realized only in our ways of ‘being manifest’ in our active lives” (“History and Commitment in the Early Heidegger” 132, emphasis in original). Realizing ourselves in our actions, we make our existence manifest in a way that is open to others, and that always deprives us of the authority of defining what we are or what we are doing.
by others is also always an experience of our essential *disengagement* from the world; if we did not matter to ourselves in way that involves a projection of world, a projection that itself involves us in the shared significance of intersubjective life, we would not have the kind of existence that would allow us to experience ourselves as mattering to others. Heidegger points to the essentially disengaged character of our existence by explaining that the world is “tied up with Dasein’s ownmost Being—a Being which essentially can have no involvement, but which is rather that Being *for the sake of which* Dasein itself is as it is” (*BT* 160/123, emphasis in original). The existence through which the world matters to us and through which we matter to ourselves is an existence that is rendered meaningful and intelligible by the resources of intersubjective life. This very existence is what is for others and, inasmuch as it is what matters to us and to others, our experience of mattering to others is related to our irreducible disengagement from the world. Heidegger underlines the relationship between our disengagement from the world, on the one hand, and our relatedness to others, on the other, in terms of self-knowledge: “Knowing oneself *[Sichkennen]* is grounded in Being-with, which understands primordially” (*BT* 161/124). Thus, self-knowledge is possible only because we are constitutively open to others; our basic, originary understanding of worldly significance is possible only because we are Being-with. We draw on this understanding in our efforts to know ourselves because the existence through which the world matters to us and through which we matter to ourselves is an existence that is rendered meaningful and intelligible by the resources of intersubjective life. Our efforts to understand ourselves, moreover, are rooted in the very nature of our existence and its simultaneous involvement in and disengagement from the world.

To summarise, in our constitutive openness to others we are affected by the fact that others are open to our existence, and we find ourselves inclined towards others as the distinct
others they are. In their openness to our existence, others provide for us an experience of ourselves of which we are not the source. This experience matters to us in ways constitutive of our experience of world and related to our possibility of self-understanding. Let us now consider how we encounter these others.

(b) 

Dasein-with

While we always exist for ourselves in the indefiniteness of our self-realization, we always encounter others as they appear to us in the world and without direct access to their experience of their own involvement. According to Heidegger, this encounter is an encounter with the Dasein-with of others, of, that is, the determinate ways they appear in the world. As a result, our experience of the Dasein-with of others is, generally, an experience of how others appear to us in our familiar worlds. Heidegger attests to the worldly character of our interpretations of the Dasein-with of others by explaining that the Dasein-with of others derives from the openness to the world that accords with Being-with—others are experienced in determinate ways because we are open to the ways their existence is articulated in our shared world. In other words, Dasein’s openness to others is part of its Being, its “there,” as Being-in-the-world such that the phenomenon of world and all its various culturally and historically specific modes of manifesting itself—its traditions, its language, its culture—contextualize its encounters with others. As Heidegger writes, “The Other is encountered in his Dasein-with in the world [...] Dasein as Being-with lets the Dasein of Others be encountered in its world” (BT 156-

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32 Peg Birmingham compares the experience of the other’s impenetrable exteriority to an experience of the sublime, suggesting that the other’s irreducible exteriority is experienced by us in a way that discloses to us our unending obligation to her (116).
33 The priority of the world is related to Heidegger’s claim that our relations with one another are not based on empathy [Einfühlung] (BT 159-160/122-123). For an account of the difference between Heidegger’s position and an account of human relations grounded on the possibility of empathy, see Olafson 27-28. For a more developed account of empathy in Heidegger’s work, see Hatab 254-257.
Recognizing the worldly Being of others, we attribute to them an existence like our own, and we interpret them in terms of our involvement in the world and in terms of the specificities of our worldly concerns. In other words, the various ways that the world is meaningful for us are what we draw on to interpret others; others exist for us in terms of our sense of what matters, a sense informed by our own fundamentally equipmental and work-related orientation to the world. As a result, our experience of others is irreducible and specific, and occurs in terms of the determinate interpretations our involvement affords us. Moreover, inasmuch as the determinate and specific ways we have of encountering others are ways of encountering the Dasein-with of others who are, themselves, essentially Being-with, our encounters with others involve us in a confrontation with something unknown. Indeed, we encounter others in terms of the determinate ways our world allows us to make sense of an existence like our own.

Since we always recognize others according to the determinate terms of recognition that correspond to our own involvement, our encounters with others are generally contextualized by equipmental contexts. Thus, while we may encounter others otherwise, our experience of the Dasein-with of others is informed largely by the determinate ways our equipmental contexts

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34 Heidegger’s emphasis on the structural phenomenon on the basis of which we appear to one another as Dasein should obviate any inclination to criticize Heidegger’s earlier work as overly anthropological, as Husserl, for example, does in the lecture entitled “Phenomenology and Anthropology.” The structural aspect of Dasein’s appearance to others, and the significance of world that arises on the basis of that, should be understood as neither anthropological nor as the accomplishment of subjectivity because it is Being itself, and not human life, that appears by way of this structural aperture. Despite the anthropological content of that which appears through Dasein’s recognition, and of the inclusion of subjectivity in this phenomenon of appearing, the task of understanding these phenomena involves not reducing them to anthropology or subjectivism, but of seeing them, instead, as the revealing of Being. As Francoise Dastur explains in her essay “Critique of Anthropologism in Heidegger’s Thought”;

the matter in Being and Time is no longer the subject-object relation; the starting point of the whole questioning is found outside the sphere of subjectivity and the being into which it inquires cannot, therefore, be considered to be something that the human subject posits (122).

Miguel de Beistegui also distinguishes between Heidegger’s approach to Dasein and anthropology by explaining that “man” cannot be defined by isolating the specific characteristics that differentiate us from animals, and by explain our envelopment in a coherent historical narrative, see “Homo Prudens” 128 fn2.
allow us to make sense of them. As Heidegger notes, we have always already encountered others in the ready-to-hand character of our equipmental dealings, as those “for whom the work [Werk] is destined,” or “as one who ‘serves’ well or badly” (BT 153/117). Thus, it is largely the case that others reflect for us our own involved and worldly determinacies, and that we experience others as they are related to these same determinacies. In these equipmental determinacies, others take on the identities and roles that pertain to our involvement and that relate to the identities and roles we adopt for ourselves.

(c) Worldly Involvement and the Determinacy of Others

Since we have seen that how we are for others matters to us and that we experience others in terms afforded to us by our worldly involvement, let us consider more closely how the experience of others contributes to our experience of ourselves. As we have seen, our experience of world is related both to our irreducible disengagement—the Being that essentially has no involvement—as well as to a determinate experience of others who are equally disengaged. As defined by an essential disengagement (the precondition of our involvement), we never experience, on our own, the self we are for others. We never experience directly, in other words, how our experience of the significance of our existence appears to others as a determinate and specific involvement in the world. Accordingly, we can acquire a perspective on the self we are for others only through our determinate ways of recognizing others. The determinate ways we have of encountering others mitigates our blindness to ourselves by providing for us a perspective on ourselves informed by the worldly contexts through which our lives are

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35 Describing our everyday encounters with others, Haar writes; “Being-with originally takes, because of the primacy of praxis and equipmentality, the mode of Being of common ‘concerns.’ ‘Concern’ (Besorgen) means ontically to be concerned with such and such an affair, to tend to such and such a need, to be involved in an activity aimed at procuring such and such a thing in the world” (“The Enigma of Everydayness” 26).
organized. According to Heidegger, our Being-in-the-World is realized in a “with-world” \textit{[Mitwelt]} (BT 155/118) inasmuch as others are:

those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish one’s self—those among whom one is too. This Being-there-too \textit{[Auch-da-sein]} with them does not have the ontological character of Being-present-at-hand-along-‘with’ them within a world. This ‘with’ is something of the character of Dasein; the ‘too’ means a sameness of Being as circumspectively concernful Being-in-the-world. (BT 154/118)

Heidegger’s description of the with-world allows us to see that our determinate ways of recognizing one another derive from our involvement in the same world and, further, that our world is sustained largely by the fact that our inconspicuous involvement in the world is reflected back to us by others. Indeed, the determinate contexts in which we are involved exist for us inconspicuously \textit{and} explicitly and, inasmuch as we encounter and interpret others in terms of our experience of the world, our interpretation of others involves both our implicit and explicit experience of the world.\textsuperscript{36} In both implicit and explicit ways, then, the Dasein-with of others, remains “existentially constitutive for Being-in-the-world” (BT 156-157/120-121). This is so because others can be encountered both “in a mode in which they are indifferent and alien,” (BT 157/121) and “in terms of what is ready-to-hand within-the-world” (BT 156/120). Thus, as open to others in principle, we recognize others implicitly in our own equipmental engagement and we assume and depend on the other’s circumspective involvement, that is, that she “sees” the equipmental world in the same way we do.

\textsuperscript{36} In \textit{Heidegger and the Ground of Ethics}, Olafson argues that Heidegger’s account of the \textit{Mitwelt} explains how we can have such a varied and complex experience of the world and that, by doing so, the account obviates the need to account for the epistemological problem of other minds (19-20). He writes, “when in adulthood we pretend to wonder whether there are any minds other than our own, we are in effect trying to call into question something that has enabled us to reach the point at which we can pose this question” (25).
Describing Dasein’s equiprimordial relatedness to others and to equipment, Kockelmanns writes, “in our dealings with beings within the world the presence of others is discovered at the same time because they are also involved in these pieces of equipment . . . the world cannot possibility be understood without any relation to them” (Heidegger’s “Being and Time” 138). Indeed, our worldly involvement can be as it is because others cooperate with us to realize and maintain the ways of doing to which our know-how is accustomed. Only in a with-world can our determinate ways of recognizing others allow us to recognize and understand ourselves. This is so because our determinate ways of recognizing and interpreting others can capture accurately the other’s involvement when the inconspicuous aspects of her experience are the same as ours. Without this sameness of inconspicuous involvement, we would project unknowingly upon the other an interpretation that does not pertain to her. If we were to then interpret ourselves in terms of how the other appears, we would fail to take into account the inconspicuous aspects of her involvement that are different from our own, and we would be unable, therefore, to interpret ourselves accurately through the terms of recognition we attribute to her. When we encounter others as determinate beings, we encounter them as they have made themselves determinate in and through their own worldly involvement in the with-world. Thus, our determinate, shared terms of recognition always involve implicit ways of recognizing others, and our self-understanding through others requires that we share the terms through which we each realize and experience ourselves.

In summary, we have seen that our existence is defined by a constitutive openness to others in terms of which we find that the other’s experience of us matters to us. We have also seen that we always experience others in determinate ways, ways generally informed by our equipmental encounters. Finally, we have seen that it is only by recognizing others in
determinate ways that we are able to overcome blind spots with respect to ourselves, and that our
determinate ways of recognizing others contribute to our self-understanding insofar as we have
become determinate individuals in a with-world. Having now come to see the basic structure
according to which our relations to others unfold, we shall move on to consider Heidegger’s
account of the ways of relating to others that are possible within this basic structure.

Section Two: Solicitude: Indifference, Leaping in and Leaping Ahead

Just as our dealings in the world are characterised by mode of involvement Heidegger
calls “concern,” our involvement with others occurs through what Heidegger calls “solicitude.”37
In this section, we shall describe solicitude generally, and look at the three modes of solicitude
Heidegger describes: Indifference, Leaping in and Leaping ahead. Our description of each mode
of solicitude will involve a straightforward presentation of Heidegger’s work. We shall add to
this by interpreting each mode of solicitude as a distinctive way of recognizing that we share the
world with others.

As we saw above, our existence is meaningfully articulated in worldly ways of
recognizing others as these pertain to a shared involvement in the world. It is solicitude that
grants us access to the significance of our existence as that significance is realized through
others. Through solicitude we recognize others as belonging to the world in which we find
ourselves, and as mattering to us as part of our world. Accordingly, inasmuch as our existence is

37 Hatab suggests the following relationship between concern and solicitude: just as we notice explicitly that we are
using tools only when they break down, we notice the negative character of our inability to relate empathetically to
the other. Both moments of explicit noticing, in other words, are derivative of our involvement with tools or others
(“Heidegger and the Question of Empathy” 257).
always unified and contextualized by the experience of world, our solicitous relations with others are always contextualized by a world. As Heidegger writes:

Solicitude proves to be a state of Dasein’s Being—one which, in accordance with its different possibilities, is bound up with its Being towards the world of its concern, and likewise with its authentic Being towards itself […] The world not only frees the ready-to-hand as entities encountered within the world; it also frees Dasein—the others in their Dasein-with. But Dasein’s ownmost meaning of Being is such that this entity (which has been freed environmentally) is Being-in in the same world in which, as encounterable for Others, it is there with them. (BT 159-160/122-123)

Through solicitude, our worldly existence is realized by and through our relations with others and in terms of our involvement in a world of concern. The world we constitute together contextualizes our relations with one another “freeing” us, thereby, for our engagement with one another as the worldly entities we are and, thus, as we enact ourselves in various ways and at different levels of experience.

According to Heidegger, solicitude is associated with a distinctive way of seeing others in the world. He writes, “solicitude is guided by considerateness and forbearance” (BT 159/123). Our openness to others, our way of “seeing” them, is realized through our ability to be considerate of them as others like ourselves and through our ability to restrain from imposing the particularities of our perspectives and interests on them and, thereby, to let them appear as the others they are. Only thus are we able to recognize others as they share a world with us and as they engage in it through their own singular perspectives in the same way that we do. However, even as open to others in principle, we do not always realize relations with others in ways that are adequate to the nature of our capacity to recognize others. As Heidegger writes, “Like
solicitude, [considerateness and forbearance] can range through their respective deficient and Indifferent modes up to the point of inconsiderateness or the perfunctoriness for which indifference leads the way” (BT 159/123, emphasis in original). We are always engaged with others one way or another, even when our engagement remains implicit for us or fails to live up to the very characteristics in terms of which our relations are realized and can be measured.38 Thus, regardless of the style or mode of our orientation towards others, we stand always in relations of solicitude with others.

As we saw above, Heidegger describes three ways that we can realize our solicitous relations with others: Indifference, Leaping in and Leaping ahead. We shall now consider each mode of solicitude in turn and interpret each of them as a way of acknowledging how we share a world together.

(a) Indifference

According to Heidegger, our relations with others are most commonly carried out in the mode of Indifference, a deficient mode of solicitude in terms of which we fail to take up our relations with others explicitly.39 When we are, for example, “for, against, or without one another, passing one another by, not ‘mattering’ to one another,” we are engaged in the Indifferent mode of solicitude characteristic of our “everyday, average Being-with-one-another”

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38 Birmingham argues that “As Being-with, Dasein is ontologically obligated to solicit the other in his or her potentiality-for-being” (115). Following Birmingham, we can understand that we disavow our ontological obligation insofar as we fail to attend to the other as possibility, though we must also recall that, as Dasein existentially defined by averageness [Durchschnittlichkeit], we are also compelled by the nature of our existence to fail to live up to this obligation (and thereby perpetuate and contribute to a collective form of life).

39 Eric Sean Nelson explains that what we are “Indifferent” to is the way our involvement can disclose to us the nature of our existence: Average everyday life is not indifferent in the Kantian sense of being disinterested or Stoic impartiality. It is not the absolute indifference experienced in profound boredom, unconcerned with all affairs, which Heidegger described in The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics. Instead, through its self-interested concern with everyday things and affairs, it is indifferent to that which would throw light on character and of the plight of its own existence. (“Individuation, Responsiveness, Translation” 273)
(BT 158/121). When solicitude is carried out in this way, we experience others in the “inconspicuousness and obviousness” of their Dasein-with; we negotiate our relations with one another without explicitly bringing them to mind (BT 158/121).^{40}

Relating to others Indifferently depends on being involved in the same world. As we saw in our analysis of habituation, aspects of our experience become inconspicuous to us only once we have acquired the know-how with which to manipulate them. Likewise, others become inconspicuous to us when our ways of dealing with them have come to be habitual for us and have taken the form of what might called “social know-how.”^{41} We can deploy this social know-how when others seem to demand from us only that which our know-how can accommodate. We know, for example, how to wait in line the supermarket, drive on highways or cheer at a team, and can do so without thinking explicitly about the others with whom we are engaged. While these aspects of life, as well as other modes of engaging Indifferently, are valuable, they involve failing to notice explicitly that we relate to others even as we realize this relatedness through the social know-how that allows us to remain at a distance from others. Failing to notice our relations to others, we fail to notice that we share a world in and through our Indifferent

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40 François Raffoul notes that Dasein can relate to itself in three possible ways: authentically, inauthentically or only in terms of the general structure of its existence: “Thus there would be a triple structure: one would have, on the one hand, the (primordial or neutral) level of the general structure of Dasein, Being-in-the world, Being-towards-onself, and facticity, and on the other hand, its two existentiell modifications, authenticity and inauthenticity” (Heidegger and the Subject 243). As Raffoul notes, Michel Haar makes a similar point about the structural dimension of Dasein in his Heidegger and the Essence of Man (32). It is at the level of Dasein’s structural relation to the world that I am locating Indifference, though I am emphasizing the structurally inevitable “equipmental” aspect of Dasein’s engagement. My further claim is that it is at the level of Indifference to others and to the equipmental world that Dasein is most thoroughly mediated and shaped by the world that it shares with others.

41 What I mean by social know-how is comparable to Dilthey’s concept of “objective mind”:

   Every word, every sentence, every gesture or polite formula [. . .] is intelligible because the people who express themselves through them and those who understand them have something in common; the individual always experiences, thinks and acts in common sphere [. . .] We live in this atmosphere, it surrounds us constantly. (Dilthey “Pattern and Meaning in History” 123-124)

Guignon quotes Dilthey in “History and Commitment in the Early Heidegger” (134). There, Guignon argues that Dasein is always embedded in its communal contexts and beholden to the moral norms of its community. See also Guignon “Authenticity, Moral Values, Psychotherapy. On the relationship between Dilthey and Heidegger, see also Zimmerman Heidegger’s confrontation with Modernity 22-23.
behaviour. Despite not noticing that we share a word in this way, even when we relate to others Indifferently, we remain the source of their worldly appearance as Dasein-with and they remain in the world with us as those who we are “for” or “against,” or who do not “matter.” Thus, Indifference is an accomplishment of our basic ways of sharing the world, and is realized in ways that allow us to fail to recognize the world as shared.

(b) *Leaping in*

In addition to our indifferent mode of relating to others, we can engage with others positively in the modes of solicitude Heidegger calls “Leaping in” and “Leaping ahead.” These modes are positive because, in contrast to the implicit involvement associated with Indifference, they are engagements with others that involve explicit intent. Let us proceed by coming to understand what Heidegger means by Leaping in. By Leaping in for others, we take it upon ourselves to perform the specific tasks that are necessary to the other’s projects. Thereby, we disrupt their involvement in matters of concern, and we enable them either to proceed with the product or completed task we have put at their disposal, or to cease to deal with the task at all. Since the other’s projects are her way of realising herself in the world, when we Leap in and insert ourselves in the projects of others, we deprive them of the opportunity to realize themselves as determinate and significant individuals. Thus, Heidegger asserts that through our Leaping in, “the Other can become one who is dominated and dependent, even if this domination is a tacit one and remains hidden from him” (BT 158/122). Leaping in threatens the freedom of the other because we tend to engage in Leaping in either without considering whether others will benefit from our interference or because we aim to interfere with the other’s development. For example, if a friend is required to take a test that we ourselves have already taken and passed, we may be tempted to “help” our friend by telling her what is likely to be on the test, or by arranging
things so that she is not required to take it. By doing so, we would be Leaping in for the other by using our knowledge and experience to make her life easier temporarily, but in a way that will likely impede her ability to deal successfully and independently with tests and other similar high-pressure situations in the future. Despite its inherent risks, Leaping in remains, in a sense, a positive mode of solicitude; through it, we deal actively with the other in terms of the particular tasks that pertain to her life.

When we Leap in for the other, we recognize our shared involvement in the world in a way that is either explicitly or implicitly related to instrumental aspects of the world. Concerning ourselves with the equipmental demands of the world, rather than experiencing the other as someone who, like ourselves, realizes herself in and through her projects, we allow the demands of the other’s particular projects to determine our experience of that other. As such, we allow the terms and necessities of our world to determine our relations with others. Thus although Leaping in is positive in the sense that it involves an active orientation towards others, and involves recognizing others to be engaged in the meaningful human world, this recognition is achieved by sacrificing or by failing to attend to the relationship between the other’s distinctive projects and her development as an individual. Thus, through Leaping in, we understand our sharing of the world in terms of equipmental demands and the necessities of life.

(c) Leaping ahead

While positive modes of solicitude always pertain to the worldly involvement of others, they do not always interfere with the other’s worldly self-realization. In fact, by engaging in the mode of solicitude Heidegger calls “Leaping ahead” we help the other to experience her projects as the sites of her self-realization. As Heidegger writes, “This kind of solicitude pertains essentially to authentic care—that is, to the existence of the Other, not to a ‘what’ with which he
is concerned; it helps the Other to become transparent to himself in his care and to become free for it (BT 159/122). 42 By relating to the other as one whose projects are the medium through which her existence comes to be significant, we relate to the other explicitly as one who exists in the same manner as we do. Thereby, we help the other to recognize and respond to the demands of her projects as opportunities to become determinate and significant to herself. For example, if, instead of helping our friend avoid the test, we help her study and encourage her to recognize herself as someone who is capable of facing that which intimidates her, we will have related to her by way of Leaping ahead: we will have taken the nature and structure of her meaningful existence into account when oriented towards the particularities of her project.

As with Indifference and Leaping in, Leaping ahead is a way of acknowledging how we share a world with others. Particular to Leaping ahead is a recognition of worldly projects, and the tasks associated with them, as opportunities for self-realization in a shared world. This recognition pertains to a realization of the characteristics of solicitude and to our capacity to restrain from seeing the world solely in terms of our individual possibilities; this recognition is realized when we allow the possibilities of the other’s existence to dictate how we interact with that other. Thus, by Leaping ahead, we recognize the necessity of worldly projects, but we do not, as we did with Leaping in, take those projects to set the terms and style of our relations to others. The equipmental terms of the world remain in play as the necessary medium of our interactions in a shared world, but they are properly recognized as ways of attending to the other in terms of her self-realization. Others, in other words, come to be recognized as those for whom

42 Richardson reminds us that, according to Heidegger, the following holds:

That may be called “free” in the most fundamental sense which has been wrested and torn away from the initial hiddenness which obscures it—whether this be the covered-up-ness of being other than There-being that are un-covered by being rendered-free, or There-being’s own forgottenness of its proper self, from which it is liberated by its own disclosedness. (Heidegger 191)

If, on the one hand, Dasein free entities unlike itself as well as “its own forgotten self” and, on the other, Dasein can help free the Dasein of the other, we may understand Dasein’s relation of freeing the other to pertain to the disclosedness of its own Dasein.
worldly possibilities can be meaningful sites of self-realization. Thus, through Leaping ahead, we experience our sharing of the world as the possibility of enabling reciprocally our self-realization. Walter Brogan describes the way in which the genuine possibility of community involves a “public sharing” that can be distinguished from thoughtless or instrumental modes of sharing:

Genuine community is founded not out of this public realm of the “they,” a realm in which other existential Da-sein are never authentically encountered, but rather on the basis of a way of being together that itself creates the possibility for a kind of public sharing of oneself that is authentic and existentiell. (239)

The possibility of community Brogan describes does not disavow the constructive and practical accomplishments of cooperative social life; it sees them as potential aspects of a genuine mode of relating, a mode that we have identified as Heidegger’s Leaping ahead.43

In summary, through solicitude we relate to the Dasein-with of others in the determinate ways afforded to us by our world. When we do so through Indifference, others remain inconspicuous to us and we fail to notice the social know-how that is enabling of our Indifferent experience of one another as an accomplished sharing of the world. When we do so by Leaping in, we take over the tasks and responsibilities of others, thereby inhibiting their self-realization. By doing so, we recognize our shared world only in terms of its instrumental dimensions. Finally, when we relate to others by Leaping ahead, we recognize their tasks to be meaningful for their development. In so doing, we recognize worldly possibilities and projects both in their particular determinacy and as shared sites of self-realization. Now that we have considered the three modes of solicitude that Heidegger describes, and have interpreted each mode so as to

43 According to Brogan, the possibility of “genuine community” is founded on Dasein’s Being-toward-Death; see 241-243. Brogan relates what he identifies as a “genuine community” based on the singularity of Dasein to Heidegger’s notion of Leaping ahead (242-243).
come to see that each pertains to a way of recognizing how we share the world with others, let us now attempt to apply Heidegger’s relatively narrow analysis of our relations with others to our involvement in a differentiated social world.

**Section Three: The Concrete World: Sociality, Social Roles and Critique.**

In this section, we shall treat each of our three ways of relating to others as a lens through which basic dimensions of our differentiated social worlds can be analysed. This will involve an interpretive elaboration of Heidegger account of the three modes of solicitude. Our interpretive elaboration will allow us to identify the following dimensions of our differentiated social worlds: *social atmosphere*, by which I refer to the culturally and historically specific attitudes manifest collectively in any society; *social roles*, by which I refer to the recognition, organization and execution of the tasks and functions that sustain life in large societies; and, finally, the possibility of *critique*, by which I refer to our capacity to recognize our social atmospheres and to assess our ways of dealing with socially necessary tasks and functions, as well as to act on the basis of our assessment. By relating Heidegger’s account of solicitude to these basic dimensions of our shared, public worlds, we shall be able to see that (a) each of the three ways of relating to one another that Heidegger describes is necessary to our self-realization in a meaningful world, and (b) that the first two modes of engagement (those that correspond to Indifference and Leaping in) ought to be open to critique from the perspective of the third

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44 Frank Schalow argues that Heidegger’s analysis of language makes it difficult to connect Heidegger’s thought “to its social context” (*Language and Deed* 37). According to Schalow, there remains in Heidegger’s analysis of language “an ambiguity as to whether its scope is more directly apportioned to the individual’s call to be authentic, or whether this call echoes a deeper claim that gathers the self and other together within the wider purview of history and truth” (37).
(Leaping ahead). While we will outline aspects of this critique, we will also leave a fuller analysis of Leaping ahead to the final section of this chapter.

Before addressing how each mode of solicitude pertains to our involvement in an organized and differentiated social world, let us turn briefly to some of Heidegger’s comments on the “they” in order to come to see that solicitude is realized in contexts that are irreducibly constituted by public dimensions of social life. Briefly, according to Heidegger, the “they” is an undifferentiated mode of Dasen’s existence, and is, as such, intrinsic to its ways of existing. As a “they”-self, Dasein understands itself as “anyone,” experiencing its unique existence in the superficial ways characteristic of the public world and, thus, in ways that prohibit genuine understanding of its possibilities of existence. As Brogan describes the Dasein of the “they,” it “tends to take itself as a subject […] who encounters other Da-sein only through the public realm of shared economies and enterprises” (239). In this experience, Dasein gives itself over to the sense of propriety and objectivity that makes its experience of the everyday world familiar to it. It is inasmuch as the “they” is constitutive of Dasein’s basic sense of familiarity that the “they” is an in-eliminable feature of Dasein’s existence. On this topic, Michel Haar notes that Heidegger is quite clear: “The first section of Sein und Zeit shows that the ‘they’ is an unavoidable ontological structure of Dasein” (“The Enigma of Everydayness” 21). Despite existing as a singular projection into the world, the self-understanding and the experience of world that accords with the “they” is irreducibly necessary to Dasein’s experience of itself—our cultural embeddedness, in other words, first shapes us and gives us the resources on the basis of which we come to be

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45 According to Schalow, solicitude includes our taking responsibility for the contexts in which we realize our freedom with others: “As finite, the self receives freedom by recognizing that it is not the sole recipient of that gift. Freedom also entails the responsibility of its “management,” or accepting the special economy that flourishes through a greater degree of participation in its benefits, i.e., which the other as well as myself can reap. Heidegger reserves the term ‘solicitude’ for this reciprocal safeguarding of the experience of freedom” (Language and Deed 69).
able to own up to our existence. While we may come to see that the world cannot answer for and justify our existence in obvious ways, we never leave behind the culturally and historically specific belonging to the world that corresponds to the “they.” As Heidegger writes:

Out of this kind of Being—and back into it again—is all existing, such as it is […] But the explication of Dasein in its average everydayness does not give us just average structures in the sense of hazy indefiniteness. Anything which, taken ontically, is in an average way, can be very well grasped ontologically in pregnant structures which may be structurally indistinguishable from certain ontological characteristics [Bestimmungen] of an authentic Being of Dasein. (BT 69-70/43-44, emphasis in original)

The “they” denotes our average, everyday mode of existing, and involves, therefore, the structures of our existence; it is a mode of “Being-with-one-another” (BT 164/127). As such, the “they” pertains to our involvement in shared contexts, traditions and institutions, even if, while enacting ourselves as “they”-selves, we fail, in principle, to recognize such domains as arising out of and mediating our Being-with-one-another. Inasmuch as our Being-with-one-another is a constitutive feature of our existence, and inasmuch as our existence is ineradicably invested in the “they,” our three modes of solicitude are realized in the shared determinate world in which we find ourselves, and, as we saw above, pertain to our capacity to recognize that world, in its various determinate features, as shared. Having now seen that our modes of relating to others are realized in the worldly context that defines our existence as “they” selves, let us now focus our attention on each mode of solicitude as it pertains to our involvement in a determinate and differentiated world.
(a) *Indifference and Sociality*

Let us begin by coming to see that the mode of solicitude Heidegger calls “Indifference” corresponds to the social atmosphere manifest in our implicit experience of one another. As we saw above, when we engage indifferently with others, we experience others in their inconspicuousness and obviousness. These specific traits correspond to an “habitual” way of experiencing others, according to the technical sense of habit described in the previous section. Briefly, as we saw there, by acquiring habits of interacting with objects, such interactions come to be experienced by us as impersonal and anonymous modes of interacting and are, as such, enabling of our ability to engage in more complex tasks. The impersonal and anonymous dimensions of habituation are recognizable in the inconspicuousness and obviousness that characterises the Indifferent experience of others we accomplish through the habits we deploy as social know-how. In what follows, by addressing in turn the way the inconspicuousness and obviousness of others is manifest in our social-know-how, we shall come to understand our Indifferent modes of interacting with one another as an accomplishment that is always realized as the distinctive social atmosphere of our various worldly contexts.

Experiencing others implicitly or indirectly presupposes that we have become accustomed to seeing others in our world, and that we have basic expectations about the interaction or lack of interaction required of us. In other words, for others to remain implicit in our experience, we must have developed habits of encountering others, as well as the skills of inconspicuous interactions that correspond to those habits. This occurs when our interactions with others are perfunctory or indirect, and when we do not have to think explicitly about how to deal with others. Most generally, this form of interaction takes place in public spaces such as sidewalks or parks where we can expect to see others without having to interact directly with
them. Accordingly, our skills of inconspicuous interaction involve, for example, the ability to act on the basis of culturally specific expectations around personal space or bodily posture or the ability to act on the basis of public expectations about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of certain polite actions such as saying “hello” or holding the door open for someone. In effect, others remain inconspicuous to us when we have acquired the social know-how that corresponds to the contexts we frequent. Only because we agree, in principle, on the basic norms that govern our indirect interactions can these interactions be carried out inconspicuously. Thus, inasmuch as others remain inconspicuous to us through the deployment of shared social know-how, our ability to relate to one another Indifferently is a cooperative accomplishment.

The obviousness that characterises our Indifferent experience of others is also related to our habits of social interaction. Experiencing others in their obviousness, I suggest, amounts to assuming implicitly that others will interact with us as we expect them to, and, thus, amounts to taking for granted that the social know-how we deploy is specific to our world. To experience someone in their obviousness is to disavow the particularity of our inconspicuous ways of interacting as well as the implicit assumptions that accompany these ways of interacting. When we assume that acting in expected, socially sanctioned ways is a universal aspect of being a person, we recognize others as persons through our sense of the space and courtesy to which others are entitled, and we experience, thereby, our habitual modes of interactions as facts about how any other ought to be treated. Thus, the experience of the obviousness of others is related to specific notions about personhood that shape our basic openness to others. Our indifference,

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46 For an account of how our ability to negotiate the spatial demands of the public world derive from the sense of space afforded to us in our private, familial domains, see Jacobson “The Experience of Home and the Space of Citizenship.”

47 It is worth considering, as Patricia Huntington describes, that the child’s encounter with the mother is “a dance of tactile game and early social attunement” (325). If Indifference is acquired, and pertains largely to our spatial interactions with others and the presuppositions implicit therein, it must be rooted in our first social and spatial encounters.
then, is the implicit accomplishment of an openness to others, but it is one that we disavow and veil precisely through the obviousness and inconspicuousness in terms of which others appear to us.

Through our social know-how and the attitudes towards others implied in it, we make manifest the social atmosphere of our interactions. Indeed, our most basic experience of social reality consists in cooperatively established norms of interaction that allow us to remain Indifferent to one another, as well as in the implicit understanding of personhood associated with these norms. On the basis of these accomplishments, we find ourselves open to others; we are prepared to encounter anyone when we have a sense of how we ought to behave and how they ought to be treated. Thus, the norms of our inconspicuous interactions with one another shape our attitudes towards others. By remaining implicit, this aspect of recognition contributes to the social atmosphere of the contexts in which we engage. To illustrate, norms that call for very little personal space and mildly aggressive interactions give rise to an atmosphere that differs from the atmosphere associated with norms that demand a high degree of personal space as well as basic deference to others. Thus, our social atmospheres consist in implicit expectations about how we expect others to behave and how we think others deserve to be treated, and we realize the attitudes that contribute to our social atmosphere in the implicit dimensions of our interactions with one another.

To summarise, others appear to us in their inconspicuousness and obviousness only when we have acquired the social know-how and implicit understanding of personhood that is shared by others in our world. This “Indifference” corresponds to our basic experience of social reality as collectively accomplished openness to anyone in principle, and this accomplishment always
makes manifest a distinctive social atmosphere, itself comprised of our basic attitudes towards one another.

\(b\) Leaping in and Social Roles

As we saw above, when we Leap in for the other, we risk preventing her from realizing herself through her projects. This prevention basically involves completing tasks for the other and allowing ourselves to be guided by the equipmental demands of the other’s projects rather than by the demands of her self-realization. In this section, we shall consider various ways that Leaping in is performed in society at large, and we shall come to see that a society-wide Leaping in occurs in terms of social roles and the tasks associated with these.\(^48\) Our analysis of Leaping in will focus on the effect of having tasks completed \textit{for us}, rather than on our completing tasks for others, because Leaping in on a society-wide scale affects us in ways that are similar to how we are affected when others Leap in for us, even though the tasks society accomplishes for us are the result of the coordinated behaviour of many individuals, rather than the intentional activity of one. Further, while acknowledging the positive aspects of society-wide Leaping in, we shall see that society-wide Leaping in can contribute to a sense of disengagement from the infrastructure necessary for well-ordered social life, and that it is, consequently, both necessary and necessarily risky.

As does Leaping in on the level of interpersonal relations, Leaping in on a society-wide scale pertains to what individuals need to have taken care of in order to proceed with their projects.\(^49\) Consider, for example, how many of us depend on the postal service, waste-disposal systems, electricity, the police, municipal, provincial and federal governments, banks, restaurants

\(^{48}\) Michael Lewis argues that we relate to the other inauthentically when we treat the other as an “in-order-to” (20). His account shares with my account of Leaping in the idea that others can play an instrumental role in our lives.\(^{49}\) Haar relates the practical necessities constitutive of everyday life to the “they” (“The Enigma of Everydayness” 25). Here, we see that they are performed in the mode of Leaping in.
and other organizations and services that establish for us a coherent and stable social world in which we can choose to participate in particular ways. Inasmuch as all the services we provide for one another accomplish for us aspects of our projects that we would otherwise have to deal with directly, social cooperation involves a complex organization of types of Leaping in.

Heidegger’s account of the roles others play in our equipmental involvement, especially in our involvement in the work we aim to accomplish, emphasizes how ubiquitously others appear to us in terms of their social role:

In our “description” of that environment which is closest to us—the work-world of the craftsman, for example,—the outcome was that along with the equipment to be found when one is at work [in Arbeit], those Others for whom the “work” [“Werk”] is destined are “encountered too”. If this is ready-to-hand, then there lies in the kind of Being which belongs to it (that is, in its involvement) an essential assignment or reference to possible wearers, for instance, for whom it should be “cut to the figure”. Similarly, when material is put to use, we encounter its producer or “supplier” as one who serves well or badly.

(BT 153/117)

When we encounter others in terms of our involvement with our own projects, others are presented to us impersonally and in terms of the role they play with respect to the concrete necessities of our equipmental involvement. While Heidegger’s account of Leaping in pertains to the context of direct, personal relationships, the idea that Leaping in occurs on the societal scale is compatible with his account of our equipmentally mediated relations with others as they are realized through impersonal relations organized and maintained in accordance with social roles.50

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50 Leaping in understood in terms of our taking up social roles is also compatible with Heidegger’s account of the influence of the “they” on us. As Guignon writes, “The understanding of being embodied in the practices of the ‘they’ provides the medium from which we slip into familiar roles—being a teacher in the school system, a moderate in politics, a church-goer in the religious system, and so on” (“History and Commitment” 134).
Employing Leaping in as a lens through which to view the function of social organization allows us to see that in the course of our lives we are, in fact, related impersonally to innumerable individuals who perform tasks on which we depend, and that, although particular individuals are responsible for tasks on which we depend we fail, for the most part, to consider that we stand in direct impersonal relations with them. In the society-wide organizations in which we are involved, we relate to others impersonally in terms of the roles they fulfill, and we ourselves are related to in terms of the roles we take on: customer, resident, taxpayer and so on.

The way others appear to us in terms of their social roles differs from the way that others appear to us through our Indifference, most specifically by virtue of the fact that social roles are diverse while the social atmosphere that contextualises these diverse engagements is largely unified. As we saw above, Indifference constitutes our basic openness to others and does not pertain to how we distinguish between one “type” and another. Meanwhile, Leaping in has to do with our ability to distinguish between social roles because Leaping in is related to the aspects of our projects that must be attended to and that are, for the most part, attended to by others to whom we relate only impersonally in terms of the roles they perform. Heidegger himself suggests the distinction between the inconspicuous experience of others, on the one hand, and our impersonal relations to others, on the other, writing:

For example, “welfare work” [“Fürsorge”], as a factual social arrangement, is grounded in Dasein’s state of Being as Being-with. Its factual urgency gets its motivation in that Dasein maintains itself proximally and for the most part in the deficient modes of solicitude. (BT 158/122)\(^{51}\)

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\(^{51}\) According to Pierre Bourdieu, Heidegger’s account of the “they” suggests that we can also relate to ourselves instrumentally. Bourdieu argues that Heidegger inscribes a poitical agenda into his philosophical text insofar as Heidegger’s account of authenticity begins with an awareness of our own inauthenticity and suggests, therefore, that
By treating social relations, broadly construed, from the perspective of Leaping in we find that Leaping in is a necessary mode of engagement without which we would not be able to lean on the important services afforded to us by social organization. Although our Indifferent relations with others set the tone for our social interactions at large and allow us to negotiate seamlessly a world of others, such relations are not oriented towards accomplishing anything in particular. “Factual social arrangements,” however, are oriented towards necessary tasks. In them, we find the social organization that enables us to pursue particular projects. Indeed, as Heidegger suggests, it is when we have not engaged concretely in a society-wide network of tasks and roles that we find that we must come up with the social arrangements that support our lack of investment in the social infrastructure. Thus, the social roles in terms of which we stand in relation to others are not relations of Indifference and can be interpreted in terms of Heidegger’s analysis of Leaping in.

Recognizing the necessity of our social infrastructure does not prevent us from considering how the risks of domination and dependency that Heidegger associates with Leaping in remain present in the context of society. In the remainder of this section, we shall consider two risks associated with large-scale Leaping in. These are (a) that we find ourselves subordinate to a public account of the definition of particular social roles, and (b) that we become alienated from the aspects of our projects in which we do not engage and, thereby, come to see the services provided by society as alien to us rather than as supportive of us and implicated in our lives. Let us begin by considering the problematic aspects of having publicly defined roles.

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individually are responsible for their own inauthentic ‘‘resignation’, which dooms them to ‘degradation’ and ‘social welfare’’ (Political Ontology 87).

52 Leaping in on a broad scale can be understood in terms of the notion of a “general situation” [Lage] that Heidegger contrasts with a “Situation”: “The ‘they,’ however, knows only the ‘general situation’, loses itself in those ‘opportunities’ which are closest to it, and pays Dasein’s way by a reckoning up of ‘accidents’ which it fails to recognize, deems its own achievement, and passes off as such” (BT 346-347/300). According to Guignon, when Dasein understands merely its “general situation,” it is not capable of working with others to accomplish anything of weight (“History and Commitment” 139-141).
The large-scale organization of tasks and services in society requires that we commit, at least tacitly, to a shared, public definition of each social role and the tasks associated with it. Our cooperation, in other words, requires that we agree on the definition of social roles and the tasks, responsibilities and privileges associated with each role. Having the mail delivered, for example, involves us in a relationship with postal workers that does not require us to know each other but that is nevertheless maintained in and through our mutual agreement on the terms of our relationship. Dealing with bankers, police officers, members of parliament, librarians and so on is possible on the basis of a public account of what each of these roles, as well as one’s own, entails and only through this public account do we gain access to the contexts in which these roles appear, i.e., secure financial institutions, safe neighbourhoods, responsive government, libraries and so on.

While our agreement on the definitions and limits of particular roles is necessary, it is accompanied by specific risks. When we take on roles in our world, we endorse the capacity of others to treat us in terms of distinct roles. While it is that very capacity that allows our well-articulated work-worlds to function smoothly, as dependent on each other’s judgment, we tacitly endorse the authority of public accounts of particular roles. When the definitions of our interests, tasks and roles become subordinate to public interpretation, we risk losing the capacity to think for ourselves about what various roles involve, and we risk disavowing our responsibility for and our dependence on particular roles. In effect, by failing to recognize our interdependence, we make it increasingly easy for definitions of roles that are insufficiently helpful, or are harmful, to us to develop, either through manipulation on the part of others, or through inattention or lack of understanding. For example, the definition of “citizen” may be

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53 Zimmerman notes that the term “publicness” [Öffentlichkeit], which Heidegger uses to describe the “they”, is “often used in connection with ‘civil society’ (bürgerlichen Gesellschaft), i.e., the business world” (Heidegger’s Confrontation 23).
reduced to “service recipient” and “taxpayer,” and this meaning may come to appear to be the truth about citizenship. If we simply accept this definition, we will likely find that we come to be treated as no more than service recipients and taxpayers and that we lose out on other possibilities of citizenship. Through our need for a public account of specific roles, we risk finding ourselves subject to a definition that does not reflect concrete realities, demands and possibilities.

Another risk associated with society-wide Leaping in is that we will become alienated from the concrete systems in which our needs are met. For example, if, as beneficiaries of police protection, we experience the world as safe, this is not because we have direct experience of the rules and systems of surveillance that contribute to our feeling of safety. Rather, insofar as the world seems safe to us, we tend not to recognize the aspects of our own behaviour that contribute to the establishment of an ordered society. Consequently, we may feel as though the rules we encounter are alien to us when, in fact, they are the condition of possibility of the everyday safety we enjoy. In this situation, it is difficult for us to experience rule-following as a meaningful aspect of our identity despite the fact that we depend on it and enjoy the fruits of it daily. Thus, the social infrastructure through which we Leap in for one another always risks separating us from substantial and supportive dimensions of our lives and projects. As a result, we may come to misunderstand or to disavow the very needs, interests, dependencies and capacities that are integral to our meaningful projects and, thereby, come to misunderstand our projects themselves.

The two risks described above—distorted definitions and alienation—both contribute to an irresponsible attitude on the part of individuals and to possibilities of manipulation and exploitation. These risks are both related to the very systems and contexts in which we are
involved and, thus, to our capacity to recognize these systems and context as substantially mediating, shaping and enabling our projects. As such, they are noteworthy even if manipulation and exploitation are limited, or do not occur explicitly, because they constitute the public instantiations of the domination and dependence Heidegger associates with Leaping in. Inasmuch as these risks are associated with necessary aspects of large-scale, organized social life, they are permanent. Their permanence, however, does not mean that they cannot be recognized and mitigated. In the following section, we shall consider how Leaping ahead can be understood as a response to the constant risks associated with life in society.

(c) Leaping Ahead and Critique

As we saw above, there are two basic types of risks associated with our embeddedness in forms of social cooperation: (a) those that have to do with inadequate definitions of roles or of inadequate services and opportunities available within society; and (b) those that have to do with our capacity to recognize our embeddedness in organized social life and to experience how our self-realization occurs only through it. Below we shall see that these risks are mitigated when we relate to others by Leaping ahead. Further, we shall see that Leaping ahead also helps the other to recognize the Indifferent aspects of our interactions as forming part of our shared experience of the significance that contextualizes our projects.

As we saw above, we engage with others by Leaping ahead when we help them recognize their own worldly involvement as the medium of their meaningful self-realization. When Leaping ahead is treated as guide for dealing well with others in the context of society, we find that we are capable of it only when we have first come to understand the basic structure of society ourselves and have come to understand that it is, in principle, in place for the sake of all of us. In effect, Leaping ahead requires that we come to understand how we are embedded in the
systems by which we Leap in for one another through the various roles we take on in the complex social whole. Thus, attending to others by way of Leaping ahead requires that we understand social life to be the result of cooperation and to be rightly oriented towards supporting the meaningful projects of individuals. From this perspective, Leaping ahead takes the form of providing to the other the basis of a simultaneous critique of the cooperatively constituted foundation of social life and of her own individual projects.

Let us now consider what the attitude of critique suggested by Leaping ahead involves. Our capacity for Leaping ahead is dependent on our ability to recognize how our activities are coordinated such that we are all implicated in a system of social cooperation; to criticize our shared contexts we must know and understand them. Understanding the coordinated system in which we are embedded requires that we understand that the contribution of each individual can be known and recognized by many only through the public account of the role each individual adopts. If we can come to understand our basic system of social cooperation in terms of the roles various individuals can adopt, our shared needs and our possibility of cooperation can serve as standards by which to measure and assess the proper definition of each role, and as measures by which to assess our own projects. In this way, the two risks associated with Leaping in can, in principle, be mitigated. On the one hand, the authority of public accounts of each role can be challenged; the accounts we tend to assume are correct can be tested against the contribution each role ought to be making to social life as a whole. On the other, one’s own projects must be understood as occupying a place in the social whole and, thus, understood in terms of their relations to the various contributions of others. Thus, the critique of public accounts of roles can be mitigated by considering the proper contribution each role ought to make, and one’s
alienation from various dimensions of cooperative life can be mitigated by an understanding of how one’s own projects fit in with and contribute to that whole.\textsuperscript{54}

The two aspects of critique that we have associated with Leaping ahead can be understood in terms of the following basic point: we Leap ahead of the other and help her to experience her own projects as meaningfully reflective of her existence when we instil in the other a sense of the necessity of criticising both the society in which she participates and her own contributions to that society and when we, thereby, encourage the other to acquire the understanding necessary to critique. If this attitude can be cultivated and the necessary knowledge acquired, the other can come to experience how her own projects are a reflection of and contribution to the whole in which she finds herself. The individual’s projects take on the significance of the whole (a) by coming to appear to her to be enabled only by our mutual capacity for recognition and cooperation, and (b) by coming to appear to her as a particular expression of this capacity for recognition and cooperation. In effect, the other comes to recognise the way in which her meaningful self-realization occurs through others and in terms of the determinate ways we have of recognizing one another. To illustrate, because Leaping ahead encourages the other to recognize the concrete, social conditions of possibility of her projects, and, in these, the resources by which to measure the significance of her own contributions, Leaping ahead implicitly encourages the other to recognize that social cooperation is not merely instrumental; as instrumentally supportive of the projects of individual, social cooperation contextualizes these projects meaningfully.

\textsuperscript{54} What I am calling the critical function of Leaping ahead is similar to the practice of consciousness raising. Dorothy Leland argues that consciousness raising should be understood as an integral aspect of Heidegger’s account of authenticity, see “Authenticity, Feminism and Radical Psychotherapy” 247. Her analysis of consciousness raising resonates with her analysis of “conflictual culture” through which she addresses issues of race in terms of the need to identify the ways in which “conflictual cultures” involve “fundamental divisions over what is important, possible and permissible” as these relate to the attempts to undermine the authority of dominant cultures (Conflictual Culture and Authenticity” 116-126).
In addition to allowing the other to experience the significance of her projects, Leaping in also opens up the possibility of the other’s recognition of our basic openness to one another and her recognition of the fact that this openness is realized in our Indifferent modes of encounter with one another. The other’s recognition of the impact and role of Indifference is important because this recognition is related to the other’s further recognition of the fact that all others contribute to the significance of her projects. When the other recognizes that she is open to the significance made manifest by others and that it is this very significance that renders meaningful her own projects, she has the opportunity to recognize our constitutive openness to one another and to recognize that she cannot disavow the experience of others inasmuch as she draws on the significance of that experience in her realization of meaningful projects. In other words, by recognizing our openness to one another as the medium of the significance of our projects, the other may also recognize that we have no encounters with one another that are not mediated by significance. Further, inasmuch as our projects are carried out in particular public worlds, the significance of our projects builds upon the significance made manifest in Indifference, Indifference must be recognized as a medium of our openness to one another, an openness that is the condition of possibility of our meaningful projects as well as that which renders relevant, in principle, the experience of each of us. Through Leaping in, then, the other may recognize that the significance upon which she draws is constituted by all and that the co-constitution of significance means that, in principle, the experience of all others matters.

To summarise, our openness to one another is always realized in one of the three modes of solicitude Heidegger describes. These basic modes of openness can be used to consider our encounters with one another in the context of society. By doing so, we come to see that our Indifference to one another is accomplished through a social know-how, that we Leap in for one
another in terms of social roles, and that Leaping ahead helps the other to recognize and mitigate the risks of Leaping in and to recognize Indifference as contextualizing significantly our endeavours. In the following section, we shall come to see that the dimensions of mediation we have associated with Heidegger’s account of Indifference and Leaping in correspond to institutional dimensions of our experience of one another. In the final section, we shall come to see that our capacity for Leaping ahead corresponds not only our capacity to instil in the other a critical recognition of the cooperative constitution of her significant world, but that, further, Leaping ahead points to a dimension of reciprocity in the realization of our capacity to recognize one another.

Section Four: Institutions, Interpersonal Negotiations and Significance

In this section, we shall come to see that the first two modes of solicitude Heidegger describes pertain to two basic dimensions of institutional life and, accordingly, that institutions can be defined as sites in which we negotiate our social roles, and as sites that always acquire significance through this negotiation. This analysis will draw on the work of John Rawls and Pierre Bourdieu to define institutions. After defining institutions, we shall turn to Heidegger’s essay, “Building Dwelling Thinking” to come to see that we always encounter our institutions in terms of determinate aspects of the world, aspects that precede us. We shall also turn to Gadamer’s analysis of play to come to see that we perform our institutionally governed reality, and that we realize ourselves only by performing it. Overall, this section aims to demonstrate that the meaningful institutions in which we negotiate our social roles precede us, and that we realize ourselves in the performance of them.
(a) Preliminary Introduction to Institutions

Let us begin by considering how we understand the nature of institutions in everyday life. Generally, we experience institutions in terms of two basic dimensions: a formal, “legalistic” dimension that we recognize explicitly when we identify, for example, a bank or a museum as “an institution,” and a pervasive dimension that affects us in implicit ways such as that afforded to us by our families or groups of friends. While, as we shall come to see, both dimensions are present in any institution, we tend to recognize various institutions either in terms of one or the other of these dimensions. To expand, while we tend to recognize institutions such as banks, universities or museums as distinct, explicit legal entities with the capacity for explicit self-referentiality and explicit instrumental purpose, we tend to recognize institutions like language or family to be non-optional products of our cultural and historical heritage that provide for us important sites of self-experience. Thus we tend to recognize as institutions both entities with which we engage explicitly for particular purposes and dimensions of life in which we are embedded perpetually and that provide for us the basic contexts that enable and define us.

Whether they seem to stand for us as structures with clearly defined scopes and legalistic models of participation or whether they seem to permeate dimensions of our everyday lives, we recognize institutions as sites of our participation. Furthermore, while both dimensions are presented to us as possible sites of participation, the “legalistic” dimension tends to be associated with an instrumental purpose and the pervasive dimension tends to be associated with what might be called an experience of inherent significance. In effect, our two ways of understanding institutions correspond to two basic ways of experiencing institutions. To illustrate, we are not surprised when the institutions that seem to stand for us as objective structures compel us to submit to their rules in order to engage with them. At the same time, precisely because they are
explicit structures, we generally imagine that they do not shape our lives when we are not explicitly engaging with them. Other expectations characterise our experience of less objectively structured institutions; we do not think of institutions like language or family as realities that exist for us only when we are taking them up directly. My sister or my friend is precisely that person who is a definite feature of my social reality even when I am not in the middle of having a conversation with her; correlatively, I do not imagine myself to be without language or outside of it when I am not speaking. Thus, we generally recognize institutions to be sites of participation, and we generally recognize institutional participation to occur both at the level of explicit conformity to the rules or norms of a given context and at the level of pervasive features of our meaningful existence, features that pertain to presuppositions about who and how we are and that constitute our basic orientations to the world.

These two everyday ways of understanding institutions—distinct “legalistic” structures whose rules I must obey and whose scope I can escape, on the one hand, and flexible realities that permeate my lived sense of reality, on the other—can contribute to a more complete account of institutions. Let us now attempt to develop this account more explicitly by drawing on the work of Rawls and Bourdieu work. In doing so, we will not only define institutions, we shall also come to see that our definition relates to Indifference and Leaping ahead and that institutions are sites of our negotiations with one another.

(b) Rawlsian Institutions

Although we shall not take up Rawls’ philosophical project in the course of this work, the definition of institutions he provides in A Theory of Justice is particularly helpful to us because it highlights explicitly the place of social roles in institutions, thereby providing a clear connection to our understanding of Heidegger’s account of Leaping in, and because, on Rawls’ account,
institutions are instrumental by definition without necessarily being sources of oppression or manipulation.\(^5\) Thus, Rawls offers what we might recognize as an optimistic and straightforward account of the explicit aspects of social cooperation. Defining institutions, he writes the following:

> Now by an institution I shall understand a public system of rules which defines offices and positions with their rights and duties, powers and immunities, and the like. These rules specify certain forms of action as permissible, others as forbidden; and they provide for certain penalties and defences, and so on, when violations occur. As examples of institutions, or more generally social practices, we may think of games and rituals, trials and parliaments, markets and systems of property (55).\(^5\)

As we can see, Rawls emphasizes and clearly identifies the formal elements of institutions. Institutions are defined by the rules that constitute them and these rules form a system that applies to all participants while admitting of variations on the basis of the different roles that can be adopted within that system. As institutional participants, we take up roles and these roles dictate how we can behave; roles, and the rules attached to them, allow us to guide our own behaviour and to predict the behaviour of others because we can expect that their behaviour will correspond to the role they adopt.

The definition Rawls offers reiterates aspects of our account of Leaping in and adds to this account by drawing our attention to the fact that institutions also enforce the rules they prescribe and accomplish a society-wide predictability. As we saw above, Leaping in occurs on...
the societal level in terms of the various roles we can adopt and in terms of the way the public accounts of such roles allow us to cooperate in order to attend to our shared needs. Our cooperation works precisely because roles and rules are public. Relatedly, Rawls associates specific roles, rules and strategies of enforcement with transparency: rules are clearly identifiable and public in the sense that any informed person could explain them to someone else. Predictability, meanwhile, is associated with the public character of any system of rules. Yet, even shared definitions of roles and rules cannot ensure that individuals will conform to them and, as Rawls points out, public definitions and expectations are reinforced and maintained through the application of definite penalties and defences. Thus, it is as public, and as supported and ensured by methods of enforcement, that institutions provide us with a stable and predictable life.

In short, Rawls defines what we might think of as formal or explicit institutions, the kinds of institutions in which one can, at least on the surface of it, participate for a limited time and then cease to do so. Obviously, some systems of rules and roles are easier to avoid than others. Being a citizen, for example, is difficult to step out of. The point, however, is not that institutions are easily avoidable, but rather that they are external to us and cease to apply once we escape their jurisdiction. Institutions, on this account, are still important features of our lives and have important social and political dimensions, but only insofar as they are the means by which specific goods are attained or tasks are accomplished. They provide for us what we require in the publicity and transparency of their articulations and in their methods of enforcement, and, thus,

56 In “The Sense of Justice” Rawls explains that our adherence to the rules of just institutions is associated with the ways individuals find themselves to be bound by principles of justice. According to Rawls, “if men did not do what justice requires, not only would they not regard themselves as bound by the principles of justice, but they would be incapable of feeling resentment and indignation, and they would be without ties of friendship and mutual trust” (281).
by explicitly shaping our behaviour in relation to our specific, socially-sanctioned roles and the specific, socially sanctioned roles of others.

(c) Bourdieu and the Habitus

While Rawls associates explicit, instrumental institutions with public accounts of social roles and transparent methods of enforcement, Bourdieu argues that the explicit dimensions of institutions akin to what Rawls identifies influence our behaviour and our sense of the world in implicit ways.⁵⁷ By considering Bourdieu’s work, we shall come to see that the definition of institutions provided by Rawls captures only inadequately our concrete involvement in institutional life and, accordingly, that a definition of institutions that includes both Rawls’ and Bourdieu’s insights is required.

According to Bourdieu, our experience and our behaviour is fundamentally shaped and determined by he calls our “habitus,” an implicit practical sense of the world. A *habitus* is a network of durable dispositions and tastes that we experience as an inclination to and disinclination from various social, political and aesthetic features of our world. Through the *habitus*, our experience of specific features of our world reflects our *particular* social role or position, and the developed network of tastes and skills associated with our *habitus* allows us to maximize our lived experience of the role with which we identify. The implicit sense of the world contained in the *habitus* is manifest in what the individual experiences as permissible and, consequently, as desirable, and what she experiences as forbidden and, consequently, as

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⁵⁷ I draw on Bourdieu’s work despite his critique of Heidegger in *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*. There, Bourdieu argues that Heidegger’s *Being and Time* is determined both by its historical time and by the field of philosophical writing, despite its claims to an ahistorical reading of Dasein. Bourdieu aims to demonstrate that Heidegger’s philosophical ideas are based on the same principles that guided his Nazism, and to do so through a “simultaneously political and philosophical dual reading of writings which are defined by their fundamental ambiguity, that is, by their reference to two social spaces, which correspond to two mental spaces” (3, emphasis in original).
undesirable or unthinkable.\textsuperscript{58} Thus, through the *habitus* the perspectives and tendencies we acquire in our world shape our experience of that world in ways that maintain the basic social conditions that first contributed to the specificity of our perspective. For example, those born into blue-collar families will typically acquire the tastes associated with that class, and those tastes will inform the capacity of individuals to acquire what they take to be in their interest. Blue-collar tastes implicitly effect in the agent the tendency to maintain the conditions contributing to her social position and the tendency to maintain the agent’s deference to those of higher social positions. In effect, our tastes are shaped by our experience of our social positions, and these tastes function for us as the practical know-how through which we realize the behaviour that is associated with our particular social positions.\textsuperscript{59} Boudieu describes the *habitus* as follows:

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (\textit{Logic} 53).

Thus, according to Bourdieu, individuals maintain the social conditions associated with the role(s) with which they identify by acting in conformity to the *habitus* that develops in relation to specific social conditions and that acts on the individual in ways to which she is at least partly

\textsuperscript{58} Russon points out that Bourdieu’s work captures the hidden dimensions of experience that enable our immediate sense of culturally specific familiarity, and that provides for us a sense of how we must act, see “Ritual Basis” fn 14; “For Now We See Through a Glass Darkly” fn 22.

\textsuperscript{59} Bourdieu’s account of *habitus* has its roots in his anthropological analysis of tribal society, and he also employs his account of *habitus* in an analysis of modern social conditions and institutions as sites of conflict and power. For an account of the relationship between Bourdieu’s early anthropological work and his later work on modern political and social life, see Cronin “Bourdieu and Foucault on Power and Modernity” 64-77. In \textit{The Logic of Practice} Bourdieu explains how pre-capitalist systems of exchange facilitate capitalist exploitation through the exchange of various kinds of social capital (112-134). See also \textit{Practical Reason} 90-123 for an account of the non-economic basis of explicitly economic exchanges.
blind. The individual experiences her own tastes and inclinations, and not the effect of the world on these and, by acting on the basis of these tastes and inclinations, she deploys a practical sense of the world that perpetuates the social conditions into which she was born.

The practical sense of the world that Bourdieu attributes to individuals relates to the social know-how we associated with Indifference, but adds to it the dimension of social stratification. This allows us to understand Indifference to be in play not only, so to speak, “out on the streets” but, additionally, in the various kinds of social contact in which we involve ourselves in terms of our social roles.

As we saw above, we relate Indifferently to others in the context of society when we have acquired the habits of social know-how associated with our worlds and when these habits have come to inform our sense of the basic courtesy and space that ought to be afforded to anyone. Similarly, Bourdieu’s “practical know-how” pertains to habitual dimensions of experience and to our sense of how to interact with others. Describing the logic of practical know-how, Bourdieu explains that it amounts to what might be called a “feel for the game” (Logic 82); in the pursuit of explicit goals, the individual draws on “prepared gestures and words” to navigate her social world (Logic 80). She negotiates various situations as they are perceived by her through her *habitus*, and as they are, thus, informed by her sense of her own place in the world in relation to the positions of others. The individual is, consequently, always involved in a dialectical relationship to the world—her perspective is shaped by the social world that she interprets and to which she responds in terms of that shaping—that plays out “in conditions which exclude distance, perspective, detachment and reflexion” (Logic 82). The individual engages in the world without recognizing the strategies and interpretations she deploys in the ongoing interpretation of her world.

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60 For an extended analysis of social differentiation, see Bourdieu “What Makes a Social Class?”. 

Inasmuch as the skills drawn on to negotiate a social world are imperceptible to the individual, the practical, social know-how to which Bourdieu refers has an habitual dimension that corresponds to what we have called social know-how. Further, inasmuch as skills of negotiation are deployed in relation to specific individuals in specific social roles, Bourdieu’s account includes an implicit, though differentiated, understanding of personhood comparable to the understanding we have found to be associated with Indifference. Thus, because Bourdieu’s account of the habitus accords with our understanding of Indifference, his work allows us to include in our understanding of the implicit aspects of our interpersonal negotiations an interpretive relation to various and variable features of our concrete lives, features that pertain to the way we are influenced implicitly by our social and institutional involvement. Bourdieu’s work thus helps us to understand the relationship between Indifference and Leaping in, as these pertain to institutional life, by demonstrating that our Indifferent involvement in the world is particular to the social position we fill: our Indifferent modes of interaction are associated with our role in the cooperative network of social roles with which Leaping in is associated.

(d) The Combined Perspective on Institutions

Together, Rawls and Bourdieu contribute to the following account of institutions: we understand by institutions both the objective, instrumental organization of social roles and the implicit effect of this organization on our always socially positioned experience. With this basic definition in mind, we can draw attention to specific features of our institutional involvement. With both Rawls and Bourdieu, we see that institutions involve social roles and a sense of how we ought to behave. Like Rawls, Bourdieu notes that permissible and forbidden behaviour is associated with distinct roles, but, unlike Rawls, Bourdieu explains that the agent is compelled by these distinctions through her own sense of what is appropriate, a sense that she derives from
her world in unconscious and implicit ways.\textsuperscript{61} Thus, Rawls’ definition helps us gain a sense of the explicit goals and strategies we employ to shape our world in ways of our choosing, thus allowing us to retain the sense that we are capable of choosing to establish and shape institutions for specific purposes, while Bourdieu’s analysis emphasizes the implicit domain of experience that corresponds to an explicit social structure, even as he reminds us that our perspectives and interests are always shaped by the institutions into which we are born and that continue to influence our behaviour regardless of the objective structures we establish.

There are two aspects of this definition that will allow us to refine our understanding of institutions to the following definition: institutions are meaningful sites in which social roles are negotiated. First, we recognize in both the explicit and implicit dimensions of institutions that institutions are sites in which we negotiate with one another \textit{in terms} of social roles that are always also interpreted implicitly by socially situated individuals. Second, inasmuch as institutions are sites in which social roles are negotiated, the meaning of particular institutions is constantly in the process of being negotiated through roles as they are presented publicly, as well as in terms of how these roles acquire significance in the behaviour of individuals. In sum, we can understand institutions to be irreducibly meaningful contexts that derive their meaning though our negotiation of social roles (a negotiation that is open to both our explicitly instrumental endeavours and our implicit orientation to the world in terms of our individual goals). Institutions thus mediate our experience of the world and our various relations with one another and do so as the shared ways we have of orienting ourselves within the world.

\textsuperscript{61} For an account of how the \textit{habitus} of particular individuals shapes their ways of speaking in ways that exclude them from effective participation in democratic political life, see Topper “Arendt and Bourdieu” 358-361. Topper’s analysis describes how institutions are present as “fields” or “markets” in which social behaviour is constituted by modes of perception and by external structures (359).
Having come to understand how institutions mediate our experience of the world and of one another, let us now consider how we encounter institutions within our historically and culturally distinct worlds. As Bourdieu’s work suggests, we are always born into a definite and significant world that shapes our perspective and, thereby, our responses to it. We will now focus on this pre-established aspect of institutions to come to see that institutional life always involves taking up definite possibilities that precede us and that their preceding us is integral to the significance of institutions. We shall proceed by considering Heidegger’s, “Building Dwelling Thinking” in order to come to understand how Heidegger explains the relationship between our way of existing and the determinate institutions that preceded, house and outlast us.

Heidegger begins his essay “Building Dwelling Thinking,” by considering how we are to understand ourselves and our activities. He identifies dwelling and building as ineliminable features of our existence, and he explains that, contrary to common ways of distinguishing between the two, our “dwelling” is always also “building”; “For building is not merely a means and a way toward dwelling—to build is in itself already to dwell” (PLT 144/VA 148).

According to Heidegger, we do not “build” various features of the world in order to live in them subsequently; instead, by living as dwelling we are constantly involved in the process of establishing the basic shape of our lives. This process of shaping requires that we take up the shaped ways the world is presented to us and come to experience these as defining the scope and form of our significant experience of the world. Illustrating our relationship to significance, to Being, through an etymological analysis of the High German word for building, buan, a word

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62 Heidegger also refers to “dwelling” in Being and Time (80/54), and in “Letter on Humanism” (Pathmarks 272). Hatab notes these references to dwelling to argue that Dasein’s dwelling is always an ecstatic unity not just of temporality, but of Being “in/there/with” and is always contextualized by state-of-mind [Befindlichkeit] (“Heidegger and the Question of Empathy”).
related both to dwelling and to the neighbour who dwells nearby, Heidegger tells us that only by building are we able to dwell “near,” or live in accordance with, the nature of our existence; “The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans are on the earth, is Bauen, dwelling” (PLT 145/VA 149, emphasis in original). Our being born into significance, into Being, is essential to our existence; we are not, and cannot be, what we are without a world that makes sense to us and in terms of which we make sense of our own activities. As Sheehan writes, “We human beings are hermeneutical by nature: we cannot exist without understanding the meaning of . . . (if we can encounter something, we can make sense of it. If we cannot make sense of something, we cannot encounter it)” (“Astonishing” 46-47). As the ellipsis indicates, we are incapable of encountering something without experiencing it in a significant way. By virtue of our dependence on the sense-making capacity of the world, we are subject to its determination of us and of our significance. When Heidegger tells us that to build is to dwell and that we dwell near that which makes us what we are, he is telling us that we are always in the process of rendering determinate the significance of our existence through the determinacies left to us by others. As he writes, “Building as dwelling always unfolds into the building that cultivates growing things and the building that erects buildings” (PLT 146/VA 150). Since the others who preceded us were builders too, they leave behind a shaped, significant world for us to inherit. Our encounters with significance are always determinate because we always find ourselves in worlds others have cultivated and constructed. As “dwellers” we care for and about our existence by attending to that which enables it (cultivating) and by making something of it (constructing). These features of our existence define us; we dwell so long as the world is that in which we live.

63 There is, here, a striking resemblance to the following statement from “Letter on Humanism”: “Only so far as the human being, ex-sisting into the truth of being, belongs to being can there come from being itself those directives that must become law and rule for human beings” (Pathmarks 274/Wegmarken 191). The historical directedness of human life described in “Building Dwelling Thinking” corresponds to the directions from Being described in the essay.
and die, and that which we cultivate and construct. Our finite existence is always contextualized by what precedes us such that the activities through which we realize ourselves are fundamentally determined by the worldly context in which we find ourselves.  

We may recognize in Heidegger’s account that “building” is not something we control or choose to do. Rather, it is something that happens to us insofar we do not control the significance of what we choose to do or fail to do and insofar as the significance of our endeavours is decided by the world into which we are born and which will outlast us. As contextualized by world, our actions, activities and efforts to cultivate and construct are never simply subject to the significance we attribute to them; the meaning of what we do consists in how our actions function as our mortal effort to cultivate and construct or, put otherwise, in how we take up and perpetuate the contextualizing significance into which we are born. Heidegger refers to our taking over significance as freeing and preserving it, and speaks of how this significance is manifest to us in what he calls the “fourfold” [Geviert] of “earth and sky, divinities and mortals” (PLT 147/VA 151). Andrew Mitchell explains that each of the dimensions of the fourfold corresponds to a dimension of significance gathered in things. The dimensions both constitute the thing and constantly threaten it with “disaggregation”: the thing “things,” it presents itself to us through and as the dimensions of significance to which we may or may not respond such that its very way of being manifest is always also its vulnerability to change or dissolution, a

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64 In “Death and Organization,” Patrick Reedy and Mark Learmonth argue that Heidegger’s account of death can help us “see death as a reason for fundamentally questioning the purpose of organizations and our place in them” (118). In various ways, organizations can obviate the tendency to instrumentalize or repress attitudes towards death by incorporating insights that derive from the way facing “up to death refames all our projects, including our academic projects, as a part of a wider but limited life where relations to others and the world around us become the most important considerations when making choices about how to spend the always limited time at our disposal” (127).

65 Kockelmans explains that although the dimensions of the fourfold seem to refer to ontic things, they ought be understood as follows: “They express the fact that whatever has meaning ultimately means whatever it means, with respect to these four basic dimensions of Being, which—as we have seen—in a concrete form always manifests itself as world” (On the Truth of Being 95).
vulnerability that pertains to our responses, or lack of responses, to the dimensions of significance in terms of which a being is manifest to us ("The Fourfold" 210). Heidegger explains that through our intercourse with the things of our world we find ourselves in the context of earth and sky as engaged in the process of appearing before the divinities together; “But ‘on the earth’ already means ‘under the sky.’ Both of these also mean ‘remaining before the divinities’ and include a ‘belonging to men’s being-with-one another’” (PLT 147/VA 151, emphasis in original). According to Heidegger, the dimensions of the fourfold are interrelated: we draw on the earth—on things as they appear to us and on the specific things that we employ in the various tasks related to our existence—to exist meaningfully within and to withstand the openness of the sky and the unpredictable and awe-inspiring events that do or can occur during the course of our finite existence. Such efforts always involve the possibility of bearing witness to the appearance or disappearance of significance—"divinities"—which both attests to and mediates the unknown and unpredictable dimensions of existence as these hold open for us the very possibility of our interpretive existence. Our mortality, meanwhile, is related to our collective experience. Thus, our experience of significance depends on our recognizing our togetherness as mortals in the finite generation into which we are born; our very finitude, our

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66 Heidegger first introduces the fourfold in his 1950 essay, “The Thing” [Das Ding].
67 This chapter does not address the role played by death in Being and Time. It is important to note that, there, the individuation of Dasein realized in anxiety makes possible resoluteness and the “care as concernful solicitude” achieved thereby (BT 347/300). Nevertheless, the focus in this chapter is on the attitudes we take up towards institutions and others, rather than the ontological disclosure of our Being that underlies it. For work that relates Dasein’s process of individuation to the ethical character of Dasein, see Eric Sean Nelson’s “Individuation, Responsiveness, Translation”; Françoise Dastur “The Call of Conscience: The Most Intimate Alterity”; Emilia Angelova “Utopia.”
68 I have drawn on Mitchell’s work in this account of the fourfold, especially on his insights into the way “earth,” by withdrawing, allows thing to appear; into the way “sky” refers to that which, as familiar and unpredictable, contextualizes our significant engagement things; into the relationship between “divinities” and our possibility of developing basic interpretations of our world; and into the communal character of our mortal existence, especially as our mortality emphasises our irreducible involvement in shared meaning ("The Fourfold" 210-214).
mortality, is our meaningful involvement in the significance we share with others. As Mitchell writes, “‘mortals’ names those beings defined by exposure and openness to world” (“The Fourfold” 211). In short, our experience of world is always at the same time an experience of endeavour, unpredictability and possibility, and of significance and shared finitude, such that our determinate efforts are always contextualized by the possibility of shared significance and of our owning up to that significance as finite and specific to us. Conversely, significance, and the possibility of recognition with which it is associated, is tied irreducibly to our finite and necessary efforts to, so to speak, feed and shelter ourselves. As a result of the interrelationship between the four dimensions of our worldly existence, worldly significance is always mediated in the determinate ways we undertake our human affairs, and such affairs are never dissociated from the significance of our existence.

By situating our determinate and specific modes of accomplishment in significance, Heidegger helps us come to understand institutions as necessary, and necessarily determinate, structures through which our meaningful existence is realized together, while demonstrating that our institutional involvement always involves encountering a world rendered determinate through the institutional activities of others. Heidegger expresses an idea compatible with the idea that our meaningful activities are always carried out institutionally by speaking of “things”; he writes: “Dwelling, as preserving, keeps the fourfold in that with which mortals stay: in things” (PLT 149/VA 153). His analysis of “things” pertains to institutional dimensions of life such as

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69 As in Being and Time, mortality is the manifestation of Dasein’s finitude. However, while Dasein’s ultimate finitude lies in its death, finitude is irreducible to death and is manifest also in Dasein’s relation to the world and to others. The plurality of finite dimensions helps explain why no mention of death appears in this chapter. For an account of Dasein’s finitude as it relates to Dasein’s meaningful existence, see Richardson 69; Russon “Ritual Basis” 511-512.

70 Compare Heidegger’s reference to Dasein’s “generation” in Being and Time: “Dasein’s fateful destiny in and with its ‘generation’ goes to make up the full authentic historizing of Dasein” (436/385).

71 I have not commented on the spatiality inherent in Heidegger’s discussion. For an account of the spatiality of dwelling, especially in relation to Heidegger’s analysis of the Greek understanding of space, see Schalow Language and Deed 70-72; Schalow The Incarnality of Being.
commerce, travel, property and so on, and emphasizes the fact that our institutional efforts both are always contextualized by a world that makes sense and involve taking over the determinate institutions of those who precede us. Heidegger describes a bridge, a “built thing,” as follows:

The bridge swings over the stream ‘with ease and power.’ It does not just connect banks that are already there. The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream [...] the bridge is ready for the sky’s weather and its fickle nature [...] The bridge lets the stream run its course and at the same time grants their way to mortals so that they may come and go from shore to shore. Bridges lead in many ways. The city bridge leads from the precincts of the castle to the cathedral square; the river bridge near the country town brings wagons and horse teams to the surrounding villages. The old stone bridge’s humble brook crossing gives to the harvest wagon its passage from the fields into the village and carries the lumber cart from the field path to the road. The highway bridge is tied into the network of long-distance traffic, paced as calculated for maximum yield.

(PLT 150/VA 154-155)

We always find ourselves in worlds that have been organized and rendered determinate in specific ways, and, just as we generally fail to attribute the existence of riverbanks to the presence of the bridge, we generally fail to attribute our sense of the determinate world we inhabit to the determinate endeavours of those who preceded us. While built things establish for us a basic orientation in the world, this orientation appears to be natural and obvious, and we build on this basic orientation in ways that add to or alter its significance. Thus, Heidegger helps us to understand that our institutionally mediated activities, activities that are themselves variable and changeable, require an established world in order to function as our ways of taking up the structured significance of a world established by those who preceded us. Moreover, Heidegger’s
analysis helps us to see that institutional life, understood in the quotation above in terms of royalty, religion, country trade and modern, technologically enabled efficiency, preserves for us a basic sense of the world. As Heidegger’s analysis of the various ways of crossing the bridge suggests, by building on and following the institutions of those who precede us, our institutions both perpetuate and reinvent the historical world. Drawing a connection between Heidegger’s description of the bridge and our understanding of institutions in terms of social roles, we can conclude that our determinate roles and rules are always predicated on the roles and rules of those who came before us and are always contextualized and supported by a world rendered stable, coherent and significant as the background against which we undertake to define or change the institutions of the past in our own time.

In summary, institutional life is always dependent on the determinate institutions of the past and always realizes an inherited sense of the world. So contextualized, our institutions have an historical dimension that undermines our capacity to define for ourselves their significance; our institutions mean something only in the context of the past out of which they develop and as leading to the institutions of the future.72 Let us now consider how we realize the significance of our institutions as individuals by turning to Gadamer’s work to see that institutions are always performed in the behaviour of individuals.

72 On the necessity of an historical understanding of our situated existence, see Schmidt “Heidegger and ‘The’ Greeks” 84-85. Schmidt writes:

One simply cannot read Heidegger if one forgets that he was writing out of a time that from the point of view of the past had generated a time that was “without a future,” in other words, if one forgets that Heidegger writes from out of the logic of the end of history, the death of history as it had been […] His real insight is a warning about that effort to sweep away the past: hence the tradition that cultivated and then participated in such a desire to be “without a past” has collapsed in essential ways, leaving us “without a future.”
Above, we came to see that institutional participation begins for each of us with an encounter with a determinate world. In this section, we will turn to Gadamer’s account of play to consider this encounter as its shapes our individual involvement in the world. Doing so will allow us to see that we perform our institutions and that we realize ourselves in our performance of them. We shall begin by presenting Gadamer’s account, and we shall follow this up by coming to see how his account is helpful for our understanding of our own institutional involvement.

Gadamer’s analysis of play is intended as an analysis of “the mode of Being of the work of art itself” that he undertakes to present as an alternative to subjectivist accounts of art and aesthetic experience and to uncover the experience of understanding neglected by methodologically oriented hermeneutics (Truth and Method 101). Rather than attribute the experience of art to our reception of it, Gadamer explains that art presents itself to us as a phenomenon that both requires our involvement for its realization and that changes us through that very involvement. In what follows, we shall treat the involvement Gadamer describes as representative of our involvement in institutional life.

Gadamer arrives at an understanding of the play of the work of art by discussing play in general and differentiating between our ways of understanding play as a phenomenon and our ways of understanding play as the activity of an individual. According to Gadamer, play is not something that individuals do; instead, pointing our attention to how we tend to use the term “play” metaphorically,—for example when we refer to the play of light or colour—Gadamer explains that play is a possibility of movement that pre-exists yet arises through players and that

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73 See Kisiel “The Hermeneutics of Gadamer and Heidegger” 5-6.
manifests itself as *presentation*—that is, as a phenomenon that exists only as presented and that is not reducible to the means by which the presentations occurs. Just as the “play of colours,” occurs through the contrast and juxtaposition of color, play in the context of a game arises through the actions of players; such actions are shaped by the players’ involvement in and commitment to the terms and structure of a game while, at the same time, giving rise to an effect that supercedes their own specificity and determinacy. Play shapes, therefore, the experience of the individual, as well the specific game in which that individual is involved, while superseding both aspects as “presentation.” The presentation, meanwhile, is a realization of what Gadamer calls the “spirit” of the game, itself the distinctive realization of the movement and possibility of play that, like the irreducible experience of significance Heidegger describes, is the precondition of the game and our involvement in it. Now that we have come to see the basic features of play as Gadamer describes them, we will focus our attention on the players’ performance of the game, understanding the objective rules and structure of games to be like the explicit aspects of institutions we encountered above. This will allow us to understand our self-realization as an inevitable performance of the institutions in which we are embedded.

In a manner similar to Bourdieu’s account of the feel of the game, Gadamer explains that while our involvement in a game is structured and delimited by its rules, regulations and goals, we play the game when these cease to be optional to us and become, instead, the form and matter of our serious attention. While, according to Huizinga, freedom from the demands of necessity contributes to the superiority of play, we see in Gadamer’s text an emphasis on the pre-established character of rules as this character relates to “seriousness”. In both cases, there is at stake our commitment to contingent domains of human activity.

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74 Johan Huizinga makes a similar point by referring the “superiority” of the seriousness of play in *Homo Ludens* 8. While, according to Huizinga, freedom from the demands of necessity contributes to the superiority of play, we see in Gadamer’s text an emphasis on the pre-established character of rules as this character relates to “seriousness”. In both cases, there is at stake our commitment to contingent domains of human activity.
become implicit and constitutive aspects of our experience. In other words, play occurs only when we take the game seriously and when we commit to its meaning and structure such that our very movements embody and realize the game’s distinctive spirit. Noticing that we realize the spirit of the game only when we take the game seriously allows us to make an important observation about the way in which our involvement in explicit structures contributes to our experience of significance. As we have seen, in games, roles, rules and goals are already established and contribute to the realization of play through the serious involvement of the player. While the player is committed to reaching specific goals, and fails or succeeds in terms of these, the goals of the game serve no purpose and have no meaning outside of the game itself. Thus, as the site of play, the game itself is not instrumental: it is an autonomous domain that gives meaning to the acts of players when it is realized as play through their actions. Thus, while the game produces nothing for individuals, it can contextualize, order and shape the lives of individuals and render their actions meaningful through their commitment to it. As Gadamer writes, play is “a closed world, one without transition and mediation to the world of aims” (Truth and Method 107). Self-enclosed, the play of the game exists for its own sake, taking up the commitments and efforts of players as the medium of its self-realization; “the purpose of the game is not really solving the task, but ordering and shaping the movement of the game itself” (Truth and Method 107). The player, in turn, encounters the determinacy of the game as a determinacy rendered significant through play. Play is not something an individual does, but is, rather, something realized through a commitment to the game.

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75 Here we see the hermeneutical dimension of Gadamer’s analysis: our orientation to the world is enabled by our adoption of the way in which aspects of our world have already been interpreted and rendered meaningful. For Gadamer’s account of the irreducibly hermeneutical character of our existence see Philosophical Hermeneutics “The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem”.
As a self-enclosed happening, play is not only not for the sake of external goals and not rendered meaningful by anything outside of it; it is also self-renewing so long as it continues to be realized by players: “The movement of playing has no goal that brings it to an end; rather, it renews itself in constant repetition” (Truth and Method 103). So long as individuals continue to “play the game,” play never ceases to offer itself to individuals as the contextualization that gives their actions shape and purpose. According to Gadamer, the game provides to individuals a sort of existential relief; when individuals take seriously the terms of the game, “The structure of play absorbs the player into itself, and thus frees him from the burden of taking the initiative, which constitutes the actual strain of existence” (Truth and Method 105). Thus the individual who commits herself to the game and realizes it in play receives from the self-enclosed and self-renewing significance of play an experience of the significance of her own endeavours. Our realization of play is, therefore, simultaneously our own meaningful self-realization, one that we accomplish when we commit to the definite terms and goals of the game. As Gadamer writes, “play is really limited to presenting itself […] The self-presentation of the game involves the player’s achieving, as it were, his own self-presentation by playing” (Truth and Method 108).

While play is realized as an inherently self-renewing significance, it is only ever realized through individuals who define themselves and present themselves to the world in significant ways through the terms and meaning of the game.76

Let us now summarize what we have learned by bringing the account of play to bear on our understanding of institutional involvement. We have already seen that, like games,

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76 According to Gadamer, we can come to understand and reflect critically on our presuppositions, giving rise, thereby, to new forms of meaning, but only because we are first invested in the language, culture and tradition on which we draw. Explaining this, Kisiel writes, “Hermeneutics locates itself in the ‘between’ of belonging to a tradition of facing an ‘object’ uprooted from the customary and posing a question to us. Explicit understanding begins only when this challenging event happens to us, creating a distance between us, the interpreters, and the transmitted message” (“The Hermeneutics of Gadamer and Heidegger” 8, emphasis in original). According to Gadamer, the work of art gives rise to an experience that allows for such a critical understanding (Kisiel 14).
institutions have objective aspects that shape the efforts of individuals in implicit ways. What we can now understand is that, like games, institutions are performed or realized by individuals; we perform our institutions in and through our commitment to their terms, rules and goals, and, in so doing, perform and realize ourselves in determinate and significant ways. To digress briefly, inasmuch as we always understand ourselves in meaningful ways, we always depend implicitly on the institutions that give rise through us to the “presentation” of autonomous, self-renewing significance. We experience this significance as the specific goals and values that falls outside the scope of instrumental assessment and, thereby, allow us to commit to something without questioning its worth and significance. Thus our self-realization is a realization of the basic sense of significance that founds and shapes our world, and this significance is embedded in the determinate roles and rules particular to our institutions.

(g) Section Summary

In this section, we began by coming to understand institutions as sites comprised of explicit structures that affect us and our behaviour in implicit ways and as sites oriented towards the negotiation of social roles. Next, we came to see that our institutional structures always precede us and that, by performing them, we realize the significance that inheres in them and render ourselves significant in terms of them. Compiling the distinct elements of our analysis, we may conclude the following: institutions are explicit structures that exist only in our performance of them, the performance through which we negotiate social roles according to the regulations, goals and priorities established by the explicit aspects of our institutions. In effect, institutions structure our interpersonal negotiations and, through this structuring, allow us to engage collectively and coherently in the realization of a shared significance that exists only in and through our commitment to it and as long as this commitment lasts.
Section Five: The ‘They’ and Leaping Ahead

Now that we have defined institutions and have come to understand the role they play in our meaningful existence, our final section will allow us to see that Heidegger’s analysis of the “they” can be read as a critique of our failure to acknowledge and attend to both the fact that we perform our institutions and the fact that by doing so we establish cooperatively the significance that defines us. By coming to understand Heidegger’s analysis of the “they” as related to institutional critique, we shall be prepared to return to Heidegger’s account of Leaping ahead and to recognize in it a mode of attending to others that allows the sameness of our self-relation and other-relation to be realized as reciprocal relations to one another.

(a) The “They” as Institutional

Let us begin by considering Heidegger’s account of the “they,” of, that is, the inauthentic understanding of ourselves and our world to which we most commonly have recourse, and by coming to see that the “they” is associated with the modes of solicitude we identified as Indifference and Leaping in. Doing so will allow us to understand Heidegger’s account of the “they” as a critique of our institutional engagement.

As we saw above, the “they” is an undifferentiated mode of our existence and refers to the average self-understanding that accords with various contexts. When we understand ourselves in terms of the ‘they,’ we implicitly assume both that a proper way of engaging in the world exists, and that all we have to do as self-responsible, intelligent individuals is to figure out what it is, behave accordingly and judge others on the basis of it. Doing so implies that we understand ourselves as we would understand “anyone,” and that we think about our behaviour, our identity and our goals in terms of how “one” ought to behave, understand and orient one’s
self. As undifferentiated “they”-selves, we accord no significance to our singular responsibility for our own self-realization, and we live according to what we take to be the way things are, never quite arriving at an account or an understanding of what the proper way of life is or why it is superior.77 Lacking an account of how to live, but, nevertheless, following what we take to be the rules, we rely on social norms and public opinion to dictate the status quo. Frederick Olafson describes the phenomenon as follows:

In the modality of Das Man, we do what we do because it is the done thing; and whenever we learn something from someone else, there is a sense in which our understanding of what is so learned is bound up with the anonymous authority of a shared practice to which the individual in question is our guide. (Ground 38)

The “they” intervenes even in our dealings with individual others, orienting us persistently towards an inscrutable authority by which we justify and assess ourselves. In this way, our reliance on implicit public norms and opinions is related to what we identified earlier as our Indifferent ways relating to one another. In both cases, we act on the implicit assumption that a proper way of behaving exists, and we engage precisely through our capacity not to question the source and structure of our involvement. In effect, then, the “they” is a phenomenon of social control that we accomplish by and for ourselves and that is realized in implicit ways in the habits that allow us to remain Indifferent to one another. Attesting to the relationship between our Indifferent modes of relating and our involvement in the “they,” Heidegger writes: “From the kind of Being which belongs to the ‘they’—the kind which is closest—everyday Dasein draws its pre-ontological way of interpreting its Being” (BT 168/130). The pre-ontological presuppositions that underlie our Indifferent, habitual modes of relating to one another derive

77 Haar likens Heidegger’s critique of our public ways of Being-with-one-another to “the Platonic distrust of doxa, that is, of the opinion of the majority or the masses” (“The Enigma of Everydayness” 21).
from the apparent universality and un-questionability of the “they.” Further, our implicit sense of who we are and how to understand our world derives from the “they,” manifesting itself in the kind of behaviour we fail to question or recognize as specific to us. Thus, it is as “they-selves” that we take our basic habits of interaction for granted and, thereby, engage with others Indifferently, failing to recognize our interdependence and the contingencies to which it gives rise.

Rooted in the inconspicuousness and obviousness of our experience of others, the “they” also extends to our sense of what is permissible and forbidden. Through the “they” we absorb, so to speak, public opinion into our every experience of the world; “We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as they [man] take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as they see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the ‘great mass’ as they shrink back; we find ‘shocking’ what they find shocking” (BT 164/126-127, emphasis in original). The “they” guides our basic appreciation of aspects of our world, and it is as guided by a sense of what is appropriate to our world that we encounter others. In our encounters with others, therefore, we are ready to assess their behaviour in terms of public life. Accordingly, we encounter others in terms of their specific behaviour and through an understanding of how their behaviour accords with our sense of the social role the other fills. In effect, our encounters with others in terms of social roles—those roles constitutive of our cooperative, societal way of Leaping in for one another—are grounded in our experience of ourselves as “they”-selves, or, more precisely, are grounded in the shared norms and opinions that enable our everyday interactions with the world by making them seem obvious to us. Suggesting this, Heidegger writes, “In that with which we concern ourselves environmentally the Others are encountered as what they are; they are what they do [sie sind das, was sie betreiben]” (BT 163/126, emphasis in original). Inasmuch as we engage in everyday
interactions as “they”-selves, our encounters with others in the world are contextualized by the interpretations particular to the “they.” These interpretations accord with the factical social roles of others. Thus, Heidegger’s account of the “they” relates to both of the dimensions of solicitude we have recognized to be institutionally mediated.

According to Heidegger, the “they” not only shapes our behaviour and our experience of others; it allows us to disavow our essential relatedness to others as this relatedness is manifest in our way of understanding ourselves and in our ways of engaging with one another and with concrete features of our world. As he writes: “‘The Others’ whom one designates in order to cover up the fact of one’s belonging to them essentially oneself, are those who proximally and for the most part ‘are there’ in everyday Being-with-one-another” (BT 164/126, emphasis in original). We encounter others in the everyday activities that comprise our lives, and we disavow the fact that we are essentially related to others in these very activities. In effect, by deriving our sense of ourselves from the “they,” we experience as unique to us that which determines us to be like all others.

Enacting ourselves as they-selves is inauthentic precisely because we take our sense of self, our interactions with others and the concrete features of our world for granted, and disavow our reliance on our own interpretive projection of a world that accords with the interpretive projections of others. In effect, we deny the fact that the world is our shared site of self-

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78 Heidegger writes: “Proximally, factical Dasein is in the with-world” (BT 167/129, emphasis in original).
79 Dreyfus argues that Heidegger’s account of the “they” is not carefully worked out and that, if it were, we would see the positive aspect of it that Heidegger borrows from Dilthey’s work (Being 143-144). In a discussion of the origin of the philosophical study of facticity, Kisiel also points to Dilthey and does in a way that resonates with the institutionally mediated character of human life under analysis here:

An early counter-Kantian reduction typically expressed in the synonyms of the ‘underivable givenness’ of facticity comes to us from Dilthey, who, in his quest for a critique of historical reason, gradually renounces the elevated reason of the detached transcendental ego and calls instead for a return to the ‘this side’ of life, to the full ‘factuality’ of unhintergehbares life itself, ‘behind which thought cannot go’ any farther. Nevertheless, this historical life is not opaque and mute, but teeming with the meaningful structures of inherited customs and institutions, with artworks and other artifacts as well as the written documents of
realization and that others are never merely “there” but, instead, exist in the world as we do. Heidegger expresses the disavowal of the worldly character of our experience, stating that “the phenomenon of the world gets passed over in this absorption in the world” (BT 168/130). When we become absorbed in what is available to us, we fail to consider how our projects and identities are only ever rendered meaningful by the world that contextualizes them by supplying us with the sense of purpose that enables us to realize ourselves. In short, experiencing ourselves in terms of the “they” involves accepting the terms of public life as definitive of how things are, and of perpetuating our way of life while failing to question its source or value.

Thus, the “they” corresponds to two related characteristics of our everyday existence: (1) that things are as they must be; and (2) that no one is responsible for the way things are. These aspects of our “they” selves correspond to important aspects of our analysis of institutions. On the one hand, enacting ourselves as “they”-selves involves encountering an ordered world, and, on the other, it involves our performance of that very order. Thus, Heidegger’s account of the “they” functions effectively as an account of institutional involvement: it includes our mediated ways of encountering one another in an ordered world that we maintain through our very performance of it. Let us now consider what Heidegger’s critique of the “they” contributes to institutional critique.\(^{80}\) To do so, we shall consider how Heidegger’s critique relates to the two characteristics of our everyday existence noted above.

\(^{80}\) In “What Is, Is More than It Is,” Iain Macdonald suggests that Heidegger intends his own work to contribute to the amelioration of concrete life. He writes: “But Heidegger adds a crucial element: to think being as possibility is not a purely formal gesture, but rather the necessary precondition for responding adequately to the public realm and the general fixity of beings in language” (49).
(b) *Institutional Critique*

As we saw above, our involvement in the “they” is manifest in the sense that things are as they must be. Things must, in other words, be maintained in what Heidegger calls their “averageness” [*Durchschnittlichkeit*].\(^{81}\) Describing averageness, he explains that it rests in what is regarded as valid, and in that to which success is granted or denied (BT 165/127). The averageness of the “they” amounts to a form of social control that relies on and enforces the established order. Heidegger calls our acceptance of the *status quo*, of the averageness of our existence, “levelling-down” [*Einebnung*]. Through it the following occurs:

> Every kind of priority gets noiselessly supressed. Overnight, everything that is primordial gets glossed over as something that has long been well known. Everything gained by a struggle becomes just something to be manipulated. Every secret loses its force. (BT 165/127)

We maintain the *status quo* through our adherence to public norms and opinions. This adherence is, for the most part, implicit, and it is realized through our failure to take note of both what is important in our environment and what constitutes an accomplishment worth preserving. These aspects of levelling-down relate to our shared, cooperative existence inasmuch as the “they” is, as Heidegger tells us, a “Being-with-one-another [that] dissolves one’s own Dasein” (BT 164/126). Because we realize ourselves through it only in undifferentiated ways, Levelling-down is a mode of Being-with-one-another in which we fail to recognize collective life as the site of our individual self-realization through others. Such recognition could counteract our tendency to Level-down by functioning as a measure of priority and by allowing us to see our shared ways of

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\(^{81}\) In § 9 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger explains that Dasein’s averageness is its undifferentiated character and that “[o]ut of this kind of Being—and back into it again—is all existing, such as it is” (BT 69/44). The averageness of Dasein is, in other words, a positive phenomenon as the domain of habits, social norms, public opinion and so on that give shape to the lives of individuals. For an account of how Dasein must individuate itself in relation to its own averageness, see Nelson “Individuation, Responsiveness, Translation” 273-276.
living as distinct and vulnerable accomplishments. Heidegger’s attribution of these failures of recognition to our absorption in the “they” encourages us to understand his account of the “they” as a critique of institutionally mediated behaviour, and as calling on our institutions to prioritise the self-realization of participants and to enable us to protect ourselves from manipulation and domination on the part of others.\(^{82}\)

While recognizing that our institutions ought rightly to be oriented towards enabling and supporting our cooperative self-realization is important, this recognition is helpful only insofar as we also recognize our responsibility for shared institutions. Inasmuch as our institutional engagement takes the form of our engagement as “they”-selves, we will tend both to disavow our responsibility for our institutions, and fail to find to find anyone who is responsible for them; we are all, in Heidegger’s words “disburdened” by the “they.”\(^{83}\) As Heidegger writes:

> The “they” is there alongside everywhere [ist überall dabei], but in such a manner that it has always stolen away whenever Dasein presses for a decision. Yet because the “they” presents every judgment and decision as its own, it deprives the particular Dasein of its answerability […] It can be answerable for everything most easily, because it is not someone who needs to vouch for anything […] In Dasein’s everydayness the agency through which most things come about is one of which we must say that “it was no one”.  

(BT 165/127)

While, as “they”-selves, we realize our shaped ways of interacting with and understanding one another, we also fail to understand that we are responsible for the way of life we realize. This

\(^{82}\) The relationship between the prioritization of the self-realization of individuals and institutional critique is suggested by Heidegger remarks on the “spatial” character of the “Situation” disclosed by resoluteness. Just Dasein’s existential spatiality is defined by de-severance and directionality, the Being-in-Situation achieved by resoluteness brings close existential possibilities that define Dasein, and shapes Dasein’s perspective and orientation accordingly. For a description of Dasein’s spatiality, see BT §23, and for the comparison between situation and spatiality see BT 346/299-300.

\(^{83}\) Huntington notes that it is existence that is Dasein’s burden, “the facticity of being born, existing without ground, and being-thrown into a body, a sex, a family, a time and place” (324).
responsibility is veiled from us inasmuch as we understand ourselves only to be doing what is done, and to be acting only in necessary and permissible ways. Moreover, we generally fail to see that anyone could be responsible for our way of living and, though we accomplish our world, we take it to be the case that no one is responsible for what we have accomplished. Heidegger’s account of the “they” thus offers to us an important aspect of institutional critique: institutional critique must take into account how the behaviour of each individual contributes to the institutions we realize together. This aspect of institutional critique also offers to us a mode of self-criticism: we can hold ourselves accountable for the way our behaviour coincides with and contributes to the nature of our institutions.

In sum, Heidegger’s account of the “they” contributes importantly to institutional critique by taking into account both how the behaviour of individuals is shaped in implicit ways, and how this shaping gives rise to a misrecognition of the nature and purpose of institutions according to which we fail to recognize them as sites in which we realize together a world that can accommodate the self-realization of each of us. Let us now reinforce our interpretation of Heidegger’s account of the “they” by turning once again to the role of Leaping ahead in the context of society. Thereby, we shall come to see that our engagement becomes a responsible and worthwhile contribution to our shared world only when, by Leaping ahead for others, we help others to recognize themselves as constituting with us the realization and perpetuation of our institutions and to recognize that our Leaping ahead for others is possible to the degree that we recognize ourselves in and through the experience of others.

(c) Leaping ahead with Others: Reciprocal Recognition

In this chapter, we have come to see that our ontological openness to others is always realized in the world and that this worldly realization takes the form of institutionally mediated
negotiations in which we establish collectively the possibilities and significance that define us. In what follows, we shall come to see that our experience of one another accords with our basic ontological openness to others—the responsiveness in terms of which we find ourselves responsively inclined to others as others—in a meaningful way when we engage in a reciprocal recognition of one another that is enabled by the mode of institutional critique we have associated with Leaping ahead. This analysis will allow us to see that we can contribute responsibly and meaningfully to the conditions of possibility of our worldly involvement only in a reciprocal relation with others.

To restate briefly the understanding of Leaping ahead we acquired above, Leaping ahead in the context of society requires that we recognize our openness to one another as well as our shaped ways of encountering one another and that we respond critically to the possibility and dangers inherent in these. We shall now consider how this critique is related to the structure of recognition in which we are invested as Being-with and Dasein-with. To recall, the structure of recognition that defines us ontologically is as follows: we are constitutively open to others, we always relate to others in determinate ways, and we always experience ourselves in terms of the determinate ways we have of experiencing others. The two accounts run parallel to each other inasmuch as Leaping ahead can fulfill its critical function only by revealing to the other the dynamic of recognition in which she is embedded. The other recognizes the institutionally mediated possibilities of her existence only by understanding these as cooperatively constituted possibilities that render her significant both in terms of the significance of others and through

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84 Since we saw above that institutional life involves Indifference and Leaping in, we may understand the following from Birmingham to express the idea that our relatedness to others can involve attending to inadequate modes of solicitude as positive aspects of our existence: “Anticipating death in the flight (phuge) of anxiety, Dasein determines itself in a codetermination of Being-with (Mitsein) wherein the indifferent and deficient mode of solicitude becomes emancipatory” (118). In the paper, Birmingham explains that Dasein cannot be utterly individuated by death inasmuch as Dasein can never be in relation to its own death (117).

85 Compare Nelson’s account of Leaping ahead as promoting “the other’s Dasein as care, freedom, and responsibility” (“Individuation, Responsiveness, Translation” 281).
attempts on the part of others to render their lives significant. As we shall see below, we acquire an experience of ourselves as individuals capable of Leaping ahead, of helping the other to realize herself, only through the other’s recognition of the role we are playing in her self-realization, and that, therefore, our experience of ourselves as capable of helping others and of contributing to the world we share is necessarily dependent on the other’s recognition of us. We shall now come to see that the other’s recognition of us contributes to our own self-recognition as individuals capable of engaging responsibly and effectively in our world only when we help others recognize their own possibilities of self-realization, a recognition that is afforded to others in their grasp of our institutionally mediated self-realization. Stated more simply, we shall come to see that self-realization occurs in reciprocal relations with one another in which our attempts to help and teach one another reveal to us how our cooperatively constituted institutional embeddedness has enabled us to become individuals capable of Leaping ahead for others.

The following analysis will demonstrate that Leaping ahead completes its critical function when we become able to recognizing the sameness of our self-relation and other-relation as a call to help one another understand the nature of our embeddedness in institutions. The following account of reciprocal recognition must be understood as having two parts, the first of which we analysed already above when we came to understand Leaping ahead as critique. As we saw above, we must understand Leaping ahead of the other as helping her to recognize and to criticize the institutionally mediated contexts on which she depends, as well as to recognize the

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86 Peg Birmingham argues that Mitsein is implicated in Dasein’s Being-towards-death, thus challenging the radical individuation of authentic Dasein that, on many readings, “allow[s] for no possibility of authentic Mitsein.” (109). Her argument focuses on the reading of Kant’s notion of respect Heidegger offers in Basic Problems of Phenomenology.

87 Both Birmingham and Schalow point to Heidegger’s interpretation of Kant as essential for coming to understand Heidegger’s views of responsibility and freedom as they are manifest in the social space of human interaction. See Birmingham 110-115; Schalow Language and Deed Chapter Two, esp. 50.
cooperative constitution of such contexts. Building on this first aspect of reciprocal recognition, we must come to understand the other’s critical understanding of our institutions as necessary to our self-realization as responsible and worthwhile individuals. As we shall see, we become able to do so when we experience the other’s perception of us as necessary for her understanding of her own potential for responsible self-realization (and perceive, thereby, the reciprocity inherent to our possibilities of self-realization).  

While Heidegger does not address directly how we are to engage responsibly with others, he does assert that our developed relationships require that our involvement be transparent to ourselves. Let us orient ourselves towards an understanding of the reciprocal character of recognition by considering a remark by Heidegger on interpersonal relations. He writes:

Of course it is indisputable that a lively mutual acquaintance on the basis of Being-with, often depends upon how far one’s own Dasein has understood itself at the time; but this means that it depends only upon how far one’s essential Being with Others has made itself transparent and has not disguised itself. And that is possible only if Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, already is with others (BT 162/125).

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88 In her account of “bearing,” Huntington argues “that failure to live out of the full openness of one’s ontological being-in-the-world is an ethical failure in its own right” (318, emphasis in original). She argues that one can live up to the “readiness for anxiety” in resoluteness only by learning to bear with the way others affect us both positively and negatively. While Huntington does not address the reciprocal character of Leaping ahead that I focus on, to my mind, her account is compatible with mine and adds to it an important dimension by pointing to the attitude we must have achieved in order to be open to the other responsibly and to see ourselves disclosed through her involvement. Consider, for example the following:

For every time I awaken to new order of seeing what people and the world are capable of, I encounter the problem that realizing a repeat performance is more difficult on the basis of this newfound perception [. . .] The greater one’s awareness not simply of the world’s questionable ways but of all that is (Being’s aletheiac character), the more intense becomes the task of winning authenticity. (323)

89 According to Huntington, becoming transparent to ourselves involves facing up to our own ability and inability to bear the finitude of our existence: “Transparency might reveal small motives. Yet most fundamentally, it might reveal that I lack heart—I know not why—for some things at some times” (326).

90 In §60 of Being and Time Heidegger explains that the resoluteness achieved through anxiety “is what first makes it possible to let the Others who are with it ‘be’ in their ownmost potentiality-for-Being, and to co-disclose this potentiality in the solicitude which leaps forth and liberates” (344/298) and further that “resolutions remain dependent upon the ‘they’ and its world. The understanding of this is one of the things that a resolution discloses, inasmuch as resoluteness is what first gives authentic transparency to Dasein” (BT 345-346/299). In resoluteness,
Here, Heidegger reminds us that we are open to others and that every aspect of our existence is coloured by that openness. Moreover, he implies that our actual relations to others are enabled by our own self-understanding and that this self-understanding involves recognizing and owning up both to our openness to others and to the effect of that openness on the various aspects of our existence. Finally, he reminds us that, as Being-with, our self-understanding is dependent on the specific others that we encounter in the world. In short, we see in this quotation that our relations to others open up to us to the degree that we recognize that the determinate ways we encounter others determine our own self-understanding.

As Heidegger’s remark suggests, our recognition of how we are for others involves coming to understand that our relations with others define us always within the determinate horizons of the significance out of which we live. The other helps us to see, therefore, our possibilities of determinate involvement in a shared world, and helps us to understand this determinacy as it presents us to others. As Patricia Huntington explains, the other mirrors my existential situatedness for me, allowing me to face up not just to my difference from the world

then, Dasein engages in a “co-disclosure” of the potentiality-for-Being sustained in and by the “they.” Dasein’s ability to engage in a co-disclosure of possibility is indistinguishable from its way of being involved in the world resolutely. As Guignon explains, “only a person who is already engaged in the world can grasp the weightiness and significance of the current setting” (“History and Commitment” 140).

91 As Hatab remarks, there is a “strong social component in authenticity” (“Empathy” 262). While Hatab considers this social component in relation to empathy, I am arguing that this social component speaks to responsible self-realization through others.

92 I am here describing a co-recognition that is associated with the reversal that, according to Haar, “governs the entire architectonic of Sein und Zeit” (“The Enigma of Everydayness” 24). As we have noted, the first section of Being and Time emphasizes the priority of Dasein’s average existence. By the end of the text, we have come to understand Dasein’s essential possibility as foundational to the “they”-world: “From the moment when a ‘being-possible-as-a-whole’ comes to light the analysis shifts. The ‘they,’ public time, and the world now get their meaning from this new ground which is clearly not a supporting ground (a substance of a subject) but Dasein as possibility” (“The Enigma of Everydayness” 24, emphasis in original).

93 Compare Heidegger’s comment that, upon acquiring the stance of anticipatory resoluteness, Dasein “may choose its hero” (BT 437/385). Guignon interprets the possibility of choosing a hero: “What is suggested here is that, when one understands oneself as relying on ‘the Dasein which has been there,’ one draws a role-model or exemplar from the heroes and heroines of the past and uses that model as a guide for orienting one’s life” (“History and Commitment” 136). I am suggesting that it is possible to take up one’s own situation by perceiving another as a hero, so to speak, so as to understand the nature of one’s own embeddedness in particular circumstances.
but to the way the world discloses me, positively and negatively, for others in the meaning we share:

The difficulty inherent in facing exposure stems from the fact that the two dimensions, ontic and ontological, intertwine in given circumstance. This means that all the forces in that circumstance—human and non-human—mirror me to myself in a distinctive way that only these people and these bodies could, and yet the phenomenon of being-exposed in a particular light exceeds their motives and wills. (327)

Through others, we may see ourselves not as discrete, isolated subjects, but, rather, as Dasein and as Being-with, as already wrapped in a world with others and disclosed to ourselves through them. As Huntington indicates, others do not choose what we are for them; instead, as capable of recognizing us only in specific ways, others show us how we can appear to them and how we exceed, thereby, our unique, pervasive and uninvolved perspective on the world only in determinate and worldly ways. Thus, the others discloses us to ourselves as specific and finite; to come to recognize ourselves as disclosed is to come to recognize that we always appear to others in finite and determinate ways. It is because we need others to recognize our own disclosedness, and its inevitable partiality and finitude, that our self-understanding is possible only in reciprocal relations with others.

Now that we have seen that the other’s recognition of us allows us to understand ourselves as we can appear in the culturally and historically specific world we share—and, indeed, in the institutional contexts that mediated our appearance—let us trace out the logic of

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94 Hatab’s description of Heidegger’s critique of empathy is helpful here and helps clarify how reciprocal relations with others arise in a with-world: “It is not the phenomenon of shared feeling that is rejected but rather the theoretical model that presumes isolated selves that somehow must venture ‘out’ to each other. In fact, the implication is that disclosure of the Other is an original element of Dasein’s being” (“Heidegger and the Question of Empathy” 255). As Hatab notes, Heidegger describes our capacity to relate to others in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (202-203).
our interdependence in order to see that we recognize our ontological relatedness only in active, specific and reciprocal relations of Leaping ahead. If our experience of others helps us to understand that we are always finite and specific for others, others also help us to recognize the partiality, specificity and finitude of our own perspectives, and to experience our limited perspective as necessary for our capacity to recognize possibilities of meaningful self-realization. It is the experience of perceiving the other from our limited perspective, and perceiving her, nevertheless, in her potential for meaningful self-realization in the factical and institutional circumstances of her life, that allows us to grasp the inherent necessity of the limitedness and specificity of our own perspectives. Through the other, we can come to understand that the partiality of our perspectives does not prevent us from recognizing possibilities of responsible self-realization and taking hold of these possibilities for ourselves. Thus, the other discloses us to ourselves as limited and specific, but also allows us to recognize the limited specificity of our perspective to be adequate to the recognition of worthwhile possibilities of self-realization.

In addition to disclosing to us our capacity to recognize possibilities of meaningful self-realization, the experience of others allows us to recognize that our self-realization will always be perceived in terms of the limited perspectives of others; our own self-realization is always witnessed by the always partial and determinate perspectives of others. In other words, the other allows us to choose ourselves with a sense of how we are for others. Through this choice we can become explicitly and fundamentally for others. As Heidegger expresses it, we discover how we are “essentially for the sake of others” (BT 160/123). 95 Thus, through the other, as she is involved in her factical and institutionally mediated life, we discover our limited but significant

95 As Peg Birmingham argues, “Heidegger suggests that the authentic self is given only in its being “for-the-sake-of” its Being-with (Mitsein)” (113, emphasis in original). While Birmingham does not address explicitly how the other is involved in this choice, she does emphasize the fact that Dasein does not choose itself as a (Kantian) autonomous agent, but, rather, from its own transcendent involvement with beings in the world and from the freedom manifest only in that involvement (111-112).
and valuable possibilities of appearing and being perceived as essential to our Being-for-others, and to ourselves.

Choosing the selves we are for others, and owning up, thereby, to our Being-for-others, depends not only on the perspective on ourselves afforded by others, but, as we have seen, on our recognition of the unique possibility of the other’s self-realization. In fact, as Frank Schalow argues, the recognition of the uniqueness and weight of the other’s otherness both draws on and contributes to our experience of the purpose of our existence in general as that existence is made relevant to us and realized by us in the shared terms of our world: “The capacity that allows human beings to recognize the welfare of others resides within the situation that constellates many different levels of concern at once, and channels them back towards the emergence of ‘that for the sake of which’ the self exists” (Language and Deed 66). A recognition of the other is thus enabled by, and indistinguishable from, an explicit understanding of our own situated existence, a grasp through which we own up to the conditions that enable it. Further, inasmuch as we come to understand our appearance to others as necessary for our understanding of how we can be responsibly for others, the other’s ability to understand us, as we are made specific and determinate in institutionally mediated ways, is determinative of how we can appear to others and how we can realize, thereby, our Being-for-others.

It is at this point that we may come to see more clearly the reciprocity inherent in Leaping ahead. We are dependent on others for an understanding of our specificity and partiality, and for our own recognition of our own unique possibilities of self-realization. This is so because we cannot grasp our own meaningful specificity in its determinacy and finitude without seeing in

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96 Frank Schalow frames his efforts to flesh out the social character of Heidegger’s analysis by an analysis that includes Schelling and Nietzsche, but draws closest to Heidegger with Max Scheler’s phenomenology of empathy. According to Schalow, “Heidegger suggests that the notion of empathy must be transplanted on the soil of being-in-the-world, so that its dimension in facilitating a commerce between human beings can be fully appreciated” (Language and Deed 66).
the other’s determinacy and finitude her unique possibility of self-realization. Further, our grasp of the other’s meaningful self-realization within and out of determinate worldly possibilities discloses to us the specificity of our own perspectives in general, as well as with respect to our perception of her. This is so because we can grasp self-realization out of finitude only by understanding the necessity of finitude for that self-realization. Such an understanding allows us to grasp the finite character of our own perspectives inasmuch as we are capable of understanding that our perspectives must be as finite and limited as the determinate possibilities we apprehend. Only out of the self-understanding we acquire through the other can we Leap ahead for her: to help the other see and understand her own finitude, and to realize herself in and through it, we must have come to understand that finitude, and we depend on the other for that understanding.

Inasmuch as Leaping ahead for the other is inseparable from the self-understanding we acquire through others, Leaping ahead for the other amounts to what might be called an attestation of our partial and finite perspectives as a commitment to forbearance, as well as to the otherness of that other to whom we attend.97 Though this commitment, moreover, we undergo another experience of self-revelation: by attending to the other as other, we recognize ourselves as agents capable of recognition, and, thereby, we realize ourselves explicitly as an existence oriented towards others. As Peg Birmingham writes, “only in choosing for the sake of the other as end is there revealed Dasein’s own self” (114). By Leaping ahead for the other, we recognize her explicitly in her possibilities, and, through this recognition, experience ourselves as “recognizers”: we recognize our recognition of others to be essential to who we are.

97 See Schalow Language and Deed 68-68: “As a self-interrogative being, Dasein displays an initiative to address itself. But that manner of conveyance must expand to include a wider context of meaning, in which the other’s concerns can be voiced as well.”
Finally, our self-recognition as “recognizers” can be recognized by the other. When this occurs, our experience of ourselves matches the other’s experience of us in a way that corresponds to our ontological interrelatedness. Thus, it is only insofar as the other responds to us as one capable of helping her understand herself that we are able to Leap ahead for the other: when the other recognizes us as capable of helping her we become, for her, an individual capable of meaningful self-realization through others. Accordingly, our self-relation comes to be equivalent to our other-relation in the other’s recognition of us as oriented towards her self-realization in the finite, definite and dependent ways our worldly existence affords to us. Only in reciprocal relation with others, in relations that draw on and realize the possibilities inherent in institutional life, does our concrete existence measure up to the ontological structure of our relatedness to one another. Accordingly, in our reciprocal relations of recognition we own up cooperatively to a condition of possibility of our existence: that openness to others that opens up the possibility of a meaningful world.

If we engage in Leaping ahead as responsible, considerate selves—selves oriented towards preserving and improving the worldly conditions of our existence by encouraging the other to recognize herself in these conditions—then we do so as selves who no longer engage in the world as “they”-selves, but who remain concerned with the institutional contexts that the attitudes characteristic of the “they” tend to mediate. Heidegger’s description of authentic selfhood, selfhood that owns up the existence and the worldly conditions that enable it, indicates that our essential possibilities of existence, ones that I am arguing arise in reciprocal relations with others, involve the concrete institutional aspects of the world we have seen to be connected to the “they”: 
Authentic Being-one’s-Self does not rest upon an exceptional condition of the subject, a condition that has been detached from the ‘they’; it is rather an existentiell modification of the ‘they’—of the ‘they’ as an essential existentiale (BT 168/130, emphasis in original).

In the connection between authenticity and the “they” we can see the necessity of recognizing our relatedness to others as that which is realized in our explicit and implicit understanding of the world. In effect, to cease to engage as the “they” we must understand our average everyday Being to be a Being-with-one-another founded on our constitutive openness to one another. While as “an essential existential” the “they” discloses to us how we are to be in the world with others, once modified, the “they” can be recognized as the phenomenon to which each of us contributes as a singular Being-with. We can own up to this insight, finally, only by helping the other to acquire it for herself and, thereby, to come to see us as involved in a unique project of self-realization in and through our institutionally mediated endeavours. To be responsible and to realize ourselves meaningfully as such, then, we need the other’s recognition—we realize our singularity in always determinate ways, and we need the other to realize herself as a singular individual capable of responsible and significant contributions to an institutionally mediated, factual world in order to understand ourselves to be capable of doing the same.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have come to see that our irreducible openness to others contributes to our specific experience of world, and that our possibilities of relating to others are related inextricably to our embeddedness in institutions. Further, we have come to see that institutions
always mediate our experience of the world inasmuch as they have always preceded us and offer to us significant ways of realizing ourselves. This chapter has, therefore, allowed us to think together our relatedness to others, and our embeddedness in the significant context of the world, and has done so through an account of institutions that shows both these aspects of our experience to be related, and to be available to us as sites in which we are able to realize ourselves responsibly and significantly as Beings who are inherently open to others, and dependent on others for the experience of significance that defines us as the Beings that we are. More concretely, we have come to understand institutions as explicit sites in which social roles and rules are rendered public and are reinforced both transparently and by our implicit reception of them. Further, we have seen that such sites depend on our implicit and explicit ways of relating to one another, and that they call for a critique of our always imperfect and necessary efforts to build our world. Finally, we have come to see that while we may disavow our essential related to others, and our responsibility for the shape and character of our institutions, we may also recognize that only our definite institutions allow us to realize a shared world and to experience, thereby, the reciprocal recognition of one another that renders our lives meaningful. We may conclude that institutions contribute to our possibility of reciprocal recognition, and that we depend on one another to recognize the inherent importance of our institutions for our meaningful experience of our world and of one another and to preserve the possibility of these through a responsible and critical attitude toward our institutions.
Chapter Three: Modern Institutions: Threat and Promise

In this chapter, I will argue that there are distinctively modern institutions, and that these can be best understood by considering the ways they derive from and realize concretely distinctive features of modern experience. As we shall see, in contrast to pre-modern institutions, modern institutions come to be conceived of as exclusively instrumental, rather than, for example, religious, but that their ostensible instrumentality veils the fact that they are oriented towards securing their own perpetuation at the expense of the human needs and possibilities they purport to serve. Further, we shall see that modern institutions encourage our misapprehension of their ostensible instrumentality by fundamentally determining how we experience the ends they purport to serve, but that their very existence, and the resources they deploy, can contribute to our capacity to reimagine the ends to which they are oriented in ways that challenge the very idea of purely instrumental institutions. We will proceed, first, by coming to understand Heidegger’s account of distinctively modern experience, focusing on the way the abstraction inherent in objective representation encourages us to disavow our significant involvement with entities. Second, we shall consider Heidegger’s critique of values to see how the modern tendency to objectify extends even to our sense of significance and “value,” and that this objectification of value is related to global capital; to an inability to criticize effectively our endeavours; and to a self-interested attitude on the part of humanity. Third, we shall turn to Heidegger’s critique of technology and to his account of machination; his critique of technology
will allow us to see that it is an interest in profit that drives technological endeavours and that these endeavours are accomplished by the distinctively modern capacities for organization and coordination. Meanwhile, his account of machination will allow us to focus specifically on the experiences that accompany modern projects, experiences that we will come to understand through Heidegger’s account of the three primary characteristics of machination: acceleration, calculation and the outbreak of the massive. In both cases, we shall see that we may be able to relate to the definitive features of our modern projects in ways that contribute to a reassessment of them and of our sense of ourselves and our relations with one another. Fourth, we shall look to Heidegger’s comments on the art museum and the university to support our analysis both by illustrating the relationship between modern experience and concrete institutions and by pointing to how we might conceive of our relationship to these institutions in ways that mitigate their tendency to deprive us of the very resources they purport to offer. Fifth, and last, we shall consider Heidegger’s account of “decision” in an effort to deepen our understanding of what is involved in the task of responding to our institutions in ways that are adequate to our reliance on and capacity for shared experiences of significance. Let us now proceed with our analysis.

**Section One: Modernity**

In “The Age of the World Picture” Heidegger provides an account of modern experience through an interpretation of the “world picture.” “World,” he tells us, “serves as a name for beings in their entirety” (OTBT 67/Holzwege 89). “Picture,” meanwhile, here serves as a descriptor of our basic experience of all beings. Thus, the title of Heidegger’s essay refers to the distinctive (modern) “age” in which the experience of world (which, as we may recall from
Chapter One, involves a basic interpretation of significance and how beings matter) acquires the qualitative character of a picture, or, following Heidegger more closely, being “in the picture” (OTBT 67/Holzwege 89). The basic features of Heidegger’s account of the “world picture” are as follows: a ground-plan, representation, and the system-character of experience. Let us look at each of these to come to understand how Heidegger views modern experience.

Inasmuch as modern experience is characterised by a “ground-plan,” to be “in the picture”—that is, to be included in that which “modern” individuals take to be fundamentally real—is to have been assessed and classified (OTBT 59/Holzwege 77). The “ground-plan” consists of possibilities of classification and includes all the ways in which entities can be taken into account from the perspective of detached observation (and we shall see below that this detached approach results in an instrumental approach to entities). Heidegger explains that the ground-plan stands “between,” so to speak, us and our experience of entities and that, as a result, we become increasingly unable to recognize and take seriously the way certain things really are, as we saw in Chapter One, unique and significant aspects of our sense of the world and, indeed, are central to and largely constitutive of that very sense.98 Moreover, according to Heidegger, this distinctly modern incapacity of ours is experienced as the truth about entities: for us, entities seem “really” to be how they appear to be from a detached perspective and in terms of the possibilities of classification to which they correspond. As Heidegger expresses it, through the establishment of a pre-ordered experience of reality—of the criteria according to which something is “in the picture”—“everything draws nearer to everything else,” and everything “becomes completely alien to itself—yes, totally other than just alien. The relation of non-relationality” (Contributions 92/[131-132]). When the basic sense of what is real about entities

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98 Nelson remarks that Heidegger’s 1930s account of history includes the possibility of an experience of the autonomy of entities through “a letting or releasement allowing beings to be immanently encountered and engaged on their own terms” (“History” 98).
comes to be how they correspond to various possibilities of classification, entities become increasingly interchangeable; the uniqueness and specificity that pertains to various things by virtue of the significant place they play in our lives is lost when such things are reduced their measureable features and become, thereby, like any other thing that can be assessed and measured. Now that we have a basic understanding of “ground-plan,” let us turn to “representation.”

When I experience a thing abstractly, I experience it as insignificant, instead of recognizing that it is my inability or refusal to attend to the significance it has accrued by virtue of my involvement with it that has rendered it so. “Representation” refers to the change in perspective that corresponds to an abstract grasp of classifiable and interchangeable entities. To represent entities to ourselves is to conceive of entities as “objects,” that is, as not only knowable by virtue of abstract measures, but, more essentially, as real by virtue of that which admits of abstract measure. Furthermore, our experience of “objects” corresponds to an experience of ourselves as “subjects.” As subjects, we experience ourselves in terms of our ability to measure and assess entities in terms of abstract criteria and to represent them to ourselves. That is, we fundamentally understand ourselves to be “real” as detached selves capable of representing objects to ourselves in terms of classifiable and evaluable criteria, rather than understanding ourselves to be significantly involved with entities. “Representation,” therefore, marks not only an alienation from the significant dimensions of objects, but also what might be called a “self-alienation”: in the modern world we increasingly take for granted that what we are corresponds to the perspective called upon in a detached assessment of objectively representable objects. Thereby, we deny increasingly the ways in which being a self involves our meaningful
investment in a specific and shared world, and we imagine ourselves, instead, as discrete subjects.

Inasmuch as we are “subjects,” the world and the totality of entities therein only ever appear to us as objects. It for this reason that Heidegger states that the world becomes picture: it is less and less the case that the world is an abiding and familiar context, and more and more the case that it becomes, for us, an object we can know and represent. We may recall from Chapter One that what Heidegger designates as “world” refers to the implicit aspects of experience that allow us to take our sense of the world for granted. When the world becomes picture, so to speak, we do not cease to rely on a sense of the world that we can take for granted. However, what we come to take for granted is, generally, the “fact” that we gain access to what is real through our capacity to experience things objectively, as well as the “fact” that that which pertains to our familiar and meaningful involvement in the world is “unreal” or insignificant. Now that the notion of modern “representation” is more or less clear to us, let us consider why Heidegger characterises the modern perspective as a “system.”

As we have seen, representational experience involves us with a “ground-plan” that enables the categorization and classification specific to representation and that determines our sense of the significance of world. According to Heidegger, the familiar sense of significance distinctive to modernity corresponds to an implicit sense of involvement in a “system” that ensures that all that we encounter is knowable and can, in principle, be used or controlled by us. Describing the relationship between the modern “world picture” and the system-like experience of modernity, Heidegger writes: “That we are ‘in the picture’ about something means not just that the being is placed before, represented by, us. It means, rather, that it stands before us together with what belongs to and stands together with it as a system” (OTBT 67/Holzwege 89).
Our capacity for representation, in other words, is not simply a capacity to know objects abstractly; it is to know them in way that contribute to a “system” of knowledge, an increasingly comprehensive knowledge of the world that depends on a particular way of knowing. Richard Polt identifies the “way of knowing” specific to representational experience in way that will help us understand the system-character of modernity:

In the modern age, the metaphysics of presence becomes subjectivism (which we could just as well call objectivism). Subjectivism pictures the human situation in terms of the subject, the object, and a representational connection between the two. The subject is supposed to be in complete command of its own consciousness, perfectly self-present or at least potentially so; the object is supposed to be a thing that occurs as present within a neutral space; and the subject is supposed to be capable of presenting itself with the object by representing it, that is, by following some procedure that will yield a correct picture or account of the object and thus make the object available for manipulation. (657, my emphasis)

It is what we may call the “procedural” character of representation that relates to the system-character of modernity; inasmuch the abstraction inherent to representation contributes to our knowledge of the world, and inasmuch as we want our knowledge of the world to increase, the abstraction inherent in representation is binding for us. The experience of “wanting” our knowledge to increase is inevitable inasmuch as, without our endorsement of the weight of our familiar involvement with entities, and indeed, other experiences of them, it is only ever such knowledge that can render significant our experience by justifying our projects and our lives. In effect, we find ourselves compelled to continue to abstract because the sense of the world we
take for granted commits us to contributing to the increasingly comprehensive system of knowledge possible for us.

Our commitment to a particular way of knowing need not be explicit to us for the stance of detached observation to seem to us to be the proper way to attend to what is real. Indeed, it is when detachment and the self-understanding associated with it come to be implicit features of our experience that the distinctively modern experience of world is established. The pervasive sense of “familiarity” specific to modern experience has to do with the relationship between the experience of the world as picture and the system-character of modern experience:

To the essence of the picture belongs standing-together, system. By this, however, we do not mean the artificial, external simplification and collecting together of the given but, rather, the unfolding, developing unity of structure within that which is set before, represented as such, which arises from the projection of the objectness of beings (OTBT 76-Appendix 6/Holzwege 100).

Inasmuch as we increase our knowledge of the world through the endeavours that correspond to detached contemplation—through science, most notably—representation is self-justificatory. The more we come to know, in other words, the more we take for granted that the modern way of knowing grants us access to what is real about entities. According to Heidegger, taking for granted the mode of knowing inherent to representation on the part of an abstract subject involves both the tendency not to question the authority of objectivity and our subordination to the terms of abstract representation. Describing what amounts to an incapacity to question the firm foundation offered to us by objective representation, Heidegger writes; “what is happening now is the melting down of the self-completing essence of modernity into the obvious” (OTBT
We implicitly assume that attending to the aspects of entities that admit of abstraction reveals to us what it real and significant; we find ourselves answerable to the way entities show themselves abstractly: “Representation [Vor-stellen] here means: to bring the present-at-hand before one as something standing over-and-against, to relate it to oneself, the representer, and, in this relation, to force it back to oneself as the norm-giving domain” (OTBT 69/Holzwege 91). In sum, modern experience is characterised by what comes to be taken for granted when a relationship of detached knowing characterises our basic experience of the world and determines our self-understanding as discrete subjects. In effect, our “commitment” to acquiring a comprehensive knowledge of the world is an implicit commitment both to our remaining detached from the world and to understanding ourselves fundamentally as abstract subjects, rather than as, to re-invoke Heidegger’s language, Dasein meaningfully involved in the world.

In the following section, we shall come to see that it is not only our experience of entities that is altered by what we take for granted; our experience of the way that entities matter to us is also altered, as is our self-understanding. More specifically, we shall see that Heidegger’s account of “values” corresponds to our tendency to objectify and to a self-understanding as beings who not only represent reality to ourselves, but who are capable of bringing about a reality that conforms to our sense of what ought to be. Furthermore, we shall see that such developments relate to the possibility of global capital.

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99 As Zimmerman indicates, Marcuse’s critique, in One Dimensional Man, of the “ideology” of science and technology reinforces and draws on our tendency to objectify (Confrontation with Modernity 217).
100 Commenting on this, Sallis writes: “Things are only insofar as they show themselves through a conforming to what is prescribed by subjectivity, and it becomes impossible to ‘permit things to be the measure-giving reality’” (“TMR” 143).
101 According to de Beistegui, the totalizing character of the modern worldview makes it the case that our perspective on our (scientific) endeavours can be understood as well from the perspective of “the standpoint of the systematic and technical organization of the earth” or “the viewpoint of the preservation and the perpetuation of the master race” as they can from the perspective of “capital and its logic of accumulation” (Dystopias 77).
Section Two: Values

We have been discussing how an attitude of detached assessment is associated with an experience of “objects,” of entities as they can be represented and classified according to abstract criteria, as well as ways in which this basic attitude defines modern experience by constituting a basic sense of what can be taken for granted. We shall now turn to Heidegger’s critique of values, and we shall begin to see the relationship between such an assessment and an instrumental attitude towards entities.

Inasmuch as what we have identified as specific to modern experience is manifest in pervasive and implicit aspects of our experience, “modern experience” is not confined to how we perceive “entities.” Rather, our experience of entities shapes the way we experience our lives and our world as meaningful. Put otherwise, our experience of significance depends upon the character of our experience of entities. As we may recall from Chapter One, the approach to entities deriving from a history of scarcity differed from that deriving from a history of abundance. The difference between the two approaches illustrated that our approach to entities is manifest as our sense of the significance of our projects because our mode of approach is a consequence of our very engagement. Our sense of worth or value only ever develops out of the equipmental engagement that pertains to a shared public world such that our experience of entities is associated with what we take to be worthwhile. As we saw above, however, modern experience is defined precisely by a disavowal of those aspects of experience that do not correspond to an experience of ourselves as “subjects” to whom “objects” appear. Our persistent denial of the influence and significance of our engagement with entities has shaped what we have called the typically modern perspective and has given rise to a situation in which we
implicitly expect all that we experience and encounter to accommodate the abstraction inherent in objectification. This implicit expectation extends to our expectations around meaningful experience; it is only possible to give an account of significance that accords with the modern approach to entities if “significance” is abstracted from our direct engagement in the world and represented to us as an “object.” Since our experience of significance emerges, as we have seen, out of the very dimensions of equipmental engagement that are excluded from the modern objectifying perspective, the distinctly modern objectification of significance fails to capture and represent the involvement that renders significant our endeavours and that ties us meaningfully to our world. As we shall see below, Heidegger’s critique of “values” is a critique of the loss inevitable in the modern objectification of significance.102

This section will begin with an account of Heidegger’s critique of values and will demonstrate that the assessment of worth associated with “values” both leads to an increasingly instrumental approach to domains of significance and to the possibility of attending to all “value” through a single measure: global capital. This section will conclude by considering how the rise of global capital is associated with the inadequacy of the political, scientific, artistic and cultural critiques that emerge in modernity and that are incapable of recognizing their own conditions of possibility, as well as by considering how the rise of global capital is associated with a self-interested attitude on the part of individuals.103

When we represent to ourselves what is significant about our lives, we assess our endeavours and activities in terms of that to which they contribute. More specifically, when

102 For a brief and clear account of the onto-theological foundation of values and technology, and the forgetting of Being constitutive of this foundation, see Taminiaux “Heidegger on Values” 226-227.

103 In Contributions to Philosophy, Heidegger makes this point in terms of the “transcendent”, “an ‘idea’ or a ‘value’ or a ‘meaning,’ something for which one does not put one’s life on the line, but which is to be realized through ‘culture’” (18/[24-25]). According to Polt, Heidegger’s contention here is that this kind of transcendent always arises on the basis of a pre-established self-understanding of humanity (664).
assessing the significance of various projects, we do not simply engage in our projects in a way that allows us to experience the significance manifest in our very involvement; to perform such an assessment we must abstract from our significant experience of involvement an idea of what is valuable about it, and such an idea is always the purpose towards which our endeavours are oriented—“relaxation,” “entertainment,” “exercise,” “culture” and so on. This abstraction misrepresents our experience, and that with which we are involved, in especially egregious ways when our endeavours are not supposed to be activities that “produce” anything, but are, rather, enjoyable and worthwhile for their own sake. To expand, if, for example, engagement with works of art are inherently significant experiences that reaffirm or transform the interpretation of the world that defines our interpretive involvement, and are important precisely by virtue of the nature of our existence, then we will fail to grasp the significance of such engagement if we aim to give an account of it in terms of what is “objectively” valuable about it; an objectification of such an experience will present that which corresponds to direct and non-instrumental engagement as something that corresponds to some objectively representable need; the rich experience of art will be translated into a “need” for art, and such a translation will necessarily fail to represent the dimensions of involvement that renders it worthwhile, presenting instead the abstract goal of having art in our lives. According to Heidegger, what we call “values” correspond to such objectification: “Values become the objectification of needs as goals brought about by a representing self-establishment within the world as picture” (OTBT 77-Appendix 6/Holzwege 101-102).104 As interpretive beings involved in the world, we have specific, what we might call “existential,” “needs” that exceed the demands of mere survival; to meaningfully

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104 Heidegger also comments on value and things in Being and Time (132/99). There, Heidegger is criticising the assumption that things exist as present-at-hand and noting that the idea of “values” simply reaffirms that ontological interpretation.
experience ourselves, we need to experience the world as meaningful, and yet the modern perspective is defined by its tendency to abstract from the dimensions of meaningful experience.

While our meaningful experience of the world develops out of our equipmental engagement, this very engagement is, as we have seen, always contextualized by a public world in which we shape collectively the sense of significance we share. In other words, as interpretive beings, our “needs” correspond to those dimensions of life that shape an experience of significance: “‘culture,’ ‘art,’ science,’ ‘human dignity,’ ‘world’ and ‘God’” (BW 251/Wegmarken 179). According to Heidegger, it is characteristic of modernity that “needs” such these are objectified as “values” and held up as goals. The objectification of inherently significant aspects of our existence—aspects that are defined by their very shaping and realizing of significance—misrepresents the way in which we need such possibilities; we need them as that which enriches the implicit sense of the world we take for granted, and that can, thereby, infuse our endeavours with a significance that ties us to others. When the aspects of life that correspond to our interpretive nature are held up as goals, they are represented in way that fails to capture the interpretive and involved character of our engagement with them; understood as “goals,” culture, art, science and so on appear to us to stand outside our everyday affairs and to be, therefore, approachable instrumentally and realizable through the production of enough “culture,” “art” or “science,” even if that which we produce remains alien to our everyday endeavours.

Thus, when we imagine values to be “goals,” we orient ourselves to them in terms of our potential for production. For example, our societies attain the goal of having “art” by ensuring that works of art are produced and are available in public places—we have statues on city streets, museums and music festivals, to name a few. The emphasis on the production of the work of art,
rather than on the nature of our experience of it, fundamentally alters our sense of what an involvement with art, or other such domains, is like: we experience art in terms of the fact that is has been produced and is available to us, and that mode of engagement elicits and affirms a sense of ourselves as producers. Thus, when inherently significant dimensions of our existence are recognized as “values,” we can acquire and gain access to such dimensions only through “production,” and this mode of access affects our self-understanding by blinding us to, for example, the presence and power of the work of art and the fact that an experience of it can be shared. In effect, the modern experience of values is related to our self-understanding as what Heidegger calls “representing-producing” [vorstellend-herstellenden] humanity (OTBT 68/ Holzwege 89). We fundamentally define ourselves as makers or producers when we transform our understanding of values into objects and thus attend to our values without recognizing the importance of our engagement in and with them.

Our self-understanding as representing-producing humanity is related to the fact that we come to take up an instrumental attitude towards all aspects of our existence. Inasmuch as we are committed to certain values and inasmuch as these values require us to engage in modes of production—whether by acquiring ever more scientific knowledge or “art,” or by accumulating superficial signs of culture—all our activity comes to have an instrumental character: as “producers” what we make is for the sake of an outstanding goal. Thus, our self-interpretation as representing-producing humanity is related to an experience of “values” that involves a dissociation from our significant involvement with the world, and that is, instead, subject to our

105 In Contributions to Philosophy, Heidegger explains that beings are rendered instrumental by the abandonment of Being: “Beings can still ‘be’ in the abandonment of Being, under whose dominance the immediate availability and usefulness and serviceability of every kind (e.g., everything must serve the people) obviously make up what is a being and what is not” (22/[30-31]). Polt interprets this changed sense of significance as “the significance of things that is taken for granted and reduces to mere usefulness for some subjectivity, be it the people or the individual” (666).
assessment of what “counts” as valuable on the basis of what it contributes to us. Indeed, “values” are deemed valuable only to the degree that they seem to us to improve our lives. Our sense of ourselves as producers, and of values as producible, therefore, is related to both the pervasiveness of an instrumental approach to all aspects of life and to the prioritization of our objective assessment of what counts as valuable. Heidegger describes the subordination of the domains that “values” represent to the assessment on the part of modern humanity in “Letter on Humanism”:

To think against ‘values’ is not to maintain that everything interpreted as ‘a value’—‘culture,’ ‘art,’ science,’ ‘human dignity,’ ‘world’ and ‘God’—is valueless. Rather, it is important finally to realize that precisely through the characterization of something as ‘a value’ what is so valued is robbed of its worth. That is to say, by the assessment of something as a value what is valued is admitted only as an object for man’s estimation. But what a thing is in its Being is not exhausted by its being an object, particularly when objectivity takes the form of value. Every valuing, even where it values positively, is a subjectivizing. It does not let beings: be. Rather, valuing lets beings: be valid—solely as the objects of its doing (BW 251/Wegmarken 179). 106

When we adopt what Heidegger understands by “values,” though we retain the place of art, culture, science, religion and so on in our lives, we strip these domains of the interpretive

106 In Between Past and Future, Hannah Arendt makes a very similar remark about the relationship of modern humanity to the past. She writes;

It could be that only now will the past open up to us with unexpected freshness and tell us things no one has yet had ears to hear. But it cannot be denied that without a securely anchored tradition—and the loss of this security occurred several hundred years ago—the whole dimension of the past has also been endangered. We are in danger of forgetting, and such an oblivion—quite apart from the contents themselves that could be lost—would mean that, humanly speaking, we would deprive ourselves of one dimension, the dimension of depth in human experience. For memory and depth are the same, or rather, depth cannot be reached by man except through remembrance” (94).

By pointing to the role of memory, Arendt indicates a connection between our oblivion to the contingent aspects of our perspective, on the one hand, and our oblivion to the tradition in which we are rooted, on the other. Arendt thus echoes Heidegger’s account of the abandonment of Being characteristic of modernity.
enrichment they otherwise offer us and do so by subjecting each of them to an objective
assessment of their worth and validity. In effect, inasmuch as our values correspond to whatever
that which we can produce contributes to our lives, we ignore the specificity of the domains to
which values refer and treat them as equivalent to one another by referring them all to our
objectifying assessment of worth.

Having seen that modernity is associated with the objective assessment of a variety of
possible endeavours, let us now come to see that the way human activity, and the objects with
which it associated, is conceived of in the modern world admits of justification and measurement
by a single value that can, in principle, function as a measure of all aspects of objective reality.
This single value must be able to measure all aspects of our lives and, just like the system-
character of modern experience, be applicable to all that it encounters. In other words, the single
value that stands as the measure of all others must be a universally applicable measure that
expresses, so to speak, our objective assessment of the worth of various aspects of human life.
Economic value serves this purpose. Krysztof Ziarek explains that the validity and
representability of beings renders them amenable to capital:¹⁰⁷

It thus makes possible not only thinking beings as valid and having a value but also as
reducible to and representable in terms of value(s). In this way, ontological difference not
only makes capitalization possible, but also facilitates and installs calculation and
exchange by allowing us to think beings as though they were different from being […]
Only when this vector of nihilation is forgotten, when being is no longer in force as the

¹⁰⁷ Ziarek interprets economic value in terms of power, and argues that values, capital and information all develop
out of the power implicit in the basic understanding of being as producible and manipulable.
quiet force of the possible, can beings become primarily a matter of validity and value (7-8). 108

Our experience of objectified values, and of economic value as that which ultimately renders valid our activity, is thus inextricably related to our self-understanding, not only as representing-producing humanity but, more fundamentally, as subjects for whom the experience of Being is revealed by the demands of objectivity. Only when values themselves have been emptied of all interiority can a single value stand as that which authorizes the validity of any activity.

We can see, then, that the detached, objectifying perspective that characterises modern experience fundamentally alters our experience of the various significant domains in which we engage, and that, only because of this fundamental change in our orientation to significant domains, the perspective specific to modernity opens the door to the takeover of modern reality by global capital. The economic assessment of values, and of the activities to which they are related, corresponds to the various possibilities of human engagement and experience in a uniform way; we measure what we take to be the validity and worth of various domains as they relate to our understanding of our own well-being. Our sense of our own well-being, however, corresponds to a perspective on ourselves that is blind to the very nature of our engagement. The fact of global capital is not neutral; rather, it is related to a specific kind of experience and a specific self-understanding. To expand, when we disavow the significance of our equipmental

108 The change that takes place between the rise of objectified values and the reduction of values to accumulation occurs only after the promise of mastery and completion inherent in the modern perspective has, at least seemingly, been realized. For Heidegger, the sign that this phase has been reached is the rise of what he calls “the gigantic.” In effect, the rise of the gigantic is a mark of the fact that nothing appears gigantic to humanity because nothing is out of reach or beyond measure and control:

We have only to think of the numbers of atomic physics. The gigantic presses forward in a form which seems to make it disappear: in destruction of great distances by the airplane, in the representations of foreign and remote worlds in their everydayness produced at will by the flick of a switch (OTBT 71/Holzwege 95).

Accomplishments in science and technology bring about a world in which great achievements take on the guise of normal activity. This phase, according to Heidegger, is one in which “humanity sets in motion, with respect to everything, the unlimited process of calculation, planning, and breeding […] and] races towards the fulfillment of its essence” (OTBT 71/Holzwege 94)
engagement, and our dependence on shared experiences of significance, we come to understand ourselves as fundamentally dissociated from the world, first, as detached, objective observers or knowers, and, next, as representing producers. Our self-interpretation corresponds, therefore, to our engagement with entities, which includes the specific experience of significance that shapes and derives from that engagement. Global capital, meanwhile, corresponds to a particular self-interpretation of humanity, one that does not and cannot recognize the very features of our existence that define us as interpreters.

As we have seen, the domination of “value,” and of capital in particular, is predicated on an underlying equivalence of all human endeavours that arises through the objectification of the domains of significant involvement. Let us now consider how this underlying equivalence is tied to the inadequacy of modern cultural and political critiques. The inadequacy of such critiques is related to the fact that they fail to take into account their own conditions of possibility; inasmuch as domains such as art, politics or culture are objectified and measured, they are delimited by the same (economic) value that measures all else. The object of critique is, therefore, always made available by an economic measure and by the system of global capital to which it relates. Thus, no matter their critical content, critiques that acquire their objects from the categories and classifications of the modern “world picture” invoke an economically sanctioned totality. So long as that totality is invoked, its economic foundation is implicitly reaffirmed and critiques fail, therefore, to grasp their own implication in the very system that determines the object they criticise. Ziarek makes a similar point:

The saturation of today’s life with patterns of efficiency, productivity, and profitability keeps turning our existence into a giant and omnipresent market sphere. Yet, while economic, political and cultural analyses or contestations of global markets and planetary
capital proliferate, the obviousness and pervasiveness of this “planetary market-ability’ appears to impact adversely reflection on what in fact makes being and experience pre-
disposed toward exchange and trading, in short, what makes being market-able, and in
turn also marketable. (“Trading in Being” 9)

Modern critiques are thus failures to grasp—and are symptomatic of—the modern determination of our experience. Similarly, John Sallis explains that criticism, in the modern age, draws fundamentally on the assumption of the availability of the world picture.  

A discussion of the present age presumably gives an analysis of our situation by bringing to light in their interconnection the various dominant features of the age: the crisis in art, the dominance of the concepts of culture and value, the godlessness of the age, the pervasive effects of science and technology […] Such analyses remain wholly caught up in the spirit of technology not just because they proceed analytically by an enumeration but, more fundamentally, because in order to proceed in this manner they must already have implicitly come to regard the present age as something in reference to which it is a matter of obtaining something like a view, a Weltbild, a goal which is not even formulable outside the compass of modern metaphysics. (TMR 159-60)

To point to problems in the domains of art, culture or science is to presume that such domains can be clearly delimited and fully grasped. The critiques that make this presumption fail to recognize that the presuppositions on which they ground themselves gave rise to the very condition they purport to assess. Thus, inasmuch as capital arises as the ultimate value, it is, in principle, beyond criticism; the power of capital is only reinforced by critiques that take as their

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109 For an account of the relationship between Heidegger’s thinking and capitalisation, see also Malabou.
110 Sallis points to pp. 69-70 and 85 of Holzwege, see OTBT 57-58 & 73.
111 Heidegger makes a similar point in relation to the possibility of a renewed relation to Being in Contributions to Philosophy: “The ‘changes,’ however, are not conditioned from the outside, by means of objections. For up until now no objection has become possible, because the question has not yet been grasped at all” (59[84-86]).
objects the very domains and objects that it delimits, justifies and defines. When the practice of
critique reinforces the categories that are determined economically, this practice remains
superficial and ultimately supportive of the conditions that inspire it.\textsuperscript{112}

Moreover, critiques of the cultural, political and economic situation of modernity veil and fail to apprehend that our distinctly modern experience is answerable to the system of objective representation, and that, as such, it is defined by a disavowal of the mode and possibility of the engagement that renders our experience significant in the (implicit and explicit) ways that cannot be measured by economic value. As a result, even as our approaches to art, culture and political life are criticized, an instrumental approach to various domains is reinforced. Such an approach, finally, is related to a self-interested attitude on the part of individuals; inasmuch as we measure the value of something in terms of what it offers to our well-being, we measure our own actions in terms of what is in our interest. This self-interested attitude is a result of our failure to recognize the inherent worth of our involvement in shared domains of significance and is, thus, reinforced by the representation of such domains as values rather than as shared possibilities of involvement.

In this section, we have come to see how the modern experience of “value” derives from the distinctively modern perspective and is related to the rise of global capital, to the inadequacy of modern critique and to a self-interested attitude on the part of individuals. In the next section, we shall see how the economic measure that derives from distinctly modern experiences is at the root of modern technological endeavours and that it, consequently, shapes concrete human endeavours.

\textsuperscript{112} For an account of the relationship between commercialism and the conservative \textit{Volkish} movement in Germany, see Zimmerman \textit{Confrontation with Modernity} 10. For an argument supporting the idea that Heidegger’s work, at least in \textit{Being and Time}, is related to his own experience of capitalism, see Coletti 172-173.
Section Three: Technology and Machination

In his writing on technology, Heidegger offers resources for further characterising both the consequences of a failure to grasp the system to which we are subject and the attitude implicit in the modern endeavour. More specifically, in his 1955 lecture “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger speaks to our failure to see what motivates our own activity. This failure involves both the complete subjection of reality to the demands of industry and an inability to perceive how this subjection changes our experience of ourselves and of our world. Meanwhile, Heidegger’s 1936-38 Contributions to Philosophy offers a more detailed description of what I have called the instrumental and self-interested character of the modern perspective, while also allowing us to begin to discern in this perspective resources for a new perspective on ourselves and our shared reality. Let us now turn briefly to each of these works in order to gain a more developed sense of modern endeavours and of the dangers and promise inherent to them.

(a) Technology

The most penetrating and powerful aspect of the system-character of modernity is its ability to subject whatever it encounters to an assessment that determines how that thing is useful. Just as we failed to noticed the effect of our becoming accustomed to representation, we fail to notice both that we have become accustomed to the assessments of reality implicit in technology and the effect of such assessments on our way of seeing and interpreting the world around us. ¹¹³ Like the system-character of modernity, the essence of technology lies in what

¹¹³ The following discussion will refer only to Heidegger’s essay “The Question Concerning Technology,” which, following Rockmore, offers Heidegger’s “mature understanding of technology” (220).
Heidegger calls a “revealing,” that which determines the interpretable character of entities to appear to be one way or another:¹¹⁴ “It reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us, whatever can look and turn out now one way and now another” (QTC 13/VA 14). In Heidegger’s analysis, then, technology is not, as we ordinarily assume, a means to an end; technology is the concrete realization of an attitude towards entities. Inasmuch as technology is not a means to an end, neither, therefore, are the projects for which we take ourselves to be employing our technological capacities. In fact, according to Heidegger’s analysis, technology can be understood as related to the objectification of value and the authority of global capital. Let us now turn to Heidegger’s account of technology to see how the relationship between economic assessment and technological capacities changes our way of seeing the world and undertaking projects within it. This analysis will address the pervasiveness and destructiveness of modern technology, as well as the positive aspects of its particular way of disclosing the world to us.

The most significant feature of the analysis of technology, at least for the purpose of gaining a perspective on modern endeavours, is Heidegger’s account of the relation in which modern projects stand to one another. This relation mirrors the ground-plan addressed above; just as entities are related by virtue of the ground-plan that ties them together and admits them to the world picture, modern projects are, fundamentally, interrelated projects that are distinguishable from one another only in terms of goals to which they are ostensibly oriented. Heidegger refers to the interrelatedness of modern projects as an “inclusive rubric” that, like the “world picture,” refers to the totality of entities and does so from the distinctive perspective of modern technology. Thus, the technological perspective on entities underlies our own technologically

¹¹⁴ Don Ihde warns that “Heidegger’s thin understanding of the history of technology […] emasculates Heidegger’s philosophy of technology from making any nuanced conclusions about particular technologies” (109).
driven endeavours. Let us now consider how our endeavours are shaped by the perspective inherent in modern technology by turning to Heidegger’s analysis of the mode of revealing particular to it.

According to Heidegger, modern machine-powered technology is distinct from other forms of technology not simply because of its greater efficiency or complexity, but, more essentially, because of the way it makes entities appear to us. This mode of revealing is characterised by “challenging” [Herausfordern] and “expediting” [Fördern] (PLT 14-15/VA 15-16). Acquiring an understanding of these characteristics will provide us with a more robust view of modern technological endeavours. A challenging approach to the surrounding world involves allowing the environing world to appear in terms of what can be extracted from it. By bringing about the conditions through which reality can be divided and classified according to its potential yield, and by classifying reality in terms of its potential yield, modern technology attends to everything as a resource and extracts from it as much as possible for the sake of furthering an extant goal. Indeed, modern technology is related to the classification of various domains—vacation property, lumber, art or culture, to name a few—in accordance with the ostensible use to which they are oriented and the profit that can be derived from them. Heidegger points to this dynamic in diverse areas: the transformation of land into a coal mining district, the transformation of a landscape into a tourist destination, the supply of patients to the clinic, and the manipulation of public opinion. In all cases, aspects of the world are divided up into categories that are determined by how that which they yield can be put to use such that reality reveals itself in terms of the most profitable and expedient use of resources. Such an approach is both instrumentally oriented towards achieving something, and oriented by a goal that exceeds

115 Thompson argues that the post-modern period is inaugurated when technology changes our attitudes towards ourselves and, thereby, effects a change in the positing power of the modern subject, see Ontotheology 60.
any definite or immediate need. Indeed, the “goal,” profit, must be unreachable in order for the modern perspective to maintain itself.

Modern projects, then, have two defining characteristics: (1) unlocking and exposing the resource-character of nature, and (2) an orientation towards expediting, or “furthering something else, i.e., toward driving the maximum yield at the minimum expense” (QCT 15/VA 16). The interest in profit enables the self-perpetuation of the system: such an interest allows all projects to be oriented as means to an end and, thus, ensures that the cycle of industry is unending. Thus, our endeavours appear to be instrumental while they are more fundamentally oriented towards the goal or value that undermines the particular worth of various projects. As such, our projects prioritize, instead, constant accumulation of the economic yield according to which they are indistinguishable from one another. While undermining the particularity of distinct projects, the constant demand for accumulation shapes modern projects by ensuring that they develop the capacity for coordination and organization that will ensure the most direct route to accumulation: “Regulating and securing become the chief characteristics of the challenging revealing” (QCT 16/VA 17). Modernity is thus defined by a power for coordination and organization, but only ever achieves this power in response to the demand for accumulation to which modern projects are subordinate.

Let us now turn to Heidegger’s account of the perspective on entities and our world that we acquire by virtue of our embeddedness in the modern technological world. Heidegger refers to this interpretation of entities as “standing reserve” [Bestand] and means by it the essential transformation of all aspects of reality into that which feeds an ongoing cycle of industry and profit. He writes, “Everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way
has its own standing. We call it the standing-reserve \([\text{Bestand}]\)” (QCT 17/VA 17). According to Heidegger, when entities become standing-reserve, they have lost any relation to that which stands outside the system of ongoing profit-making and are, therefore, at play only as “on call” for the demands of industry. Profit, that which comes to be the distinguishing mark of modern endeavours, is thus an expression of the fundamental disclosure, the revealing, that renders visible the invisible forces that shape us and drive us. In other words, it is precisely because we take for granted the validity of objective measure and of an economic evaluation of the entities, and possibilities, we encounter that the profit-oriented projects of modernity can so successfully and completely shape our sense of our world and ourselves.

The modern technological perspective, however, is not only related to an interpretation of entities; as we have seen, the modern capacity for technology is related to the actual capacity to organize and shape concrete endeavours. This concrete capacity, which risks reducing everything to standing reserve, can also preserve and reveal distinctly significant human domains. Even as the apparent autonomy of various domains of human activity is maintained for the sake of profit, the various dimension of human activity—domains that have at least the potential for inherent significance—are made explicitly recognizable and, in this way, are minimally preserved; while art, culture, and politics, for example, are conceived of in terms of their profit-making potential rather than in terms of the experiences of shared significance with which they afford us, their names, at least, survive as indicators of what has been lost. While nothing ultimately alleviates the risk that regulating and organizing for the sake of profit will take precedence over any seemingly autonomous domain, Heidegger indicates that it may become possible to recognize modernity as an accomplishment, rather than to continue to take for granted the perspective associated with it. Such a recognition would reveal to us that our distinct modern
accomplishments in the domain of organization have, in fact, arisen from the modern perspective that disavows our rootedness in the significant dimension of life. Pointing to the threat and the possibility of recognition associated with modern technology, Heidegger writes:

On the one hand, Enframing challenges forth into the frenziedness of ordering that blocks every view into the coming-to-pass of revealing and so radically endangers the relation to the essence of truth.

On the other hand, Enframing comes to pass for its part in the granting that lets man endure—as yet unexperienced, but perhaps more experienced in the future—that he may be the one who is needed and used for the safekeeping of the coming to presence of truth. Thus does the arising of the saving power appear. (QTC 33/VA 34)

Our contingent way of rendering visible the invisible and indefinite character of reality can itself come to appear to be contingent such that our disavowal of all that it cannot accommodate may itself come to seem not only unnecessary but fundamentally at odds with our experience and our understanding of our existence. If we become able to perceive and understand the contingency of the very objective and “instrumental” perspective we take for granted, then the classification and organization of reality that such a perspective enables and maintains can itself be revealed in its contingency and as a resource, an optional perspective, that can be oriented towards goals of our choosing. Heidegger writes, “But the revealing never simply comes to an end. Neither does it run off into the indeterminate. The revealing reveals to itself its own manifoldly interlocking paths, through regulating their course. This regulating is, for its part, everywhere secured” (QTC 16/VA 17). If the very fact that entities are “revealed”—come to appear to us—in a distinctive way is itself recognized, then what we have called the ground-plan or “inclusive rubric” can itself become apparent in its contingency and in terms of the resources it offers to us.
According to Heidegger, recognizing that we have always interpreted entities one way or another is akin to recognizing the way in which truth relates to how entities appear to us. Describing the relationship between modern technology and truth, Heidegger writes: “Thus the challenging Enframing […] conceals revealing itself and with it That wherein unconcealment, i.e., truth, comes to pass” (QCT 27-28/VA 28). Truth occurs, in other words, in the establishment of the perspective that seems most obvious to us. Thus, it is only by recognizing that what appears to us to be the “Truth” is fundamentally established in the implicit and taken-for-granted aspects of our perception that we may become able to question the nature of our projects and the capacities associated with them, and may also become able to consider how best to employ such resources. In effect, to recognize that the modern perspective is not an obvious and unquestionable grasp of reality would be to recognize that the domains preserved by the inclusive rubric of industry are both essential to human life and are revealed only imperfectly and partially by objective representation and economic delimitation.116

Thus, although the regulating and securing inherent to the modern perspective contain no internal check, the capacity for regulating and securing has its own potential for revealing. As a result, the accomplishment of ordering and planning particular to the modern world can reach the point at which the system that enables it can be recognized as contingent and received. This recognition depends on humanity’s willingness to reconceive of itself. Without this reconception, the system of profit and global capital will follow its own unstoppable course, and do so with an

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116 The ability to recognize the one-sidedness of an instrumental understanding of beings relates to the account of “sheltering” Heidegger offers in Contributions to Philosophy:
Sheltering belongs to the essential sway of truth […] The clearing must ground itself into its open within it. Clearing needs that which keeps it in openness, and that is in each case a different being (tool—thing—work). But this sheltering of what is open must at the same time and in advance be such that the openness comes to be in such a way that self-sheltering and thereby be-ing holds sway in it. (271-272/[387-90])
Polt explains the salient features of this quote as follows: “Sheltering, then, involves a mystery that we lose sight of when we experience things merely as objects. Sheltering lets the limits of meaning show up at the same time as it reveals a network of meaning in every experience of concrete beings” (660-661).
indifference towards the various facets of human existence that are consumed. The human self-
interpretation is, thus, intimately connected to both the possibility of recognition and
reorientation specific to modernity and to the danger inherent in our failure to live up to this
possibility.

(b) *Machination*

We shall now turn to Heidegger’s account of “machination” to see what resources exist in
the modern world for a re-conception of self on the part of humanity. This analysis will suggest
that the possibility of understanding ourselves as other than subjects rests in the shape and
character of our projects and that these projects themselves must come to conform to that re-
conception of self of which we may be capable.\(^{117}\) In other words, we must see in our very way
of experiencing our own interests and projects the sketch or emergence of a possibility of doing
otherwise. As we have seen, our experience, as well as the modern sense of self, is restricted to
that which can appear within the confines of the world picture, while the underlying system on
the basis of which our experience unfolds remains alien to us. We shall now see that, precisely
because it remains alien, we are able to recognize that the contextualization otherwise provided
by a significant world is lacking and that modern experience is shaped by this very lack.\(^{118}\)

As we have seen, modern experience is defined by the withdrawal of the significant
contextualization of experience and is oriented towards an instrumental experience of the world.
This withdrawal expresses itself, I contend, in our expectations about the shape our projects
ought to take such that the potential to recognize the contingency and inadequacy of the modern

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\(^{117}\) In Section 44 of *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger lists a number of decisions in which the fate of modern
humanity rests. The first of these is “whether man wants to remain a ‘subject,’ or whether he founds Da-sein”
(62/[89-90], emphasis in original).

\(^{118}\) According to Ziarek, the withdrawal of Being characteristic of modernity is “how being suitably gives itself as its
own refusal” (5). In *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger suggests that the refusal of Being is “the foremost and
utmost gifting of be-ing, nay even its inceptual essential swaying itself” (170/240-241, emphasis in original).
perspective is prefigured both by the way our experience has been rendered devoid of significance and by the particular possibility of recognition inherent in the experience particular to modernity. To begin to discern the possibility of the return of significance, of Being, let us now consider the shape of modern projects in terms of the three characterisations of the “abandonment of Being” Heidegger describes in Contributions to Philosophy: calculation, acceleration and the outbreak of the massive. We shall come to see that these three characteristics point both to a reconception of self and to a distinct picture of human action.

By identifying “calculation” as a defining feature of the modern experience, Heidegger underlines the modern prioritization of organization and coordination. As described in Heidegger’s analysis of technology, this prioritization can dominate human endeavours and foreclose any spaces in which a unique and self-generating significance might appear. As Heidegger puts it, we have “[f]rom here on the priority of organization, renunciation from the ground up of a freely growing transformation” (Contributions 84/[120-121], emphasis in original). Clearly, the domination of organization impacts not only the objects of human activity, but also that very activity itself; human action is reduced to the correct, automatic response to whatever disorder threatens the capacity for technological control; the modern capacity for organization is accompanied by an inability to see the potential for growth and transformation intrinsic to the experience of significance. Despite the bleak future this inability suggests we can see in it a possibility of overcoming our modern experience of ourselves and our projects. Let us now turn to a description of this possibility.

In our inability to respond to any unique potential can be recognized a distinctive experience of possibility; when our sense of accomplishment is reduced to that which can be accomplished by ordering and planning—the sense that anything at all can be achieved by
human beings arises. The sense that *anything possible and can be achieved by human action* is itself a unique experience and arises only when the experience of reality is divided up and assigned to the appropriate means of control. This modern experience of possibility in no way shapes or guarantees that to which human endeavours should aim and, indeed, both terrifying goals and a threatening lack of goal threatens the modern world. At the same time, the recognition of a capacity for acting on concrete reality points to the possibility of recognizing that a goal is possible, while the utter lack of reference to anything outside the scope of human affairs points to our current lack of goals and to the necessity of a genuine decision on the part of humanity about that towards which it should aim.

If, indeed, any potential exists in the modern world for recognizing the possibility of deciding on a goal, this potential is threatened by the tendency for what Heidegger calls “acceleration.” Acceleration refers to a constant orientation towards that which comes next and the consequent fleetingness of whatever the present offers up as an accomplishment. The tendency to look past the present to that which comes next is equally the incapacity to see how present accomplishments might be able to develop into something lasting and worthwhile; when each present is conceived of as merely an isolated step towards the next one, any potential that depends on continuity and a sense of the future is disregarded.\(^{119}\) This lack of patience and insight into any slowly developing possibility is experienced as an orientation toward “maximum accomplishment” (*Contributions* 85/[121-122]). When we are oriented towards “maximum accomplishment,” we fail to perceive that our efforts are inspired by and can be oriented towards something greater than ourselves, and we confine ourselves instead to superficial innovations: “The genuine restlessness of the struggle remains hidden. Its place is taken by the restlessness of

\(^{119}\) Vallega-Neu explains that the emptiness of this kind of experience must become explicit before a historical relation to Being becomes once again possible (*Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy* 41).
the always inventive operation, which is driven by the anxiety of boredom” (Contributions 85/[121-122]). The inventive operation, then, comes at the cost of the truly grand and lasting possibility of accomplishment. Nevertheless, this inventive operation it has a yield that is particular to it: the ever-increasing capacity of technology and the ever-improving capacity to manage and organize.

The final characteristic of machination is “the outbreak of the massive.” At the heart of this “outbreak” is an egalitarianism related to the abandonment of Being. This egalitarianism rests in the fact that calculation and acceleration give rise to attitudes and accomplishments that are, in principle, “equally accessible to anyone” (Contributions 85/[121-122]). Calculation and acceleration offer to all of humanity the same standard and possibility of action by reducing the uniqueness and promise of anything to what can be accomplished by calculation and innovation: “What is common to the many and to all is what the ‘many’ know as what towers over them […] Here is the sharpest opposition—because it is inconspicuous—to the rare and the unique (the essential sway of being)” (Contributions 85/[121-122], emphasis in original). The loss of uniqueness that threatens us equally gives rise to the possibility of a shared vision of reality, one according to which we become capable of perceiving that our interests and goals are shared by others and that this very sharing of goals can become, one way or another, an end in itself. In effect, the completeness and purposefulness of reality correspond to a sense of shared goals, goals that are public and, in principle, recognizable by all, with the result that the sharedness of our situation may come to be the focus of the modern capacity for regulation and invention.

Let us sum up this sketch of the unique potential of modernity by addressing the combined effect of the three characteristics to which Heidegger points. We have come to see that the unique potential of modernity rests in a particular experience of the possible: the
development of unprecedented ability to manage and control; the public character of this ability; and a sense of shared goals and a shared situation. Through calculation and acceleration, the sense that anything at all is possible arises, as does an increase in our capacity for a specific kind of achievement. By virtue of the outbreak of the massive, the sense of the possible and the inventive means by which it can be achieved are experienced as public. Thus, while the modern sense of possibility may be limited to that which humanity already knows, and while attention is focused away from the slow development of the unique, the modern world shows itself to be the possible site of its own unique and slow-growing possibility; the goal intrinsic to the modern world reveals itself in a shared sense of reality as the potential to bring about a situation in which the possibility of free and effective action for each person in a shared, public world exists.\footnote{In \textit{Contributions to Philosophy}, Heidegger moves away from the account of Dasein as the existential structure that underlies human existence to an account of Dasein as something that some—indeed only those who are properly historical (313/[349-441])—can become. On this point, see Polt 658 and fn 9: “This situation is one in which ‘we’ stand at a crucial moment in history, a moment that will decide whether we succeed in coming into our own as Dasein.” The possibility of self-recognition I am invoking here would include all those invested in the instrumental institutions of the modern world and, thus, would not be limited to a historical “we” or \textit{Volk}. 

\footnote{The experience of self and others I am pointing to here relates, in principle, to the possibility of experiencing ourselves as other than subjects inasmuch as the recognition with which I am concerned orients us towards our shared orientation towards an unknown and possibly significant future. According to Heidegger, merely asking who we are is stepping outside the confines of humanism and a metaphysics of subjectivity; see \textit{Contributions} 52-53; Polt 661-663; Ziarek 1-2.} 

Overall, the experience that is distinctive of modernity, that same experience that renders us vulnerable to becoming standing reserve for a system oriented towards profit, opens us up to a reconception of ourselves.\footnote{The experience of self and others I am pointing to here relates, in principle, to the possibility of experiencing ourselves as other than subjects inasmuch as the recognition with which I am concerned orients us towards our shared orientation towards an unknown and possibly significant future. According to Heidegger, merely asking who we are is stepping outside the confines of humanism and a metaphysics of subjectivity; see \textit{Contributions} 52-53; Polt 661-663; Ziarek 1-2.} As we have seen, the sense that anything is possible is accompanied by an explicit experience of shared goals. Together, these two developments suggest that we can experience as possible our collective orientation towards one goal. To express this idea otherwise, I am like others in that, like them, I have goals. I am modern in that I experience as possible the realization of a shared goal through the capacity for calculation and control our era allows. At the same time, I am modern to the degree that no substantial goal exceeds the
instrumental means at my disposal. Modern instrumentality thus presents itself as both a collective accomplishment and as that in which each of us has a stake.\textsuperscript{122} In effect, modern instrumentality presents itself as that to which we ought all to have equal access, and, by recognizing that we ought to share in the means and benefits of modernity, we recognize ourselves as related instrumentally to others and recognize others as deserving of the opportunities made available to us by our shared situation. Further, we may, in principle, recognize that our more substantial goals are as of yet undefined. Thus, action, in the modern world, can be conceived of as the means by which humanity can realize itself in conformity with its vision of itself, and its vision of itself, whatever its downfalls, includes a dimension of publicity that both points to a unique but undefined goal and identifies that goal as shared. This recognition of our connectedness to others is not guaranteed, nor is it sufficient for a significant experience of ourselves. It is merely implied, I argue, in what otherwise presents itself as the destructive and dangerous character of modern projects and, thus, offers itself to us as the potential ground of a renewed experience of significance. Let us now come to see how modern institutions reflect the metaphysical analysis we have just undertaken.

\textbf{Section Four: Modern Institutions}

Both the potential and the dangers inherent to modern institutions rest in the fact that the human perspective is shaped by institutional life. Indeed, it is only by adapting ourselves to institutional life that we become capable of directing our institutions towards the potential

\textsuperscript{122} Polt distinguishes helpfully between “metaphysical individualism” (“a view of human beings as essentially asocial seats of absolute will and consciousness”), on the one hand, and the liberal view that “there are individuals and these individuals have beliefs and make choices” (671). His view supports the idea that there are ways of operating within the confines of our modern institutions without limiting ourselves to the metaphysical presuppositions that, as we have argued, give rise to them.
inherent in them, just as it is only by immersing ourselves in the instrumental attitude characteristic of modernity that we risk failing to notice that our institutions could be oriented towards something other than the organization and accumulation related to economic value. In what follows, we shall come to see that modern institutions are subservient to the modern perspective and that they continue to reinforce the presuppositions that underlie it by appearing to be instrumentally oriented towards our goals. Further, we shall come to see that by realizing our projects through instrumental institutions we risk losing the meaningful content of various domains of human life and retaining only that which pertains to the demands of the self-perpetuation of the modern perspective. We shall also come to see that modern endeavours, and the instrumental institutions by which they are accomplished, have their own benefits; they can act as placeholders for the various activities that make up a distinctly human life, while also revealing to us the means at our disposal and, thereby, our capacity to make decisions about the shape and significance of our endeavours.

We shall now consider two institutions Heidegger describes, the art museum and the university, to illustrate how modern institutions are simultaneously subject to the demands of industry and profit, on the one hand, and house the potential to preserve and open up for decision the domains towards which they are oriented, on the other hand. More specifically, our analysis of the art museum will show that institutions demand a certain mode of participation and achieve it by shaping the perspectives of individuals to ensure that they cohere with the larger profit-oriented system of which institutions are in service. At the same time, this analysis will show that our institutions preserve, nevertheless, domains of significance. The example of the university will reveal how the administrative capacity of institutions establishes a particular perspective and how, once established, particular institutions run the risk of becoming obsolete and, thereby,
falling prey to a uniform approach that presents itself as a universally appropriate mode of accomplishment despite deriving from a particular situation. We shall see also that such institutions have the capacity to disclose the means at our disposal and our capacity to orient these means.\textsuperscript{123}

\textit{(a) The Art Museum}

Heidegger’s comments on the art museum point both to the influence of institutions on the perspective of individuals and to how this influence on the perspective of individuals ultimately supports the subordination of art to the interests of industry. Moreover, Heidegger’s analysis shows that it is insofar as the art museum appears to be an instrumental institution—appears to be the way that art is displayed and made available rather than that which shapes how art is experienced—that it can accommodate both tasks.

The distinctly modern character of the art museum is related to the understanding of art that is associated with a sense that museums are an appropriate venue for housing and viewing art. Only when art is emptied, so to speak, of its living relationship with the world can it appear to be appropriately displayed in modern art museums. Heidegger addresses our changed perspective on art by claiming that, in the modern world, the experience of art becomes an issue of aesthetics.\textsuperscript{124} As an object of aesthetic evaluation, works of art are taken to be discrete objects about which our experience can inform us.\textsuperscript{125} As Heidegger writes, “The way in which man

\textsuperscript{123} Here, we shall be echoing Heidegger’s critique of technology’s failure to grasp the limit inherent to things. Zimmerman describes Heidegger’s attitude as follows: “The technological disclosure of things was so horrifying in Heidegger’s eyes because it lacked insight into the intrinsic limits of things; without such insight, there cannot be a genuine historical world” (\textit{Confrontation with Modernity} 227).

\textsuperscript{124} For a discussion of Heidegger’s critique of aesthetics, see Iain Thompson, \textit{Heidegger, Art, and Post-Modernity}, chapter 2. Other important commentaries on Heidegger’s account of the work of art include Bernasconi’s “Heidegger’s Displacement of the Concept of Art,” and Guignon’s “Meaning in the Work of Art: A Hermeneutic Perspective.”

\textsuperscript{125} For a more complete account of art as aesthetics, especially in contrast to the relation of art to the life around it, see Gadamer \textit{Truth and Method}, “Transcending the Aesthetic Dimension”. While, ultimately, Gadamer’s account of
experiences art is supposed to inform us about its essential nature” (OTBT 50/Holzwege 67).

Although we may not know why we create art, what it says about us or how it renders significant our existence, we take our experience of it to be sufficient for explaining it: the objectification of art, then, is required for the institutionalization of art in the modern art museum.

The objectification of art enables works of art to take their place in a coherent system of classification and organization; art “fits” with the system in terms of which reality as a whole is conceived. Indeed, art as “object of aesthetics” is connected to the idea that there is nothing problematic or lacking in the experience of art enabled by a particular institutional form. As Heidegger explains, it is when art becomes a specialized domain that so-called aesthetic experience is mistaken for the experience of art:

Almost as soon as specialized thinking about art and the artist began, such reflections were referred to as “aesthetic.” Aesthetics treated the artwork as an object, as indeed as object of ἄιςθήσις, of sensory apprehension in a broad sense. These days, such apprehension is called an “experience” (OTBT 50/Holzwege 67) 126

Subject primarily to sensory apprehension and the experience this mode of apprehension can accommodate, art is confined to the experience of the subject and the objectivity and classification inherent to it. By recalling that, in his writing on technology, Heidegger refers to the inclusive rubric for the classification of all aspects of reality, we should be able to see that the experience of art as a specialized domain accords with the demands of industry. Moreover, we should be able to see the irreducible role played by the institutions of the art museum in the

the work of art differs from Heidegger’s insofar as Gadamer identifies a fundamental contemporaneity of art through which works can speak to different worlds and different historical eras and Heidegger restricts what counts as art to the historical world to which it speaks, both agree that art as aesthetics fundamentally misrecognizes the irreducible power of art to reflect and shape the world around it and the consequent irreducibility of art to a form wholly accessible to subjectivity.

126 Ziarek argues that art, especially poetry, acquires a critical function only when “artworks become divorced from being recognized as aesthetic experiences or cultural objects” (“Trading in Being” 18)
transformation of art into items that fit into an unending system of profit-making. Describing the relationship between art and the market, Heidegger writes:127

Well, then, the works themselves are located and hang in collections and exhibitions. But are they themselves, in this context, are they the works they are, or are they, rather, objects of the art business? The works are made available for the public and private enjoyment of art. Official agencies assume responsibility for the care and maintenance of the works. Art connoisseurs and critics busy themselves with them. The art dealer looks after the market. (OTBT 19/Holzwege 45)

Institutions, or “official agencies,” are the means by which art can serve the demands of profit-making, and when institutions for the sake of viewing or otherwise encountering art exist, their ostensible purpose is always also the means by which art is made appropriable by the interests of industry.128 Furthermore, the very reality of the museum is an implicit assertion about where art ought to be experienced. In it, art is presented to us in specific ways, and, in this presentation and the classification according to epoch, genre, artist and so on, our understanding of art remains “aesthetic” and art remains an object that can be bought and sold. While no one is, of course, blind to the fact that the art industry exists, we tend to fail to perceive that institutions that support the art industry shape our perspective on art such that our perspective on, and understanding of, art come to accord with the systems of classification necessary to the art industry. Experiencing art becomes an activity that requires one to participate in an institutional

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127 For Heidegger’s explicit comments on the market in a work pertaining to the role of artists in the modern age, see “What Are Poet For?” PLT 89-139/Holzwege 219-320.
128 In “The Age of the World Picture” Heidegger remarks that the institutionalization of research leads to “a human being of another stamp” (OTBT 64/Holzwege 85). Institutionalized researches are, in other words, researchers under the influence of representation and production. We may consider, in light of Heidegger’s comment, how the institutionalization of art marks artists and viewers as different kinds of human beings.
context that is shaped and determined by something other than the purpose towards which the institution is oriented.

In light of the system of classification to which the museum adheres, the museum seems to us to offer the least obstructed access to art. Thus, the influence of the museum on our perspective is exemplary of the effect of our institutions on our perspectives and on our sense of the appropriateness and practicality of our institutions. Institutions shape our sense of what is appropriate, and, in so doing, blind us to the fact that what seems like an appropriate way to access art is in fact a particular view on art that conforms to the systematic character of the modern perspective and the concrete manifestation of that system in the circulation and accumulation of capital.

Let us now consider how our institutions preserve the very domains they risk depriving of inherent worth. While the art museum may subordinate the terms of our experience of art to the needs of profit-making, the system of profit-making, and the classification required for it, points both to the dependence of the system on the continued existence of art museums and the, albeit limited, preservation accomplished by it. Just as it approaches all other aspects of nature and human existence, the challenging attitude characteristic of modernity extracts from the environments that it defines but that it could not have created. In this orientation towards extraction, we can see a powerful capacity for abstraction, as well as the fact that this capacity for abstraction is always applied to domains that no systematic power could have invented and on which any system ultimately depends. Those domains on which the system depends are, thereby, preserved in principle. The modern art museum, then, like any other institution, ultimately points to the domains of significance that determine human life, and does so by shaping our perspective on those domains. While nothing intrinsic to the museum points to ways
of bringing to light or addressing the shaping of our own perspective, the analysis of it points
evertheless to the idea that our embeddedness in institutions is related to our potential to see our
inerradical relationship to significant domains of human life and, thereby, to come to recognize
the limited ways our “values” relate us to these domains.

The analysis of the museum brings us to a general point about institutional life and about
modern institutional life in particular. The art museum, like any other institution, shapes our
perspective and orients us towards that which supersedes the confines of an individual life. Thus,
our perspectives act as a bridge, so to speak, between our individual experience and the
meaningful dimensions of human existence that both are only ever the experience of individuals
and that, as a realization of Being, amount to more than an accumulation of individual
experience. Because the art museum functions like any other institution and, yet, occurs in a
world overtaken by a blind system and the demands of industry, Heidegger’s comments on the
art museum allow us to see in sharp outline the distinctively modern character of institutions;
modern institutions are distinguished from other institutional forms by the systems that connect
the perspective of the individual to the domains such as art, politics, religion or philosophy in
which, as Heidegger’s analysis shows, a significance is made available that cannot be the product
of human doing or knowing. In sum, Heidegger’s comments on the art museum have shown both
how the systematic character of modern institutions has the capacity to shape the perspective of
humanity such that it supports the demands of industry and disavows the significant domains
available to human life, and that a relation to these domains is preserved through the dependence
of institutions on them.\(^{129}\)

\(^{129}\) An interesting example of this tension is Heidegger’s decision to sell his hand-written manuscript of *Being and Time*. The item is valuable as an irreplaceable object, and valuable because such items are considered worthy of display. See Ihde 125-126.
(b) The University

While Heidegger’s comments about the art industry illustrate how modern institutions shape the perspective of modern humanity, his comments about the university reveal the unique potential of the modern administrative and bureaucratic means of enabling research activity. Thus, while the analysis of the art museum illustrated the effect of modern institutions on our experience of objects, the analysis of the university points to the fact that this shaping is, to a large degree, accomplished by the instrumental methods that are at our disposal. In what follows we shall see that the administrative capacity of the modern university could either be transformed into the institutions that feed the demands of industry directly—in the form of professional schools and research institutes—or could retain the capacity to disclose the practice of research as a contingent form of scientific endeavour enabled by modern institutional means.

Let us now consider how Heidegger’s account of the university points to the space opened by our administrative capacity for a perspective on the human organization of human affairs, as well as for a potential reintroduction of non-utilitarian or value-oriented purposes or goals, an end he refers to only obliquely in terms of the potential to orient scientific and technological capacity towards the good of the community. Through this analysis of the university, then, we shall see that the unique potential of modern institutions rests in the association of the modern technological capacities with the possibility of the disclosure of the human responsibility for the reception and perpetuation of significance. We shall also see that this possibility of disclosure is related to the inherent weakness of modern institutions as that rests in the possibility of taking our technological capacities to be both universally applicable and

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130 For an account of the modern characteristics called into question by the Rectorade address, see Radloff, “Heidegger’s Rectorial Address in Light of Contributions to Philosophy” 24-25.
in our failing to hold on to the institutional measures that can disclose to us the intimate
connection between our human capacity and our human responsibility.

The following analysis will focus on Heidegger’s comments about the university as they
appear in his 1938 “The Age of the World Picture.” There, Heidegger explicitly addresses the
institutional ground of modern science, and his insights lean towards unearthing the potential of
modern institutional forms for coming to see the “incalculable”—that which objectification and
economic evaluation cannot measure—that exists amidst the modern capacity for calculation
(OTBT 72/Holzwege 95-96). We shall come to see, in other words, that for which our means and
methods cannot prepare us and that which our evaluations and assessments cannot explain: the
very condition of possibility and significance of calculation and other representational
endeavours. Let us now consider the institutional means by which an orientation towards the
incalculable becomes possible.

Heidegger’s analysis of the university indicates that modern institutions perpetuate the
modern perspective; our institutions are the means by which instrumentality and profit-making
can become and remain our principal endeavour. More specifically, in the modern university, the
efforts to organize and coordinate are manifest in the research goals this institution enables.
Indeed, the modern university is distinguished by the role it plays in rendering legitimate only
specific forms of research and specific research goals, as well as by its capacity to make the
particular form of research it legitimates appear to be the natural form. As Heidegger explains,

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131 See also Contributions 98-110/[140-160]. For an account of the political implication of Heidegger’s Rectoral
address, see de Beistegui, Dystopias 58. De Beistegui’s account describes the radical changes to the university
structure that Heidegger’s earlier writing called for.

132 Iain D. Thompson’s Heidegger on Ontotheology offers a thorough account of Heidegger’s optimistic view of the
future of the university. His account focuses on Heidegger’s orientation towards a goal of a community of scholars
in which education can recover from the utilitarian tendencies to which it is subject.

133 In “What is Metaphysics?” Heidegger explains that what is particular to the modern form of research is that it is
rigorous, methodologically-driven and constant. He is not interested in the content of research and, in fact, sees the
sameness of all research endeavours to be manifest in their increasing distance from one another and their
the modern university legitimates research carried out in the context it circumscribes, while these contexts perpetuate a specific kind of research; “a science, whether natural or humanistic, in order to achieve proper recognition today as a science is required to be capable of being institutionalized […] institutions are necessary because science as, intrinsically, research, has the character of constant activity” (OTBT 63/Holzwege 83-84). The modern institution is thus instrumental insofar as it legitimates and insofar as it enables. It accomplishes the legitimation of a certain kind of research and ensures that such research will be accomplished only according to the methods and procedure it administers. This shaping of human activity is the externalization of the system character of the modern perspective and is, thus, never merely a way to gain more and more knowledge and more and more control. Indeed, just like the system character of the modern perspective, the unacknowledged orientation of the modern university is the naturalization of the perspective at work in research, and this naturalization is accomplished not only by eliminating opposing views, but by making itself appear natural. As Heidegger writes;

> All arrangements that facilitate the planned amalgamation of different types of methodology, promote the reciprocal checking and communication of results, and regulate the exchange of labor are measures which are by no means merely the external consequence of the fact that research work is expanding and diversifying. (OTBT 64/Holzwege 84)

The administrative bureaucratic activity of the university is the very means by which research work is expanding, not only because it enables this work, but, more essentially, because it gives rise to a world in which the kind of work carried out by scientific research appears to be the only way knowledge—the knowledge that enables practical mastery and control—can be acquired.

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orientation towards practical goals, see Pathmarks 82-83. Heidegger offers his view on the university as early as 1911 in “Toward a Philosophical Orientation for Academics” (496-501/Reden und Andere Zeugnisse 11-14)
The university also serves and enables research by establishing the methods and modes of communication that allow research to pile up at a constant rate. As a result, the modern university is instrumental not only in terms of the actual activity of research but also in ensuring that all domains of research are able to pursue their own course indefinitely, while maintaining the ability to communicate with one another and from within a coherent research network. Thus, modern research appears to be free and unfettered while it is in fact brought more and more under the domination of method. It is in this development that the threat of modern institutions lies: the threat is that a specific mode of accomplishment will present itself as universal. As a result of the domination by method, all the results of modern science come to be compatible with the mode of inquiry the university endorses. Method takes precedence over scientific inquiry only when the perspective in which the classification and perpetuation of domains of research have been naturalized and the administrative capacity of the university is no longer required.

Heidegger explains that the administrative capacity of the university can itself be rendered obsolete and that, when this occurs, a different kind of institution takes the place of the bureaucratic, organizing university. As Heidegger states, “The more exclusively a science becomes focused on the complete carrying out and mastery of its process of working, the more these activities are—without illusion—shifted into research institutes and professional schools for research” (OTBT 65/Holzwege 86). Research institutes and professional schools reflect the cooption of genuine research by the interests of industry. The risk that this cooption will occur is

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134 Don Ihde notes that Heidegger’s analysis of the institutionalization of research reveals “something of the social structure of the scientific enterprise” (104).
135 Derrida comments on the relationship between research institutes, utilitarian ends and the reason or ground of the university in Eyes of the University (141-42). There, he relates the interest of end-oriented research to the need for mastery and control of the course of research and to global political problems, on the one hand, and to the eradication of the Kantian division between “technical” and “architectonic” schemas, on the other.
related to the university’s fundamental capacity to enable the form of research that can render it, the university, obsolete: when the form of research supported by the administrative capacity of the university becomes self-perpetuating in the service of industry, the unifying function of the university is no longer required. With the shift into research institutions and professional schools, modern science becomes purely instrumental—it appears unconnected to whatever may influence the perspective of humanity and appears to be in service of the needs humanity identifies for itself. Nevertheless, according to Heidegger, the modern university has its own specific potential to contribute to the possibility of meaningful life. Heidegger points to this potential contribution:

The reality of the university is that it is an establishment which still, in a unique way, on account of its administratively self-contained form, makes possible and visible both the fragmentation of the sciences into the specialities and the peculiar unity of constant activity (OTBT 64-65/Holzwege 85).\(^\text{136}\)

The promise of modernity, then, rests in the combination of the institutional capacity of modernity—a capacity which tends to withdraw—on the one hand, and, through this capacity, the disclosure of the possibility of an orientation towards an undetermined possibility, on the

\(^{136}\) Since we know, from “The Age of the World Picture,” that the essential ground of the sciences is modernity itself and the mode of doing inaugurated by the establishment of the subject, we can understand Heidegger’s claim about the relation of the sciences to their essential ground to be a claim about the systematicity inherent to modernity, and we can understand this inherent systematicity as other than any external manipulation of otherwise unconnected research domains. For the difference between internality and externality with respect to a system see OTBT 76/Holzwege 100-101. In “The Self-Assertion of the German University,” Heidegger points to the importance of “rootedness” in “the essence of the German University,” describing it in terms of self-government, self-understanding and self-assertion (29-39/Reden und Andere Zeugnisse 107-119). Heidegger’s point is that the essence of a university is to be oriented towards a mission that points beyond its own limits and therefore to recognize itself as the means to the end of a spiritual self-realization, or of a “knowing” that overrides “facts” with the recognition of its own fragility and with unceasing questionability of what it encounters. In effect, Heidegger is pointing to the necessity of coming to understand the source and purpose of “world-shaping” endeavours (the task of the teachers) as well as the necessity of pushing the limits of the capacity of such endeavours (the task of the students). These tasks must, according to Heidegger, be in strife, and the university realizes the greatness inherent to this strife insofar as it understands its essence to be in service of science. The unity or system that undergirds the modern university is to be praised only insofar as it enables the dynamic Heidegger affirms. I am limiting my comments here to his comments on the university.
other. In the university, the potential to call attention to the contingent and shaped character of scientific research remains: we can see that our own administrative capacity was informed by the interests of science; we can see the dependence of science on our capacity for organization; and we can see that insofar as we cooperate with scientific research, we must answer for our own choice to do so. The difference between the modern university and other kinds of research institutions is, then, that in the university there remains a possibility of doing otherwise as well as the need to justify one’s own activity. When, however, research is oriented towards practical goals, the unique particularity of the university withdraws and comes to be concealed by the useful activity that itself tends to be taken for granted. Heidegger echoes our claim about the danger of the reduction of research to that which serves our practical needs:

The more unconditionally, however, science and research take seriously the modern shape of their essence, the more unequivocally and immediately are they themselves able to stand ready to serve the common good; and the more unreservedly, too, will they have to withdraw into the public anonymity of all socially useful work. (OTBT 65/Holzwege 86)

This openness specific to the university is lost when research institutions and professional schools become the norm because such schools accord with the domination of the obviousness of the modern perspective and, thus, with the withdrawal of contingency, choice and responsibility. Modern institutions, unlike the forms to which they risk being reduced, preserve a perspective according to which the meaning of our modern capacities can be questioned. They preserve

137 Kant points to the issue of self-justification when addressing the lower faculty of a university, the faculty of philosophy. He explains that only this faculty is free to deal with the demands of truth, and that this is so because it is not at the command of the demands of practice and the interest of government (27-29).

138 In relation to retaining the possibility of questioning, Heidegger’s account of the relationship between teachers and students echoes Kant’s account of the conflict between truth and obedience in the lower faculty. Kant explains that it is both objectively and subjectively impossible to hold something as true because we are ordered to do so, and that questions of truth are subject to the free and autonomous judgement of reason. The lower faculty, in principle,
this possibility, however, only as part of a system oriented towards organization, instrumentality and profit, a system to which they constantly risk being reduced. Therefore, the very instrumental means by which modern institutions can accomplish and disclose something valuable are the same as those that risk depriving us of that possibility. In effect, by withdrawing from sight, the university risks effecting its own demise, and it is in this that unique danger of the modern world consists.

Heidegger’s analysis of the university shows the institutional character of the university to be that which holds open the possibility of a critical approach to both intellectual and practical affairs through a transparent method of administration and the related possibility of orienting our methods towards a goal of our choice. In contrast to the form of critique criticized by Sallis above, a critique that takes for granted the “picture” of reality and laments that certain aspects of it are insufficiently performed, the critique that is possible from within the administratively self-contained university reveals the limits of modern endeavours as these limits are constitutive of its

has access to a truth denied to the other faculties (by virtue of their subordination to governmental interest and authority), and exists so as to make available truth otherwise denied to the higher faculties, and to thereby contribute to an increasingly rational organization and perpetuation of religious, civic and biological life, so long as the communication between faculties remains within the jurisdiction of scholarship and does not leak and promote civic unrest. At the same time, the relationship between the lower and higher faculties may be perverted and the search for truth may give way to the tendency of the public to follow its inclination rather than its reason and to see the higher faculties as stores of practical know-how, the like of which cannot be offered by the lower faculty. In other words, both Heidegger and Kant note the importance of maintaining a productive tension between the guardians of the wisdom that shapes human affairs, on the one hand, and the need to carry out those affairs, on the other. Derrida, speaking to the issue of the reduction of the university to technical ends and of the responsibility to preserve the capacity to think, acknowledges the necessity of remaining within the systems and institutions of which one is speaking:

Beyond technical ends, even beyond the opposition between technical ends and the principle of sufficient reason, beyond the affinity between technology and metaphysics, what I have here called “thinking” risks in its turn (but I believe this risk is unavoidable—it is the risk of the future itself) being reappropriated by socio-political forces that could find it in their own interest in certain situations. Such a “thinking” indeed cannot be produced outside of certain historical, techno-economic, politico-institutional, and linguistic conditions (Eyes 150-151).

In other words, to develop or maintain the capacity to criticise and resist a system, to investigate the potential it offers, that system must exist, as must the risk that a critical approach to it will be either stifled or appropriated by it. At the same time, according to Derrida, to dissociate the university from utility is accompanied by the danger of re-instituting other forms of inequality: “Desiring to remove the university from ‘useful’ programs and from professional ends, one may always, willingly or not, find oneself serving unrecognized ends, reconstituting powers of caste, class, or corporation” (Eyes 153).
very capacity to achieve results. What the university can disclose, in other words, is that “the methodology of a science is circumscribed by its own results” (OTBT 63/Holzwege 84). Further, it can disclose that institutions are the very means by which such circumscription is maintained; modern institutions both give rise to and can disclose the limits of the modern capacity, and it is only as such that they fulfill their potential.

If the critical potential of modern institutions rests in their capacity to disclose the limits of the endeavours they enable, what then is the promise, the potential, towards which they orient us? Heidegger writes:

The advantage this system is required to promote is no contrived and rigid unification of contents of the object domains. Rather, it is the greatest possible free, though regulated, flexibility in the changing around and initiating of research with respect to whatever are the principal tasks of the moment. (OTBT 65/Holzwege 86)

The promise that remains in the modern world is connected to our capacity to discern precisely what is the “principal task of the moment,” and to orient our capacities towards the accomplishment of that task. We may indeed have the resources to determine how we ought to orient our institutional resources. These resources are, however, insufficient to the task of deciding how we ought to orient ourselves. Indeed, as we have seen, the very promise of our modern institutions rests in their capacity to preserve domains of inherent significance and to disclose their own limitation with respect to their capacity to help us live up meaningfully to such domains. Through our institutions, in other words, we can come to recognize both the

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140 In “Towards a Movement of Reversal,” Sallis points to the necessity of discovering the “limits” of that which grounds the experience of subjectivity. For example, he asks the following question: “can the character of language as handed down be experienced as a genuine limitation of subjectivity, as decisively pointing beyond subjectivity to that under which and from which subjectivity receives its limitations?” (155).
possibility and necessity of making a decision with respect to the character and significance of our lives— with respect to how things matter.  

(c) Decision

As Heidegger’s analysis of the institutionalization of research shows, we gain the possibility of orienting our institutions towards something of our choosing only when this possibility can just as easily fail to be perceived; our possibility of choice and action is always also a possibility of failing to recognize our capacity for choice and action. If we think together our accounts of the two institutions analysed above, we will be able to consider the nature of this orientation, as well as the nature of that to which we may orient ourselves, as providing us with a possibility of relating anew to significant dimensions of our existence. Thereby, we shall be able to see that it is the instrumental character of our institutions that allows us to consider explicitly the practical cooperation we noted above. Moreover, we shall be able to see that our practical cooperation ought itself to be oriented towards our possibilities of meaningful engagement, those that render significant our lives and projects through the sense of significance we share with others. In this final section we shall proceed by considering, first, the orientation to domains of significance that our institutional embeddedness affords us; second, the way this orientation opens up for us the possibility of decision; and, third, the relationship between our possibility of decision and the unique potential of modernity identified above (the sense of the possible, the instrumental resources and a sense of shared goals).

Above, we considered how Heidegger’s analysis of the art museum indicated that modern institutions preserve significant domains even as they allow the demands of industry to shape our

141 The necessity of decision is connected to the possibility of the experience of the inherent significance of that which stands beyond human affairs; only by deciding with respect to the inherent significance of our world does humanity become capable of the experience of world; see OTBT 22-23/Holzwege 30. Heidegger also addresses the role of decision in a specifically modern context in Section 44 of Contributions to Philosophy.
attitudes towards these domains and, thereby, risk blinding us to their very significance. We also considered how Heidegger’s analysis of the university revealed the importance of maintaining the transparency of the bureaucratic methods of organization and how this very transparency showed us that our efforts were not themselves instrumental, but were, instead, a mode of activity that we can orient to a goal of our choosing. Together, these analyses revealed to us that our institutions are necessary for our possibilities of relating to domains that exceed the confines of our increasingly instrumentally oriented lives, and that our possibilities of relating to the domains that are only barely preserved by our institutions requires us to pay attention to our institutions and to preserve them as forms that can themselves preserve and support whatever possibilities of meaningful existence still remain to us. Our institutions, in other words, (arguably) more so than our private lives, encourage us to recognize the inherently intersubjective and cooperative dimensions of what we ordinarily take to be obvious and instrumentally oriented aspects of life (such as our education, or the experience of art for philistine-like purposes, or of philosophy as useful for critical thinking).142 Inasmuch as our institutions preserve the possibility of art and philosophy, for example, they preserve domains that are inherently intersubjective, and that draw on and realize shared ways of thinking and doing. Inasmuch as our institutions require us to recognize them, they reveal to us our practical cooperation in itself, and as that which can be oriented towards tasks of our choosing, tasks that can include the development and cultivation of the possibilities that exceed instrumental activity. Thus, our instrumental institutions are ultimately revealing of the importantly intersubjective character of significance, and of the equally important practical dimensions of cooperation

142 Ziarek comments on the reduction of such domains to endeavours that are justifiable and valid: “And the only way poetry can be rendered marketable is to show that it can acquire value of some sort, that, for instance, it exemplifies or teaches values: moral, cultural, political, religious, ecological, human, that is, values which could be used ‘productively,’ for example, to evaluate and guide us in our use of technology” (17).
without which we risk losing the contextualizing effect of art, science, philosophy, religion, political life and so on.

Let us consider briefly how art, philosophy, science, religion and political life can contextualize our experience. The re-introduction of a decision on the part of humanity that is an essential feature of the promise of modern institutions echoes Heidegger’s account, in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” of the historical destiny of humanity. This destiny rests in the capacity of humanity to “[return] to itself for the completion of its vocation” (OTBT 21/Holzwege 28). In the essay, the vocation of humanity is determined by the norms of collective life made manifest, by the work of art, in their inherent significance. This return happens through truth as it is made manifest by the work of art and, thereby, allows things to show themselves in their autonomy as they are rendered meaningful by our experience of significance. According to Heidegger, for humanity to “return to its vocation” is for it to recognize its role in the realization and preservation of the historically mediated cultures, traditions, experiences and institutions through which “what is” is made meaningful to humanity and acquires an autonomous significance thereby. In “the Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger allows us to see that the experience of the rise of the domains that shape our sense of ourselves and our world is something that occurs through a people, and, thus, is an implicitly cooperative and intersubjective process. It is inasmuch as modern institutions afford to human beings the possibility of decision that such institutions reveal the fundamentally intersubjective and cooperative foundation of meaningful human existence: if we can orient ourselves to

143 The return at stake here should be distinguished from the return of Dasein to itself that is constitutive of the structure of its existence as projection. For an account of the structure of this return see Sheehan, “Astonishing! Things Make Sense!” 15-16.
144 As Françoise Dastur explains, art cannot be understood as representation because, as Heidegger notes in the 1935 Freiburg version of “The Origin of the Work of Art,” “art never represents something; simply because it has nothing that it could represent, because the work creates at first what appears for the first time through it in the open.” (Quoted in Dastur’s “Heidegger’s Freiburg version of the Origin of the Work of Art” 121).
significant domains, and if the content of these very domains is lacking, both our experience of the lack and of that to which it orients us will be a shared experience. Indeed, we experience the intersubjective constitution of significant domains as an experience of Being: the dynamic between historical humanity and the very possibility of significance is reciprocal because human endeavours present to the work of art something to reveal as truth, while the very possibility of truth enables *collective* human life.

What, however, is this decision, and how does it relate to our modern experience? As we saw above, the implicit promise of specifically modern projects consists in the sense that anything is possible, in the explicit experience of our capacity for organization and control and in an explicit experience of our cooperative interdependence as that which, in principle, affords to each of us the possibility of pursuing meaningful projects. Above, we concluded that we begin to reconceive of ourselves and others by recognizing explicitly our instrumental relations to one another. By turning our attention now to the notion of “decision” Heidegger invokes, we shall be considering the idea that our instrumental institutions are significant to us only so long as we are capable of experiencing our projects and our relationships in terms of significance that is not confined to instrumentality or, indeed, to values and to culture as Heidegger describes them. In other words, we will be considering the idea that insofar as we are committed to cooperating instrumentally with one another, we are implicitly committed to a meaningful experience that exceeds the terms of instrumental cooperation and that remains, nevertheless, something we can accomplish only with and through one another. By recognizing that we are fundamentally dependent on one another for the meaningful possibilities of significance on which we all depend, we shall to come to see that insofar as modern institutions hold open the possibility of decision, they do so by affording us the opportunity to acknowledge and own up to the
intersubjectively constituted domains of meaning that enrich us and define for us what matters. Let us now turn to Heidegger’s account of “decision.”

In Sections 43-48 of *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger refers to the possibility of “de-cision” by which we are to understand the possibility of overcoming the separation (scission) from Being that was realized by the stance of detached assessment, by instrumentalization and by value thinking. We must, in other words, find a way to experience in beings the power and weight of their being, of the real significance they accrue by virtue of their distinct place in the course of our lives. We can do so only in terms of the way that beings matter to us by virtue of the significance that our culturally and historically distinct perspective affords to them and draws from them. To make a decision in the Heideggerian sense is, then, to commit to our culturally and historically distinct moment as that which provides us with a sense of what matters even, and perhaps especially, if, as Heidegger asserts, our time is “the epoch of the total lack of questioning” (*Contributions* 76[108-109]). In other words, even if what matters now is simply that nothing matters, and that we have lost (or risk losing) a connection to beings (both like us and other than us) that is not informed either by a sense of the “obvious” or by a sense of the

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145 Haar suggests that Heidegger’s talk of the “turning” is more akin to the understanding of a new beginning presented in *Contributions to Philosophy*; see “The End of Metaphysics” 161-163. Nelson’s account of the other beginning of metaphysics, however, focuses more on the sameness of the first and “other” beginning: “Heidegger’s critique of the narratives and explanations of historiography and the philosophy of history point toward an-other history—history as the history of being rather than of beings” (“History” 102).

146 I should note that my view of the role of decision here is not that of an essential decision on the part of an authoritative state, or of the authority of any institutions, as Carl Schmitt asserts (44). For an account of Schmitt’s view of the authoritative decision that takes place in and through the recognition of an enemy, see Figal 32-34.

147 In *Contributions*, Heidegger refers repeatedly to the fact that only those who are to come will be capable of a renewed relationship to Being, and asserts that attempting this relation to Being today would amount to a repetition of calculation: “Will this attempt ever find its expounder? The one who can speak of the way that goes into and prepares for what is futural? But not the one who calculates out of it only what belongs to much of today and thus ‘explains’ and destroys everything” (57[81-83]). My focus on the possibility of keeping open this possibility through our institutions should not be understood as a way of making the “decision” to which Heidegger points. Polt expresses well the basic possibility for our (political) institutions: “Liberals need not hold that self-preservation or self-promotion is the ultimate end. Liberal liberty leaves individuals politically free to pursue selfish interests, to work for the welfare of larger groups, or to respond to the sheltering of Being in beings” (673).
practical role they play, we can still own up to such situation.\textsuperscript{148} Indeed, according to Heidegger, the decision at stake refers less to what we can do than to how we come to be capable of opening ourselves to what can be done \textit{to us}, to what can compel us to recognize in ourselves something other and greater than ourselves, and do so without recourse to the reified values and instrumental rationality that characterise our time.\textsuperscript{149} As Nelson writes, “decision is the responsiveness and non-responsiveness of Dasein to being and its abandonment, to the earth which it preserves and cultivates or allows to be destroyed, and the openness which it lets be open or encloses, enframes, and forgets” (“History” 114). Deciding means, in other words, orienting ourselves towards Being in the preestablished ways specific to our historical and cultural \textit{or} doing otherwise, where this “otherwise” realizes itself as an open-ended relation to the possibilities of significance given to us to realize.

Heidegger’s work suggests that it is by attending to our ordinary, institutionally mediated endeavours that we will be able to come to understand the possibility of decision. An originary experience of decision, he explains, always involves a preliminary experience of the ordinary sense in which “decision” is understood as “a human act,” and that the more originary sense of decision as an involvement with “the essential sway of Being” is discoverable only through that experience (\textit{Contributions} 58[83-84]). We must, in other words, discover in our familiar intercourse with specific, concrete possibilities the contingent, uncanny and unjustifiable character of these very possibilities. This discovery is, I contend, related to the sense of unlimited possibility we attributed to “calculation,” as a feature of machination. As our capacity for calculation increases, so too can our sense of the possible. This is not merely because we become

\textsuperscript{148} Nelson writes, “The singularity and uniqueness of the moment (\textit{Augenblick}) is a crisis calling for an individuating decision (\textit{Entscheidung}) and resoluteness in response to the situation” (“History” 103).
\textsuperscript{149} For an account of the productionist tendencies in our accounts of history and action as the product either of our doing or of god, see Nelson “History” 105.
capable of doing more, but because we become capable of recognizing the fact that our situation is defined by a lack of a goal, and more essentially, our not wanting one. When what we value and how we see the world become our way of justifying our constant, calculative activity, we fail to treat our values and our perspectives in their inherent questionableness; our focus on means allows us to continue to fail to question. It is, therefore, only by attempting to make concrete decisions about how to act that we gain the possibility of experiencing our failure to decide in the first place, and of coming to see that we have lived our lives on the basis of familiar presuppositions about who we are and how we ought to act. Indeed, it is by recognizing our comfortable familiarity with ourselves and our world, itself enabled by the economic, technological and industrial developments of modernity, that we become capable of seeing that the “preservation of a people is never a possible goal but only the condition for setting goals” (Contributions 68[98-99]).

Thus, what we have identified as the modern sense that anything is possible is related to an experience that discloses to us that we have allowed the comfortable familiarity of our technologically mediated lives to answer for us. This basic experience is enabled by the institutions of modernity as these present themselves to us as the instrumental means by which we are able to accomplish what is expected of us without questioning or deciding on our goals.

We only ever acquire our capacity to question, and to experience how we are compelled and influenced, within our pre-ordered world, even if this world and the institutions through which it is organized do not themselves aim to foster this capacity. The capacity to question and

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150 Nelson remarks that Heidegger’s critical approach to history relates to our average, everyday ways of behaving: “Heidegger’s destructuring confrontation with the history of ontology and metaphysics has a critical and transformative dimension by engaging ordinary and everyday ways of behaving, as structured by tradition and average public life” (“History” 97). Dallmayr associates “a struggle waged for the sake of sheer self-preservation and self-enhancement” with Heidegger’s critique of machination (100-101).

151 Heidegger refers to a change in the “ordinary” experience of beings (Contributions 339/[481-482]).
to experience in originary ways is not, therefore, ultimately suppressed by our instrumental institutions. As a result, we remain capable of recognizing our institutions as having been made possible and as related to the possibilities of experience they now merely preserve:\(^{152}\)

*The single ones, the few, the many* (not taken in a quantitative sense but with respect to their being marked) still stand partly in the old and current and planned arrangements. These arrangements are either only the husk of a protection for their endangered existence or still the guiding forces of their willing. (67/[96-98])\(^{153}\)

We cannot remain open to Being, to significance, without the institutions, the “husks,” that preserve the domains in which significance manifests itself—the essential domains of art, philosophy, science, politics and so on that draw on and shape the resources of intersubjective life. Thus, just as we saw that acceleration is related to our unforeseen capacity to organize, we can come to recognize this capacity as a basic preservation of our possibilities and as necessarily external to these possibilities inasmuch as organizing and coordinating are always the organizing and coordinating of something else. By recognizing, at one and the same time, the accomplishments that are our institutions, and the external or instrumental character of these accomplishments, we may be able to see that these institutions must support rather than circumscribe the domains with which they are associated.

As we have seen, it is the very instrumental character of modernity and its institutions that marks modernity with the particular possibility of decision. Thus, to recognize and acknowledge our capacity for decision is to remain open to the risk that we will fail to do so.

\(^{152}\) Heidegger’s reference to the “few” is problematic given his own political past. For a discussion of this issue see de Beistegui, *Dystopias* 105-113. There, de Beistegui shows that Heidegger’s reference to the Germans and the Greeks can be understood as a model for grappling with history: “The law of history is such that it is only in the inversion of the struggle by which ancient Greece emerged as a historically and destinally decisive configuration that Germany can happen as a repetition of that initial moment” (110).

\(^{153}\) I am here echoing Heidegger’s claim that he is thinking “the essential crossing into the still possible transformation of Western History” (*Contributions* 57/[81-83]).
While the risk of failing to recognize the potential of our institutions and the significant domains to which they open us never disappears, we find that it is by acknowledging our interdependence that this risk is transformed into a recognition of our capacity to orient ourselves cooperatively towards significant, determinate ways of living with one another in our own time. Indeed, we find that we are capable of experiencing ourselves as answerable both to the current possibilities that define our existence and to the possibility of living and doing otherwise when we recognize ourselves to be irreducibly related to others and when our experience of our relatedness takes precedence over the way our institutions have shaped our perspectives so as to accord with the demand for order and profit:

The “world-historical” events can take on proportions never before seen. This at first speaks only for the growing frenzy let loose in the domain of machination and numbers. It never speaks immediately for the emergence of essential decisions. But when a gathering of the people, or its existence [Bestand], is established unto itself in these events—and partly according to their style—could not a way open up there, a way into the nearness of decision? (Contributions 68 [98-99])

Here again we see that we first attend to the emptiness of our well-ordered modern experience, and only thereby experience this emptiness as a shared situation sustained through our cooperation. Accordingly, here too, we see a connectedness to machination: what Heidegger calls the “outbreak of the massive” can be an experience of shared goals. The explicit experience of shared goals is enabled by our otherwise groundless situation and our ability to recognize our fundamental interrelatedness as it is realized in practical ways, as these ways shape us, as well as
how our interrelatedness is realized a situation in which new possibilities of living and experiencing may arise.154

Thus, Heidegger’s account of decision relates both to how we have defined the modern possibility and how we have come to understand our modern institutions. In both cases we find that recognizing the distinctly modern shape of our institutions allows us to relate to them and to one another differently, and to begin, thereby, to consider the meaningful possibilities of collective life our instrumental institutions otherwise disavow.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have come to see that Heidegger’s account of modern experience—our self-understanding as subject and our sense of the indubitable reality of objective experience—is realized both in the sense of the world particular to our time, on the one hand, and in the nature and character of our modern projects and the instrumental institutions through which they are realized and sustained, on the other. We identified as particular to the modern experience not only the representation that pertains to subjects and objects, but also, more essentially, the ambiguous character of modern experience in terms of which we experience our detached, objective, instrumental perspective to be obvious, and thereby allow it to influence and shape our projects. By tracing the effect of modern experience through the experience of values and the character of modern technology and of machination, we arrived at a point at which we were able to see how modern experience is realized in the institutions of modernity and to understand that

154 The possibility of shared goals to which I am pointing should be understood more in terms of possibility, than in terms of the establishment of particular concrete goals that would, according to Heidegger, amount to an inauthentic repetition of the modern way of thinking and doing. Heidegger expresses his disapproval of goals: “Seeking itself is the goal. And this means that ‘goals’ are still too much in the foreground and still take place ahead of be-ing—and thus bury what is needful” (Contributions 13/[16-18]); see also Nelson “History” 109.
this realization is both a realization of a particular possibility, and one that insistently denies this about itself. Moreover, by coming to see that a distinctively modern possibility lingered in our instrumental approach, we were able consider our modern institutions as both representative of the systematic instrumentalization and capitalization of reality and as sites where we might begin to develop ways of living and experiencing otherwise. Inasmuch as our institutions shape our experience and risk depriving us of anything other than an instrumental approach to life, they also preserve the domains that can challenge an instrumental attitude. Furthermore, so long as we preserve them, they offer us the means by which we are able to reconsider the domains that are preserved by recognizing both our practical cooperation and our inherent interdependence with respect to the very experience afforded to us by and within such domains. In short, we found that our modern institutions enable both our disavowal of the collective dimension of life and our recognition of that dimension as that through with and in which we find ourselves compelled. We found, furthermore, that our openness to that experience of compulsion was necessary to our ability to perceive the possibility of deciding with respect to the shape of our lives by taking up that which is offered to us uniquely in our own time and uniquely through the possibility inherent in our relatedness to one another.
Chapter Four: Politics, Art and Intersubjectivity

We typically grow up in well-developed worlds, adjust ourselves to the modes of behaviour appropriate to those worlds, and choose and pursue the goals that make us determinate. In so doing, we may become teachers, lawyers, clerks, small business owners, yoga instructors, labourers and so on. We also may become friends, partners, parents, co-workers, teammates and clients. Although roles such as these vary to one degree or another depending on our culture, historical moment or socio-economic status, the roles we choose both define us and put us into definite relations with others, and we are generally able to answer to the demands of these various, and often conflicting, relations with high degrees of coherence and fluidity because those with whom we interact have gone through similar processes of adjustment and choice. Our ability to adjust, to choose and to interact with others is grounded in our capacity for interpretation; our everyday behaviour means something to us, as do the roles we choose and the others with whom we interact. Our world, in other words, matters, and its mattering is determined by our interpretations. It is because we matter to ourselves that the world we share with others matters to us. To be a self is to be involved definitively in an interpretive context, a world shared by others, and the habits we acquire and the goals we experience as meaningful reflect the inevitably intersubjectively constituted domains that enable and compel us to be the selves we are.
Yet, while intersubjective reality is the medium of selfhood, to be a self is to be an interpreting agent whose comprehension of the world and whose experiences within it are her own; our well-developed worlds are, largely, shared interpretations of what is appropriate, worthwhile or execrable, and the “sharedness” of these interpretations is irreducibly dependent on the exclusive and singular experiences and interpretations that define us as unique selves. Thus, as much as our worlds are always collective accomplishments, they are accomplished by singular individuals who may not notice their own dependence on intersubjective contexts: the contexts we create together are therefore always accompanied by the risk that we will deny our fundamental cooperation and fail to maintain the aspects of our shared domains that depend on it.

These themes—interpretation, significance, self, others—all have definite places in Heidegger’s oeuvre. Yet, while Heidegger’s work has incredible resources for deepening our understanding of what it means to be self, of what is involved in interpretation and in our tendency to disavow our own interpreting character, he is well-known for his reticence with respect to ethical and political issues. Heidegger offers few arguments or claims about how to negotiate or organize the very domain he shows to be the interpreted product of our interpreting selves. Despite this, we have argued that Heidegger’s philosophy offers us the resources for showing that political issues are framed by and develop out of contexts of recognition and interpretation and, indeed, that our coherent worlds are the result of successful negotiations of the capacities that sustain those contexts. In this chapter, we shall see that Heidegger contributes

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155 Pointing to this dilemma in The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic, Heidegger writes: Being-with as a comportment of authentic existence is only possible in such a way that every existing-with can be and is authentically itself. This freedom of with-one-another, however, presupposes the possibility of the self-determination of a being with the characteristics of Dasein as such, and it is a problem how Dasein can exist as essentially free in the freedom of the factual ties of being-with-one-another. (139/MAL 175)

Here, we see Heidegger point implicitly to the conflict between individual authenticity and its relation our social nature. Heidegger explains that our authentic being together presupposes authenticity on the part of individuals and that achieving authenticity on the part of individuals can be difficult in the “factual” social situations we have built for ourselves.
to political thought by revealing the connection between our self-recognition as interpreting agents and our capacity to recognize the limitations of our one-sided, instrumental institutions. More specifically, we shall see that the analysis offered above helps us see that modern political institutions are important and positive developments that must nevertheless be subject to critique with respect to the fact that they do not account for, attend to or cultivate the important intersubjective domains of human existence that rely for their robust realization on our self-recognition as interpreters. By distinctly political institutions in the modern world we mean, basically, to identify those institutions oriented towards the legitimate making and executing of the laws that apply to individuals who can be identified as belonging to a particular group (generally, to the same municipality, province, state and/or nation). We shall see that it is impossible to recognize the limits of our institutions without a renewing of our capacity for self-understanding. Further, we shall see that this capacity for self-understanding calls for an experience of art, especially in local contexts, in order to cultivate our capacity to recognize the inevitably interpreted character of our world.  

Since Heidegger does not offer an account of political institutions, in order to demonstrate the relevance of Heidegger’s account of our interpretive character to modern political life, we shall turn to the work of George Herbert Mead whose radical democratic thinking resonates, I will argue, with Heideggerian insights, and offers an account of modern politics that Heidegger could endorse and that relates to our current political context. Through Mead’s work, we will come to see that liberal presuppositions about fully formed rational individuals and neutral universals only ever arise out of the interpersonal negotiations that shape and constitute individuals and that such negotiations shape in particular ways our understanding

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156 Consider Heidegger’s account of the “site” [Ort] (OWL 159-160/UsZ 37) in which, as Lysaker explains, “the poem is ‘collected’ and ‘released’ into poetizing” (184).
of these so-called universals. Further, we shall come to see the connection between the historical origin of liberal presuppositions and the inadequacies of liberal politics, and we shall consider specific examples of injustices that can be remedied only by cultivating our capacity to once more recognize the necessary, concrete, partial and inadequate role of institutions in relation to collective life. Once we have acquired an understanding of the historical and institutional dimensions of modern political life, we shall return to Heidegger’s work, and we shall interpret his work on art in light of our insights into the modern political situation. Throughout, we shall be referring to the modern political situation, as well as the presuppositions that correspond to it, as “ours,” even if this designation would not necessarily apply to anyone who encountered the ideas presented here.

Due to Heidegger’s involvement with the National Socialist party, his position as Rector of Freiburg between 1933 and 1934, and his remaining a party member even after that, some preliminary remarks about Heidegger’s political involvement are in order. While it is not my aim either to defend Heidegger or to condemn all of his thought, it is my aim to show that Heidegger’s work offers significant resources for thinking through some of the problems that characterise our modern democratic systems. It is necessary, therefore, to situate my approach in relation to other approaches to Heidegger’s political involvement. Generally, the features of his work that open up the door to his involvement with the Nazis include his supposed “decisionism,” his invoking of the “Volk,” his accounts of agonistic struggle in Nietzsche’s work and in relation to the Polis, and his denunciations of liberal political life.

A broad overview of scholarship on Heidegger’s involvement with the National Socialist party reveals extreme positions that either condemn both Heidegger and his work or claim that it is impossible to condemn Heidegger’s thought on the basis of his political involvement. In
addition, there is work that seeks to separate the philosophically viable dimensions of his thought from that which is sullied by his politics. For example, Rockmore claims that Heidegger’s political involvement was rooted in his philosophy and can be traced from his early to his later work, and Lyotard argues that “silences” in Heidegger’s writing point to his failure to acknowledge his debt to “the forgotten,” to those who do not constitute themselves as a people, and that this “forgetting” makes it impossible to dissociate Heidegger’s thinking from his actions. Meanwhile, Derrida takes a less critical approach to silences in Heidegger’s texts by tracing the presence of “spirit” in Heidegger’s work and revealing the impossibility of determining the nature and implications of Heidegger’s involvement, even if his involvement cannot be excused. Another writer less critical of Heidegger is Pöggeler who claims that while not all of Heidegger’s thought is to be condemned, Heidegger’s involvement nonetheless is not unrelated to his philosophical work. Taking another approach, Rickey demonstrates the similarities between Heidegger’s diagnosis of the “forgetting of Being” and the National Socialist party, while at the same time arguing that Heidegger’s views did not encompass the

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157 In *Thinking with Heidegger*, for example, de Beistegui argues that Heidegger’s own understanding of repetition reveals that his thought is irreducible to any form of politics (60).
158 Along with Rockmore, Emmanuel Faye’s *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy* offers an account of the role of National Socialism in Heidegger’s thought. Farias has also attempted to connect Heidegger’s political activities and his work. Radloff’s *Heidegger and the Question of National Socialism*, meanwhile, argues that Heidegger’s thinking is fundamentally informed by the emergence of “gestalt” as that which differentiates between being and beings, and that the self-definition of a people can be understood to echo that demand, not as the immanent self-realization a people but rather “in the postmetaphysical sense that the community, and the identity proper to it, no longer derive from collective subjectivity” (11). Young argues that “one may accept any of Heidegger’s philosophy, and, though Heidegger himself was far from any such commitment, preserve, without inconsistency, a commitment to orthodox liberal democracy” (Nazism 5). Opting for another approach, Pierre Bourdieu acknowledges that one can neither assert that philosophical texts are autonomous from their historical situatedness nor can one simply reduce such texts to their situations. He thus asserts that it is necessary, as we saw above, to “undertake a simultaneously political and philosophical dual reading of works which are defined by their fundamental ambiguity” (Political Ontology 3). Through this reading, Bourdieu argues that the compatibility of Heidegger’s thought to the Nazi program was a result of Heidegger’s own failure to confront the implicit inclinations and structures embedded in his own experience of the world.
159 Lacoue-Labarthe’s position is that Heidegger’s overtly political claims can be regarded as merely programmatic and that their absence in Heidegger’s later writing can be met only by treating Heidegger’s “political attitude” which informed his openness to the National Socialists but which does not ultimately condemn his thought.
160 See “Heidegger’s Political Self-Understanding”.
Nazi racial doctrine and the “quest for world domination” (Saints 192). Habermas dissociates Heidegger’s philosophical thinking entirely from politics, asserting that there is nothing political in Heidegger’s early writing and that Heidegger’s later writing reflects the result of political pressure rather than the development of an inherently political position.\footnote{See “On the Publication” 189. For Heidegger’s claim that “The Führer alone is the present and future German reality and its law” see Reden und Andere Zeugnisse 184, emphasis in original. The quote also appears in Wolin’s The Heidegger Controversy 47.} Still other approaches look to Heidegger’s work for a productive contribution to political thought.\footnote{For example, in Metaphysics and Oppression, John McCumber argues that Heidegger’s work exposes forms of oppression immanent in metaphysical concepts that inform political thought.} My position is similar to De Beistegui’s;\footnote{Fred Dallmayr also suggests a view similar to this: “On my view Heidegger’s opus after 1933 is a prolonged struggle to expel or subdue the virus, without returning to orthodoxy” (19). Dallmayr points to Heidegger’s move away from “his infatuation with Jünger and with an extreme type of Nietzscheanism” to “Hölderlin and the pre-Socratics” (26).} he calls attention to the inherent risk involved in any thinking:

Heidegger’s early thought is not fascistic at all, but […] it puts a number of motifs into place that will be mobilized in 1933 in order to welcome and legitimate the coming into power of Nazism, thus exemplifying an ontic realization of those ontological structures laid out in 1927. (Dystopias 5)\footnote{In “My Last Meeting with Heidegger in Rome, 1936,” Karl Löwith relates that Heidegger, wearing Nazi paraphernalia, agreed that “his own partisanship for National Socialism lay in the essence of his philosophy” (Wolin 142).}

De Beistegui also identifies Heidegger’s later writing as “an attempt to come to grips with the reality of National Socialism, with the historical and political situation of the West, as well as with the present and future of Germany in the age of global technology” (Dystopias 5).\footnote{The later texts de Beistegui refers to are “the majority of the lecture courses and the writings from 1935 to 1945, particularly those devoted to Nietzsche and Hölderlin” (Dystopias 5).}

Despite the references to “co-historicizing” that may resonate with conservative thought,\footnote{For Heidegger’s reference to “co-historicizing” Dasein see BT 436/484.} my view is that Being and Time is fundamentally descriptive when it comes to issues of authenticity and cooperation, and that it describes necessary aspects of our co-dependent experience of the world which may come to be concretely realized in different ways (BT.
436/384). I treat Heidegger’s later writing as containing equally descriptive accounts of our current situation, accounts that can be read together to disclose a fuller picture of what Heidegger’s thinking offers to our current world. As a result, even if there are ways in which Heidegger’s writing presents ideas that resonate with fascist ideology, these may be construed as Heidegger’s efforts to deal with the current situation rather than as a final word on the necessary shape of human cooperation or community. Overall, I make no specific claim about Heidegger’s political involvement. Instead, I draw on Mead’s work, Heidegger’s account of modernity and his specific comments on modern politics in an effort to trace a path along which Heidegger’s powerful thinking can be brought to bear on institutional life in a liberal, democratic context.

The relation of Heidegger and Mead also deserves some preliminary remarks before we can proceed with an account of political life. According to my reading, both Mead and Heidegger identify institutions as sites where one’s self-recognition is dependent upon the recognition of another. As we saw in Chapter Two, the fact that Dasein is Being-with means that an aspect of its essential possibility rests in its being recognized by another in shared terms that arise in institutions. According to Mead the “self” arises through a recognition on the part of others that allows the self to become an object to itself. When this recognition occurs on a small scale, it contributes to the development of an individual’s “personality,” but it only constitutes a “self” when it includes the attitudes and customs of a group as whole. What Mead refers to as the “self” thus arises in institutions that embody the shared social attitudes that allow the self to take a view of itself from the perspectives of what Mead calls the “generalized other,” or “that social

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167 To some degree, the relationship between Heidegger and pragmatism has already been established. Rorty, for example, takes up Heidegger’s anti-metaphysical stance and Mark Okrent has devoted a whole study to the relationship between Heidegger and pragmatism, mainly by explaining how the early Heidegger is a verificationist thinker of intentionality and how the later Heidegger’s position is anti-mentalistic, pragmatic, verificationist and anti-metaphysical. For a summary of both positions, as well as an independent account of the differences between Heidegger and Dewey’s ways of “de-intellectualizing” theoretical understanding, see Blattner “Primacy of Practice.”
institution within his own conduct” (“On Social Psychology” 230). The institutions that both constitute the self and reveal it to itself can accommodate different attitudes that vary in relation to the size of the group of which one is a part: the larger the group, the more abstract are the attitudes, with the result that large-scale society seems to be devoid of attitudes and built only on the recognition of universal features of human life, features we recognize even from a plurality of perspectives. Mead writes:

That which makes society possible is such common responses, such organized attitudes, with reference to what we term property, the cults of religion, the process of education, and the relations of the family. Of course, the wider the society, the more definitely universal these objects must be. (“On Social Psychology” 225)

In this chapter we shall mainly focus on works in which Mead considers large-scale institutions and explains how, in their modern, democratic forms, these institutions remain the external manifestation of a collective recognition on the part of individuals. Mead’s analysis of modern institutions describes the relationship between those institutions and the attitudes of individuals as these attitudes contribute to the way modern political institutions are realized. Accordingly, Mead’s analysis will help illustrate both the implicit dimension of institutional life that we came to understand with the help of Bourdieu’s work and the performative character of institutional life that we considered in light of Gadamer’s account of play. Mead’s work will also illustrate the political consequences of the modern, instrumental institutions we considered in the previous chapter.

Despite his compatibility with Heidegger, Mead employs some presuppositions that Heidegger takes pains to reveal and overcome.\textsuperscript{168} Examples of these are the subject-object

\textsuperscript{168} Aboulafia describes Mead from the perspective of post-modernism: “From the vantage point of those attuned to the cluster of sensibilities that have come to be called post-modern, Mead would be classified as a modernist. He
distinction and the recourse to instinct and impulse that endorses a biological view of humanity.\textsuperscript{169} It might also take some work to establish the ways in which Mead’s work is compatible with the idea that our equimental relation to the world is the foundation of the selves that we are since he sees habits as “our moving about in a world that is simply there” (“On Social Psychology” 199). At the same time, Mead’s account of the self is more easily shown to be roughly compatible with our analysis of habits as the site of our openness to a meaningful world since he explains that one must “distinguish between the experience that immediately takes place, and our experience of it in the self” (“On Social Psychology” 199). His work seems to be even more straightforwardly compatible with our account of the necessary role of others; according to Mead, even our bodies become part of ourselves in a social group (“On Social Psychology” 201). Also interesting is the fact that Mead acknowledges and makes no attempt to explain many of the phenomena that relate to certain seminal Heideggerian insights;\textsuperscript{170} Heidegger illuminates the foundationless character of the self and the interpreted constitution of the world, and Mead acknowledges the centrality and importance of similar phenomena while claiming that their source and constitution are beyond the purview of our understanding.\textsuperscript{171} Most relevant to our use of Mead’s work here is that he recognizes the necessity of our rootedness in dimensions of collective life, and thus serves as an appropriate guide for coming to understand

\textsuperscript{169} Speaking to the role of biology in the relationship between Heidegger and pragmatism, Blattner explains that for Dewey theoretical activity arises in confrontation with a problem and is thus an extension of the normal activity of an “organism,” while Heidegger moves past the conception of biological organism involved in “problem-solving” activities by taking up possibilities of disclosure; see “Primacy of Practice”. As we shall see, Mead’s account resonates with Heidegger’s insofar as problem solving is combined with possibilities of appearing to one another, and, thereby, remains in line with Heideggerian disclosure.

\textsuperscript{170} For Honneth, Mead’s “I”/“me” distinction adds an account of motivation to Hegel’s dialectic of recognition, see Carreira da Silva 106.

\textsuperscript{171} In Mead’s social psychology, the individual is both and “I” and “me”; the “me” is the object of consciousness constituted by the social world in which the individual finds herself, while the “I” is the source of the impulses that give rise to consciousness. This “I” is never an object of consciousness with the result that, as Reck claims, there “is a kind of fiction lying always beyond the borders of consciousness” (xxxi). As fictional, the I is an explanatory principle which effectively leaves open questions about an otherwise easily identifiable subject.
the political contributions associated with Heidegger’s account of our modern metaphysical rootlessness.172

This chapter has three sections: the first offers an account of Mead’s work in order to highlight specific themes in modern politics; the second relates Mead’s analysis to Heidegger’s account of the systematic character of modernity and to Heidegger’s view of liberalism; the third interprets Heidegger’s essays, “The Origin of the Work of Art” and “What are Poets For?” as diagnoses of and responses to the metaphysically bereft character of modern political life. Through an analysis of these essays we shall see that Heidegger’s work points to our need for a rich community life in which to cultivate our ability to perceive the limitations of our institutions through a capacity to respond the emergence of significance in a group. Let us now turn to Mead’s work.

Section One: Mead and Modern Politics

Mead’s account of modern political life is related to his insights into the nature of the self and its social relations. For Mead, the institutions of modern democratic politics are the explicit realization of a human possibility that never fails to be manifest in collective life—the recognition of ends common to all. In his view, modern institutions are founded and justified on the basis of the common good, but tend to fail to recognize and attend to the concrete interest of which the common good is comprised, largely by disavowing their rootedness in concrete situations of mutual recognition and adjustment. His critical work traces the rise and decline of modern political institutions and ultimately identifies the source of their decline as a failure, on

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172 Aboulafia claims that “if one is interested in advancing an enduring exchange between pragmatism and other contemporary trends in philosophy and social theory, then one would be advised to turn to Mead” (Cosmopolitan Self 1-2). Aboulafia relates Mead’s work to Arendt and Levinas, among others.
the part of such institutions, to sustain the social conditions out of which they emerged, conditions in which the diversity of human life and self-expression can be realized.

The following analysis will address Mead’s understanding of characteristic features of liberal political thinking. We shall see that Mead understands “universals” and the rational individual to be rooted in social life. We shall also see that, as responses to definite threats, these liberal presuppositions came to be dissociated from their necessary connection to ongoing interpersonal negotiation and to be perceived, instead, as representative of universally necessary conditions that continue to dominate social and political life even when specific threats to the freedom of individuals have been overcome. More specifically, we shall see that rights and the division between public and private become the means by which modern life encourages a self-interested attitude on the part of individuals, as well as the reason that it is thought that the state must support all important domains of human interaction. We shall also see how these developments allow for the withering away of the community and the cultivation of an economic reality that allows for forms of injustice even while upholding abstract political ideals. Finally, we shall see that, given this situation, Mead argues that the necessary response to the inadequacy of executive and juridical institutions must involve a cultivation of the attitudes of individuals in ways that are appropriate to the institutions on which we all depend.

Let us now trace Mead’s understanding of the development of modern political institutions, and come to see that, according to Mead, while modern political life may be the realization of a distinctly human possibility, it is also the means by which human beings can disavow the collective accomplishment of society and the possibility of meaningful life afforded therein.
(a) *Institutions and the Social Self*

The self of Mead’s social psychology is socially constituted; it becomes aware of its acts as its own when it comes to perceive that its gestures have the capacity to communicate, and that it is just as subject to the terms of communication as is any other who understands them. Thus, Mead’s thinking does not fall prey to the liberal presuppositions that posit the fully formed rational individual and the universals to which she can appeal. Instead, with Mead, the individual is constituted in and through her (ultimately) cooperative social interactions, and through the shared terms—“universals”—that are always the result of definite and finite interpersonal negotiations. We may understand the shared terms Mead analyses as universals inasmuch as such terms are a result of ongoing negotiations between members of the social whole and inasmuch as they reflect, in principle, the input of all and, thus, apply “universally” to all members of a given society. According to Mead, because our shared terms involve an awareness of the group to which we belong, we are always implicitly aware of the legitimacy of the demands of those belonging to one’s group. The indebtedness of the individual to the social whole out of which her “self” is constituted implies the legitimacy of the other’s claims in specific contexts of communication; the social self exists with an awareness of the way that the desire or impulses of others are implicated in her self-understanding. As a result, the experience of the common good is always an experience of the legitimacy of the other’s attempt to act for the sake of her interest. Thus, in contrast to a liberal conception of abstract universals such as we see in, as Shannon Hoff writes, “law and the integrity of state authority” (206), Mead attributes the possibility of universals to shared terms of communal life. As Mitchell Aboulafia

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173 Ames writes, “Mead’s tremendous discovery is that the mind begins to appear at the point when certain gestures tend to call out in the individual making them the response which they simultaneously arouse in another form” (50).
174 Liberal theorists would argue that they are not “falling prey” to anything. For example, Rawls writes, “justice as fairness is not a comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine” (Justice as Fairness 14).
175 For an overview of this dynamic see Mead, “National-mindedness and International-mindedness” 315-317.
explains, “their universality rests on the fact that they are shared and can potentially be shared by any one else ‘who might find himself in the same position’” (25). The achieved universality inherent in the terms Mead analyses form the foundation of the “rational” universals of contemporary liberal conceptions of politics, for example, the universality of law as it applies to any discrete, rights-bearing individual and, thus, reflects the formal and abstract universality inherent in the decision on the part of ostensibly free and equal individuals to obey and uphold the law for mutual benefit. In effect, Mead conceives of the principle of democratic government—“that there are common ends in which men are individually interested, and that these individual interests in community ends may be made the basis of government” (“On Nationalism” 294)—as the principle of cooperative human behaviour made explicit. Thus, according to Mead, even abstract universals are a reflection of the social constitution of the self, of, that is, the fact that the determinate selves we become are always dependent on and achieved through our adjustments to a shared experience of life in community; it is only out of the definite interactions and specific possibilities of communication and self-understanding available to us in social life that we become selves capable of autonomy and agency—that we become the individuals we identify as abstract and rights-bearing.

In contrast to the liberal tendency to assume that universals are unchanging, Mead ties his account of universals to the changing terms of social interactions and shows that universals are themselves subject to change. Even if modern institutions are realized in social wholes that involve various groups and a diversity of possibilities of self-expression such that what is desirable to some members of the social whole will not be desirable to others, and even if, as a result, the capacity of modern, democratic institutions to support our ability to negotiate large-scale cooperation among individuals and groups with diverse interest is due to their “abstract
universality,” the capacity of such institutions to accomplish the large-scale negotiation of interests is, nevertheless, itself only ever an explicit recognition of a definite situation. Modern political institutions thus only ever maintain their democratic integrity so long as they are explicitly recognized as sites of such negotiation, negotiations through which adjustments to shared terms of cooperation ensure that such terms reflect the concrete interests of the individuals involved.176

(b) Modern Political Institutions

According to Mead, the concrete possibility of modern democracy arose through struggles in specific historical circumstances. Let us now consider Mead’s account of the historical emergence of modern democratic institutions and come to see that the universals entrenched in liberalism derive from responses to the historically specific origins of modern democracy even as these theories, as Hoff expresses it, “neglect the historical social relations through which these particular rights came into being and through which they were justified” (207). Mead explains that while modern institutions inherited the task of ensuring that the common good is enforced, these institutions had to be realized before they could respond to the social cohesion necessary within a large-scale and diverse society. Indeed, while modern democracy depends on the recognition of the ends pertaining universally to members of the political group, the initial recognition of large-scale or “universal” cooperation could be achieved only through the recognition of a common enemy. Problematically, the antagonistic roots of modern democracy led to the failure to continue to acknowledge the connection between democratic principles, on the one hand, and interpersonal negotiation and recognition in the context of social life, on the other. It was a collective antagonism towards a common enemy and

176 See “On Nationalism” 279.
a recognition of the powers to be overthrown that had to arise before the rich content of social
life could be attended to and contribute to making the diverse and conflicting interests of the
members of the larger new society the subject of the negotiations that preserve the common good
in concrete and evolving ways. For example, as Mead illustrates with reference to definitions
“taken from the declaration of the rights and duties prefixed to the French constitution of
September 23, 1795,” the formulation of rights derived from an expression of the necessary limit
to the specific power that suppressed the exercise of activities that interested individuals
(“Natural Rights” 222). While rights were formulated for the sake of protecting concrete interests
and possibilities, they were articulated abstractly in terms of the powers that were in place
(“Natural Rights” 222-223). Rights were articulated abstractly not because that articulation
was supposed to capture and express what was worth fighting for, but because the articulation
was itself a mode of defense and a bulwark against the forces that threatened the newly
recognized social whole.178

The specific rights that came to be our so-called universals also dictated the role of
communal forms of enforcement, on the one hand, and the purview of political institutions on the
other. As Mead writes, “Into public opinion enters all that has any place in the consciousness of
the community, while political control is exercised only through the interests that go to make up
the political individual” (“On Nationalism” 297). That which falls to the community to protect is
that which does not need direct protection against an enemy. Thus, modern political articulations
exclude many of the interests of those who fought in the original situation, especially interests
that have to do with the individual’s particular place and mode of participation in the social

177 Mead also acknowledges the progress achieved by these institutions, as well as positive changes in the function
and orientation of institutions; see “On Nationalism” 273, 276-277.
178 While I do not trace inequalities that arise from the way political terms are articulated, it should be noted that
both Rousseau and Marx offer such an account; see Hoff 208. Rawls offers a summary of Marx’s critique on pages
176-179 of Justice as Fairness. For Marx’s own account see On the Jewish Question 56-71.
whole. The acquisition of the perspective necessary for political participation, then, correlates with the disintegration of the perspective through which one orients one’s self towards the endeavours that perpetuate one’s ability to perceive and interpret oneself in and through the experience of others and to maintain a meaningful connection between one’s experience of others and the projects that define one’s life. When this orientation remains dominant, democratic life undermines the cultivation of the concrete domains of human life that its institutions are supposed to protect, and the well-being of humanity and the alleviation of human suffering are not taken to be the object of social actions. Let us examine this dynamic more closely.

According to Mead, the division between private and public leads to a situation in which the institutions on which we depend are themselves able to contribute to the common good only with the help of individuals, while these same institutions cultivate in individuals a self-interested attitude that blinds them to the demands of community life. In effect, modern political institutions cultivate in individuals attitudes that undermine the potential of these institutions to contribute to, as Aboulafia puts it, “the fostering of a democratic temper,” and to disclose and protect the common good (Cosmopolitan Self 2). Mead’s account of the distinction between private and public is imbedded in his critique of the impulses manifest in the political understanding of property. He explains that because modern government is oriented towards the protection of the rights of the abstract political individual, government is expected to protect both private property and the common good, a dual task that has repercussions for how property is understood:

The individual is abstract because only the impulse of having and holding, the impulse out of which property arises in the community, and that of hostile self-assertion which,
under social conditions such as have arisen in modern democracies, becomes that of self-government are recognized as preconditions of our social order […] This situation has a double effect. On the one side, community action leading to change in the conception and definition of property is regarded as attacking the foundations of society, while on the other hand activities springing from impulses that give rise to the family, education and science, art and recreation are conceived of as dependent upon the action of the state.

(“Nationalism” 299)

The self-interested impulses towards property and self-assertion are related to the failure to acknowledge that concrete common interests form the foundation of collective life. Moreover, the self-interested attitude perpetuates a situation in which the individual’s capacity to acknowledge the demands of others and her own social whole withers continuously and in which any effort to support the life of the community is interpreted as an infringement on the rights of hostile, proprietary and self-interested individuals.

Due to a lack of support for the domains that contribute to the development of the individual, modern institutions fail to maintain their own conditions of possibility. Indeed, according to Mead, the right to property, and rights in general as well as the private interests related to them, rely on the realization of concrete social life as much as on the political institutions:

The whole procedure emphasized the divorce between the abstract political and economic man from the rest of human interest, impulse and endeavour. And yet the actual structure of society depends as necessarily upon the other sides of human nature as upon these, and in the end it cannot be possible to so grudgingly recognize other than political and
economic activities in the operation of social control, that operation which we call
government, with the consent of the governed. (“On Nationalism” 301)

Effective government depends on the cultivation of individuals even if the institutions of
government articulate themselves in terms of a division between abstract, economic interests, on
the one hand, and those pertaining to the development of the individual, on the other. Despite the
dependence of government on the development of individuals, the articulation of government
shaped the perspective of individuals in ways that encouraged individuals to recognize only
abstract and economic interests, and this shaping contributed more and more to the
disappearance of productive avenues for social cooperation.179 As a result, goods such as
“family, religion, art and recreation, and the community training of children” (“On Nationalism”
300) where rendered vulnerable and unprotected while the political individual remained
protected. While there is no intrinsic distinction between goods pertaining to the group as a
whole and goods pertaining solely to the individual, democratic government instituted that
distinction as the condition of possibility of self-government and did so without assuring that all
the conditions necessary for the recognition of the common good, including goods necessary for
the development of the person, would continue to be met.

Let us now turn our attention more directly to modern political institutions, first by
addressing risks involved in the dependence of such institutions on articulations of the rights of
individuals and, next, by considering briefly how these same institutions, especially the courts,
can function effectively as sites in which the common good can appear. Mead offers two
examples illustrating the dangers inherent to modern political institutions. First, Mead refers to

179 Aboulafia characterises the responsibility of a democratic society to its citizens:
    For democracy to flourish, Mead would tell us, society must recognize that it has an obligation to assist its
citizens in the actualization of their potential. A society that does not is simply less than a just society. For
Mead, it is also one that will fail to realize a truly democratic order, for such an order requires an active,
flourishing and engaged citizenry. (9)
the rise of factories which deprive workers of the fundamental social basis of their status as political individuals and, thereby, of the benefits that property is supposed to secure; unfair pay and unfair distribution of profit deprives the factory worker of the economic independence that is acknowledged as necessary to all individuals, as well as to the common good generally. An abstract conception of the economic interest of individuals, then, has the power to undermine the democratic political system that enables it, and this power is increased when the positive content of rights is not recognized and articulated by democratic political institutions. Thus, the necessarily abstract character of instrumental institutions is also the site of a particular vulnerability to private interests of the powerful.

The second problem to which Mead brings our attention is the fact that singular self-interested individuals can manipulate abstract universals to their own advantage. Mead explains that in a situation of competition it is possible that the institutions of government will fail to ensure that judgments fall in favour of the public interest, and that these same institutions will thereby allow the interests of a particular few to prevail over the interests of others:

I think I shall not be subject to contradiction if I assert that in this country at least, where we have gone further than men have gone in other countries in the attempt to formulate fundamental rights in our own written constitutions, and in the use of the courts for their protection, we have not succeeded in rendering definite what the rights are which should receive these guarantees, and that behind the effort to state and defend these rights have always loomed other issues, which theoretically should be kept out of the question, but which come to be the deciding influences in the action of the court. (“Natural Rights” 229)
The institutions that, in principle, make visible concrete common interests are also sites in which private interests can block the appearance of the common good. Thus, as above, if it is only abstract, universal articulations that are protected, we will fail to see that these articulations are always open to interpretation, and we will be less likely to be able to prevent articulations that benefit some over others.

Despite risks such as these, so long as our social whole continues to include large-scale and diverse interests, abstract instrumental institutions remain necessary, as does the location of the appearance of the common good within them. While necessary, these institutions are always fundamentally dependent on the perspectives of individuals. As Mead writes, “It is evident that categories which are to serve all these purposes must be abstract and empty of content and that they should get their content through the struggle which arises on the bare floor and between their distant walls” (“Natural Rights” 229). Yet, according to Mead, the necessarily abstract character of our political articulations reveal their own insufficiency, especially if we consider the effect of this abstraction within the institutions designed to protect the continued appearance of the common good. For example, as Mead explains, while allowing the common good to appear is the proper role of the judicial process, the abstract character of rights threatens this function even as it remains necessary:

What is of importance is that all the interests which are involved should come to expression. For this purpose it is of importance that no hasty action should take place. And from this standpoint it is clear that political guarantees which delay action in the legislatures and constitutional provisions which are enforced in the courts have the same function. (“Natural Rights” 230).

Similarly, Lefort points out that during elections, when popular sovereignty is supposed to manifest itself, “the citizen is abstracted from all the networks in which social life develops and becomes a mere statistic” (18-20). For an account of this issue and its relation to the appeal of totalitarianism, see Dallmayr 92-94.
It is never rights alone that are the proper object of protection; the abstract character of rights enables them to stand as objects of institutional protection even as their content changes to reflect the common good.

Although we have not explicitly addressed Jürgen Habermas’ contribution to these issues, it is worth nothing that the issues described above, those pertaining both to the risks associated with modern political institutions and to the fundamental importance of such institutions, allow us to see why Habermas is right to defend public discourse and “abstract” principles as necessary to the important function of such institutions. Through Habermas’ work, it becomes possible to think through the way in which the political institutions of modernity can indeed function as sites in which the common good appears.

Habermas is oriented towards developing the means and standards according to which rational public debate and “compromise-formation” can become substantial and guiding features of our otherwise technical institutions through the inclusion of “a rational consensus on the part of citizens concerned with the practical control of their destiny” (Theory and Practice 255). To support our freedom-oriented interests, blind faith in instrumental rationality must be replaced both by a critical appraisal of and pragmatic approach to such rationality.\(^{181}\) This approach draws on a “quasi-transcendental” understanding of the conditions and presuppositions of speech.\(^{182}\) It also involves a reorientation and recultivation of the individual such that she no longer conceives of herself merely in terms compatible with the abstraction inherent to instrumental rationality nor holds blindly to the norms and dictates of such rationality.\(^{183}\) As Fred Guerin writes, “our

\(^{181}\) In “Three Normative Models of Democracy,” Habermas explains that “the fairness of compromises is measured by presuppositions and procedures which for their part are in need of rational, indeed normative, justification from the standpoint of justice” (“Normative Models” 245)

\(^{182}\) For an account of the “quasi-transcendental” character of Habermas’ project, see Guerin 204-205.

\(^{183}\) Attesting to the importance of the attitude and competence of the individual, Guerin writes: Habermas is attempting to articulate an “enlightened” guide for human action in speech and social interaction that helps us distinguish and determine that our authentic knowledge-oriented interests always
emancipatory interests can be historically situated and made transparent once we begin to grasp the extent to which modern social configurations rely more and more on an instrumental conception of rationality” (198). With this change in the individual’s capacity to participate, a change substantially supported by Habermas’ “universal pragmatics,” rational political discourse may support constructively the potential of otherwise technical political institutions to make visible and realize a rational compromise between the substantive interests of divergent groups and, indeed, to do so through public discourse in which symmetry and equality characterizes the relationship between interlocutors. As Guerin writes:

Habermas thematizes the critical potential of a normative mindset through relations of symmetry and equality between interlocutors [...] At a social and institutional level the relations of symmetry and equality have the capacity to coordinate diverse aims, enhance social solidarity and critically address systemic distortions that follow when we permit instrumental and strategic forms of rationality to colonize all aspects of the lifeworld—for example, those aspects of the family, of interpersonal relations, our diverse ethical and cultural understandings, and of course, the public and political spheres of interaction. (Guerin 211)

Thus, although an in-depth account of Habermas’ contribution to the way in which the common good is realized in institutions is beyond the purview of this analysis, it is important to note that Habermas’ work is important to the analysis underway here; it offers critical and practical insight

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184 In his essay, “What is Universal Pragmatics?” Habermas explains that “universal pragmatics” refers to “the research program aimed at reconstructing the universal validity basis of speech” (5).

185 The focus on the individual emerges in Habermas’ earlier work in which he compares the relationship between patient and therapist in Freudian Psychoanalysis to the change the political individual must undergo. For a brief account of Habermas’ position, see Guerin 199-200.
into the important function of modern political institutions and does so in part by attesting to the importance of the contributions of individuals to diverse society.

Returning to our analysis of Mead, we may recall that it is within the very institutional processes that can accommodate the changing character of rights that the limitation of our abstract articulations comes to light—we see that it is always incumbent upon individuals to identify and interpret the content they lack. Indeed, the inherent limitations of our modern institutions—their very lack of concrete content and specific interpretations—makes it incumbent upon us to recognize that those institutions depend on and have arisen out of the capacity for human sociality, the very capacity that opens our eyes to the legitimacy of the other’s claims and to the social world of which we are a part. Mead endorses the idea that the individual’s capacity to recognize the common good and to respond to it, either by approving of that which makes it manifest or disapproving of that which hinders it, is what our modern political institutions require. As such, the only way to work toward the alleviation of large-scale injustice and the disintegration of community life consists in the cultivation of the individual’s capacity to recognize the common good, a capacity that itself depends on her participation in the life of the community. As Mead expresses this idea:

Furthermore, whatever confidence we may have in the brakes and drags which we put upon the wheels of popular action, we should not forget that the ultimate guarantee must be found in the reaction of men and women to a human situation so fully presented that their whole natures respond. However lacking in rigidity and solidity this may seem, it is at bottom the only guarantee of a human right to which we can finally appeal. (“Natural Rights” 232)
The common good is threatened not solely through an unfair distribution of material goods—though this distribution is important—but also through the shutting down of opportunities for the cooperative realization of society as the rich and diverse life necessary for the full expression of the person. The loss of these possibilities pertains to our failure to continue to cultivate our ability to recognize our embeddedness in the social world: to recognize ourselves in the gestures of others, to recognize that we appeal to ourselves in our treatment of others and to recognize that the whole social world informs the selves that we are. In short, the human sociality that derives from the sharing of language, custom, tradition and the pleasure and struggle of human recognition are all threatened by the abstract institutions that now house and shape our interactions. While these institutions continue to be positive contributions to human society, no aspects of life beyond the strict limits of modern institutions are free from the basic interpretations of personhood and personal liberty out of which these institutions grew and to which they now contribute.

In sum, the positive aspects of our modern institutions rest both in their capacity to disclose their own limitations and in our capacity to recognize that disclosure as a concrete situation to which we must respond. Thus, our modern institutions both tend to cultivate a self-interested attitude on the part of individuals and depend on the recognition of individuals in order to fulfill their role. Accordingly, the division between private and public, and between property and the intersubjective domains of community life, tends to undermine the development of individuals even while our institutions depend precisely on this development. Inasmuch as our institutions allow for the appearance of the common good, they can, in principle, disclose their own limitations, as well as the necessity of developing extra-institutional strategies for shaping individuals capable of participating effectively in liberal democracies. Thus, the unavoidability
of abstract institutions makes interpretation and the perception of the common good, on the part of a plurality of diverse individuals, the real foundation of the promise of modern political institutions.\footnote{Indeed the common good is not a universal in the ordinary, abstract sense. Aboulafia’s description of Mead’s account of international-mindedness illustrates this well:

The cosmopolitan is one who has not only experienced numerous communities but understands and can anticipate how the movement from one social situation to another requires being prepared to live with unrealized expectations and novel events. In other words, an ability to grapple with novelty clearly is part of the enlarged mentality for Mead. It is also part of a democratic sensibility, one that entails being prepared to take novel and different opinions seriously. (47) }

**Section Two: Heidegger and Politics**

Let us now consider what Mead’s work contributes to Heidegger’s analysis by addressing the following themes: the public character of modern politics and our tendency to take things for granted; the instrumental character of modern political life and its system-like character; and the self-conception at work in political life as it relates to our inability to question ourselves and our consequent blindness to the intersubjective dimensions of political life.

Heidegger’s own comments on political life fall into three main categories: (a) his overtly political addresses such as his *Rektoratsrede* or his later *Der Spiegel* interview; (b) his comments on the Greek *polis* and the “strife” at work in it, as well as his work on Nietzsche (and Jünger),\footnote{Dallmayr points out that Heidegger’s writing on the Greek *polis* emerged during the time when Heidegger distanced himself increasingly from Nietzsche and when he was oriented towards the Greek *polis* as it differs from the modern understanding of politics. Dallmayr writes:

Thus in lectures presented during the summer of 1942, Heidegger differentiated sharply between the classical conception of *polis* and modern or contemporary politics with its ideological politicization of life in general. Whereas the classical *polis* was a place of questioning and unsettled openness, modern politics aims at the implementation of historical plans. (27) }

and (c) his critical comments on liberalism and socialism.\footnote{Heidegger’s overtly political writing, as well as the *Der Spiegel* interview, is collected in Wolin’s *The Heidegger Controversy*. For the original German, see *Reden und Andre Zeugnisse*. For Heidegger’s writing on the *polis* see *Introduction to Metaphysics*. In that work, he also addresses the Greek term “dike,” justice. Those interested in his account of *dike* should also consider his “Anaximander fragments (OTBT 242-281/Holzwege 321-374). On the *polis* see, Fried *Polemos* 139; de Beistegui *Dystopias* 128-145.} Since this chapter is primarily
concerned with the limits and vulnerabilities of modern institutions, as well as with what
Heidegger might have to say in response to them, we shall limit our focus to the last of these,
Heidegger’s explicit comments on liberal political life.¹⁸⁹ By turning to Heidegger’s comments
on liberalism and government, we shall be able to see how his views on political life are
expressive of his insights into modernity, insights that we have developed into an account of
institutions. Through this comparison, we shall be able to connect his insights into modern life
and human experience to the demands and weaknesses of modern political life. My thesis is that
Heidegger’s thinking sheds light on the “systematic” character of modern political life and thus
on the degree to which liberal democratic ideals are vulnerable to the self-perpetuating character
of economic life. His thinking sheds light also on the idea that this vulnerability is mitigated only
by a revolution in our self-understanding, a revolution that must be supported by a culturally rich
community life and which is, consequently, impossible within the scope of rational political
discourse which invokes the very conception of the subject that must come into question. My
approach to Heidegger’s comments on political life, then, will build upon the Heideggerian
account of modern institutions we saw in the previous chapter as well as, implicitly, on the
account of our Being-with-one-another that we saw in Chapter Two.¹⁹⁰

With Mead’s claim that the principle of democracy is the principle of human social
cooperation made explicit, we see a version of what Heidegger identifies in Contributions to
Philosophy as the “outbreak of the massive” (85/[121-122]). In Heidegger’s analysis, the
outbreak of the massive is an effect of the metaphysically bereft character of modern life; in the
loss of the experience of something inherently significant, a loss related to our experience of
ourselves as subjects, we rely more blindly than ever on our capacity to take for granted the

¹⁸⁹ For an account of how, in Introduction to Metaphysics, Heidegger distinguishes between (Russian) Marxism,
(American) positivism, and (Nazi) facism, see Dallmayr 28.
¹⁹⁰ Fried also attends to the political relevance of Heidegger’s account of Dasein’s Being-with-one-another (137).
terms of human life. “What one does” or “how one behaves,” “who one is” or “how one belongs” cease to be matters of the life of the community and fail to be recognized as questions we must answer. According to Heidegger, it is imperative that possibilities that are definitive of our human existence not be “immediately and generally known and comprehended by all and displayed for the public eye” (Contributions 21/[28-29]). Moreover, as he sees it, this making-public of our goals, our treating them as predetermined realities that transcend us, is characteristic of “that way of thinking that is called ‘liberalism’” (Contributions 18/[24-25]).

Despite concrete contexts of recognition through which we may come to see free, modern society as a political possibility, the abstraction necessary for the possibility of modern political life has the effect of allowing us to fail to recognize that when we posit clear objective goals, we make implicit claims about who and what we are. According to Heidegger, liberalism allows us to disavow our responsibility for these claims; instead of experiencing themselves as Dasein, as the site of an essential decision with respect to the character of historical humanity, “The many have the ‘good fortune’ of finding themselves in something extant and thus of pursuing what belongs to them by following what is useful to the whole” (21/[28-29], emphasis in original). While Heidegger’s disparaging comments about liberalism may be cause for concern given his own political past, his critique resonates with Mead’s concrete description of the development of democratic politics. Heidegger’s analyses thus allow us to see that modern political life relies on our tendency to take things for granted, specifically, on our acceptance of organization and social control for its own sake and the self-conception with which this is associated. While Mead rightly celebrates this insight as the precondition of large-scale and diverse modern society and

\footnote{Heidegger credits Nietzsche for recognizing the need to define ourselves, but since, as Heidegger sees it, Nietzsche failed to see that metaphysical character of his own thinking, “the place for the overman’s will is another realm of another grounding of being. This other being of beings has meanwhile (and this marks the beginning of modern metaphysics) become subjectivity” (“Nietzsche’s Word” OTBT 190-191/Holzwege 255).}
of the overthrow of oppressive bonds, Heidegger points to the danger of our sense of shared goals as it enables the modern political project. Stated plainly, this danger consists in our increasing incapacity to sustain a vital relationship to something for its own sake and in the fact that the political ideal that rests on this capacity is vulnerable to the effects of our taking political life for granted rather than living up to its inherent possibilities.

Let us now consider how Heidegger’s thinking relates to the instrumental character of our modern political institutions. As we have seen, it is as conceived of instrumentally that liberal democracy was articulated in terms of the specific divisions we saw above, namely, the language of rights and the division between the political individual and the community. Heidegger diagnosed the misinterpretation of the terms of human life as merely instrumental in Introduction to Metaphysics, writing that, “As soon as this instrumental misinterpretation of the spirit sets in, the powers of spiritual happening—poetry and fine arts, statescraft and religion—shift to spheres where they can be consciously cultivated and planned” (50/IM 51, emphasis in original).192 According to Heidegger, an instrumental understanding of political life divorces it from spirit—from a relationship to Being according to which human life unfolds as the meaningful happening of historical reality. This divorce can go unnoticed, largely by instantiating a domain of organization and regulation in the place or space where significance could have arisen.193 If we apply Heidegger’s critique to Mead’s analysis, we see that, when conceived instrumentally, the potential significance of modern political life, and the individual and collective possibilities associated with it, was translated into the language of rights and the divisions that accord with

192 According to Derrida, Heidegger’s 1935 use of the term “spiritual” is ambiguous: it is both a “metaphysical gesture” of support for National Socialism and a criticism of the reification of spirit on the part of the regime which marks Heidegger’s increasing distance from political life (Spirit 40-46). For a summary of Derrida’s position, see Dallmayr 33-40.
193 See Elden “Rethinking the Polis.”
it. Since this articulation is instrumental in and of itself insofar as it derived from the need to overthrow specific powers, this very articulation became the site where planning, organization and calculation replaced the human possibility of inaugurating its own significance. Political life, in other words, became the domain of organization and planning. Again, then, Heidegger draws our attention to the delicate balance implicit in modern political life; it is necessarily accomplished through instrumental administration and thus always risks being reduced to it.

Commenting on Heidegger’s diagnosis of the modern world, Michael Zimmerman writes,

> The scientific-technological mode of knowing was supposed to serve the worthy goals of freeing humanity from material deprivation and pacifying human social relations. Once the status of the moral-political and aesthetic-personal spheres was almost completely eroded, however, science and technology began to serve not only goals consistent with the emancipatory aim of the Enlightenment but also goals consistent with the striving after power for its own sake. Heidegger, too, concluded that Enlightenment modernity’s talk of emancipation and progress was merely a mask for modern humanity’s quest for infinite power. This quest makes humankind brutelike, deprived of an ontological *ethos* that assigns limit, order, and measure to human existence. (“Ontological Decline” 202)

As Zimmerman explains, the classification and orderability needed for modern political life—differentiation among “the spheres of science, art, and ethics or politics,” as well as the need to make “[i]ndividual experience […] consistent with the kinds of judgments permitted by governing institutions” (“Ontological Decline” 202)—became the medium of the subordination

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194 Such a view resonates with the view that both Pöggeler and Dallmayr express, namely that liberalism is concerned with the “implementation” of values, see Dallmayr 29; Pöggeler “Heideggers politisches Selbverständnis” 42-47.
of the possibility of political life to the goal of power. \(^{195}\) In short, Heidegger criticizes the increasingly technological character of political life, and sees it to be enabled and perpetuated by the replacement of the possibility of significance with an instrumental attitude. \(^{196}\)

Indeed, in his critique of modern political life, Heidegger connects the rise of private experience to our dependence on the technological state. Let us consider how this development is related to our inability to question our political self-conception. \(^{197}\) Again in *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger states, “For even in the ‘liberal’ worldview there lies this self-righteousness, in the sense that it demands that each be allowed his opinion” (27/ [37-39]). The liberal worldview allot to each her own, both in the domain of opinion and in terms of the association between the political individual and her right to private property. Insofar as the modern individual depends on the state for the protection of that which is her own, she holds fast to the political articulation that she takes to be to her advantage even if, or when, this articulation makes her subject to the terms of modern political life rather than involved in realizing and defining them. The protection of the private domain is, then, related to the individual’s refusal to question her political identity, a refusal that becomes more and more entrenched the more the

\(^{195}\) In *Contributions*, expressing the effect of the orderability of the modern world, Heidegger explains that the essence of liberalism is the “self-security” in terms of which humanity takes its nature to be determined and life to be open to total organization (38/[53-55]).

\(^{196}\) We may consider how the capacity to “challenge” and “expedite,” which we encountered in the previous chapter in our analysis of “The Question Concerning Technology,” is at work in political life. As we saw, the modern technological attitude uncovers the characteristics according to which reality admits of classification and, as “expediting,” looks to the uniform criterion of economic value to discern the unique feature that distinguishes, for example, one part of land from another, the feature that admits something or someone into the system of profit making. The economic system, meanwhile, is taken for granted. The conception of the common good and its expression in abstract rights is compatible with the Heideggerian analysis, especially insofar as modern democracy requires a capitalist system in which rights and private property coincide. The universality of modern political representation is precisely the identification of the freedom and protection that must be rendered to individuals for their participation, their entry, into the modern economic world, and the terms of this world are economic because they derive from efforts to undermine the economic hegemony that characterised earlier forms of social life.

\(^{197}\) Commenting on the relationship between Heidegger’s anti-humanism and his politics, Dallmayr writes:

Post-metaphysical thinking in Heidegger’s sense cannot possibly subscribe to naturalism or biologism, because the latter depend on the intellect as their correlate. Translated into political terms this means that the critique of modern ideologies (deriving from metaphysics) cannot possibly entail support for Hitlerism or National Socialism or any kind of naturalistic politics (treating nature or human nature as given) (47).
individual conceives of the abstract economic state as her only recourse. By refusing to question herself, the political individual perpetuates the disavowal of historicality and specificity. Thereby, she ensures that the liberal conception of the abstract individual contributes increasingly to a lack of diversity and creativity. Consider Gregory Fried’s account of Heidegger’s view of liberalism:

Liberalism as a grand political project reflects the universalizing spirit of modern science by deducing principles that apply to a homogeneous human subject, granting to each certain rights, and globally prescribing political dispensations that accord with “natural law,” without regard to the meaning of Dasein’s belonging to a particular history and place. (183)

In other words, the individual’s refusal to question herself becomes largely responsible for the fact that human beings are about “to subordinate the course of history to the plans and orderings of a world government” (OTBT 280-281/Holzwege 372).198 In this political analysis, as with our earlier metaphysical one, “what apparently offers resistance and a limit to machination is only the material for further elaboration and the impulse for progress and an occasion for extension and enlargement” (Contributions 76/[108-109]). In other words, both the political and the metaphysical subject takes her identity for granted the more she relies on the systematic character of modernity to take care of whatever difficulties she may face or whatever needs she may have.

Thus, by virtue of the individual’s refusal or incapacity to question the meaning of the political articulation on which she depends, the political and economic realities of modern life

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198 Heidegger’s view that modernity has lost its historical dimension is also related to his critique of the “biological foundation of liberalism. For example, see Contributions 20/[26-28], 37/[52-53]. In “Strategies for a Possible Reading,” Dennis Schmidt explains that Heidegger’s interest in maintain the historical dimension of human existence puts him at odds with the Nazi racial policy (“The Greeks” 40). Fried also addresses this topic (183). For Heidegger’s comments on “blood and race” see Contributions 347/[492-494].
are able to ensure their own stability and continued existence. We saw above examples of the sorts of injustices that are a consequence of the way our economic reality supervenes upon the ostensible political goals of modernity; the individual risks losing the possibility of constructive participation that rights are supposed to protect, and the “universality” of legal and political articulations becomes an avenue for the self-interested activity of singular individuals. Under the domination of economic life, neither of the basic presuppositions of liberal politics is protected; the “rational individual” is removed from resources that render her capable of participating in political life and the universal terms of political life become overtly partial. Both these tendencies are reflective of the cultivation of a self-interested attitude on the part of individuals, a cultivation that is inevitable in light of the way modern political life is articulated.

Inasmuch as the self-interested attitude is legitimated through the same mechanisms by which the community is rendered vulnerable we should be able to see that Heidegger’s criticism of modern life, and the political, administrative and technological means by which it is perpetuated, is ultimately a criticism of the way our modern institutions fail to keep us oriented toward and conscious of the sharedness of our world. By disavowing the role of others, and of a community of others as the domain in which interpersonal negotiations and recognition are accomplished, in the production of all human domains—in property, politics, science, art, ethical life and language, to name a few—our modern institutions can deprive us of the resources through which we can realize ourselves in terms of and out of our shared human possibilities.

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199 For an extremely helpful account of the relationship between human action and the necessity of transgressing universals, see Hoff.

200 Even if, as Pöggeler asserts, Heidegger underemphasised the importance of practical-political judgement, his work supports the idea of cultivating a sense of responsibility for the political institutions of our current world: “If there is a European responsibility—as Heidegger insisted in his own way—then this responsibility (after the self-destruction of Europe as former heartland) must reside in the effort to accentuate the limited chances of a prudent politics which still remain possible” (“Heideggers Politisches Selbstverständnis” 23-24, 48-51, 54-57). This translation appears in Dallmayr 30.
Attest ing to the necessity of community, of a space for gathering, at the end of his essay “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger turns to a poem by Johann Peter Hebel. There, Heidegger illustrates the relationship between collective human accomplishment and “essence” as such; it is essentially our nature, our essence, to bring into being together that which belongs to each of us, and the root of the word essence implies the cooperative and intersubjective character of human life. As Heidegger tells us, the word “essence” derives from Weserai and refers to the “city hall inasmuch as there the life of the community gathers and village existence is constantly in play, i.e., comes to presence” (QTC 30/VA 31). Our modern world draws upon but forsakes the cooperative and intersubjective character of human existence; it takes, to follow the quotation above, the city hall and other concrete aspects of human life to be separable from and independent of the gathering through which what is comes into appearance. In so doing, something is realized in and through the intersubjective dimension of human life, but this “something” is a groundlessness in the place of what could be the manifestation of a collectively realized significant domain. According to Heidegger, then, what modern political life is lacking, and that to which it may still have recourse, is that very groundlessness that remains a collective possibility.

Inasmuch as the institutions that support economic, cultural and political life are distinctly instrumental, and, thus, incapable of disclosing or supporting substantially the interactions through which shared significance is realized, these institutions present themselves to us as perceivable in terms of their limitations. To perceive the limits of our institutions, however, requires that we be capable of acknowledging the “destitution” of our age and the lack of inherent significance that characterises it. This capacity is, according to Heidegger, what is

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201 With this, we touch on the nature of political life as Heidegger describes it in relation to the polis. For an account of the role of polis in Heidegger’s political thought, see Sluga 209-212; Fried 136-185.
threatened in the modern world, and it is because it is threatened that Mead’s analysis does not go far enough in recognizing what our institutions require. While Mead calls for participation and for the recognition of the common good, he does not address how deeply our modern institutions have affected us, or how to begin to transform that effect. In light of the scope of Mead’s analysis, let us now turn to some of Heidegger’s ideas about art and poetry. In them, he addresses the possibility of recognizing truths about our time, truths that we now know to be relevant to life as governed by our liberal democratic institutions.

Section Three: Heidegger, Art, Poetry

We have found that Mead’s analysis reveals to us the distinct failure of our modern age; the institutions that would enable a flourishing world are incapable of supporting and cultivating the human capacity for flourishing. This puzzle has been attended to in different ways, and, here, I would like to consider Heidegger’s work on art and language as a response to this very issue. If, as we saw above, the necessary way of attending to our institutions draws on capacities that these institutions cannot instil, and if these institutions tend to cultivate the view that it is the task of government to answer to all human interests and the task of institutions to articulate the scope of interests, we have found ourselves in a world that gradually depletes itself of the resources it needs most. In what follows, we shall consider Heidegger’s response to the “destitution” of modernity, understanding this destitution to include the political circumstances just described. What, I argue, we shall find in Heidegger’s work is an account of the irreducibility of the capacity on which our modern world depends most, as well as an account of the experiences that
reawaken and strengthen it. As I shall explain more thoroughly below, this capacity is our capacity for interpretation.

In this section, we shall consider more fully how Heidegger’s essay on the work of art functions as a diagnosis of our current situation, and we shall consider his account of the poet as an account of what is necessary for rekindling in all of us a responsiveness to the interpreted character of our world, arguing that such rekindling is cultivated best in local spaces that allow us to experience the inherent significance of things as the intersubjective dimension of human life—as the very medium of our interaction and of our possibilities of recognition. Finally we shall argue that the continued cultivation of our capacity to respond to interpreted dimensions of existence requires domains of cultural life that are free from the influence of abstract rules, procedure or goals, and that only if this is achieved can the proper attitudes towards our modern institutions be cultivated. This account of the necessary limits of modern institutions, and the need to acknowledge the spaces that must be free from their influence, is what we shall identify as Heidegger’s political contribution and his contribution to institutional critique.

Let us begin by reminding ourselves of themes in Heidegger’s work that point to its potential for the sort of institutional critique outlined above. If, indeed, a Heideggerian politics exists, it is likely that it will revolve around the experience associated with Heidegger’s recurring philosophical concern. This concern is with, as Capobianco describes it, “the temporal manifestation of things; their opening, manifestation, shining-forth to us” (“Greek Experience” 180). In contrast to this, the modern world with which we have been concerning ourselves is characterised by an obviousness that conceals the phenomenon of the happening of presence. How can Heidegger’s concern with presencing be understood as a political concern? As we noted in our conclusion to the previous section, modern democratic politics requires precisely
that we attend to our institutions as the site where the common good appears and, therefore, requires that we cultivate in ourselves an habitual orientation towards our institutions as secondary to and in service of a significance, or possibility, that they do not have the capacity to articulate (recall that the concrete common good is precisely what our modern democratic institutions do not articulate). The reason that Heidegger’s work is relevant here is that, especially in Contributions to Philosophy, he has diagnosed our age as incapable of experiencing anything beyond the obvious terms of our everyday life.\textsuperscript{202}

In what follows, we will consider Heidegger’s claims about our capacity for the kind of responsiveness demanded by our institutions by looking to two of Heidegger’s essays written around the same time, “The Origin of the Work of Art” and “What Are Poets For?”\textsuperscript{203} We shall see how Heidegger’s account of the poet is related to our productive capacity to respond to our specific institutionally governed world by perceiving, through the help of the poet, what Heidegger calls its “destitution” as the demand to recognize ourselves as the interpreting agents we are. More specifically, we shall consider the idea that it is by recognizing ourselves as interpreters that we also recognize both our capacity to attest to and realize and our responsibility for attesting to and realizing the significance of our affairs rather than continuing to allow the instrumental terms of modern life to dictate the value and form of human endeavours.\textsuperscript{204} It is my claim that the limits of modern institutions are revealed and maintained only insofar as we are capable of owning up to a responsibility our own world bestows on us, and that we can live up to this responsibility only with recourse to poetic experience. In the modern world, poetic

\textsuperscript{202} Dallmayr describes the political relevance of Contributions to Philosophy: “In stark contrast with this clearing, the treatise outlined the dominant features of our age, concentrating on mass organization, the unleashing of technology, and the general instrumentalization and ideological politicization of life” (29).

\textsuperscript{203} Both these works appear in the volume Poetry, Language, Thought translated by Albert Hofstadter. “What Are Poets For?” was written in 1926 and, according to Heidegger, had been revised repeatedly up until its 1950 publication in Holzwege. “The Origin of the Work of Art” was written in 1935 and was also published in Holzwege.

\textsuperscript{204} Frank Schalow undertakes a similar project in the context of Heidegger’s relation to German Idealism, see Language and Deed.
experience must be made available within our local communities such that a rich community life is of distinct political importance in our current world because it offers to us domains that are free from the abstract demands characteristic of our institutions and that allow us to confront our dependence on one another.

(a) The “Work” of Art

Let us begin by considering Heidegger’s essay, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” so as to gain a sense of the interpretive task facing us. The work of art makes possible a collective experience of significance not just despite but through the fact that human beings are both capable of experiencing significance and are given that capacity without being given a definite account of the worth and value of anything. The essay considers the role played by the work of art in the event whereby our indefinite capacity to experience the significance of things, actions, ourselves and others comes to mean something specific. As we shall see, in order for us to experience significance, it is imperative that we retain a sense of connectedness and belonging to the unknown: the unknown is both the condition of possibility of significant experience and the reason that experience itself is always indefinite and foundationless, thereby calling perpetually on our interpretative capacity to render meaningful the world with which we are involved.

Heidegger describes the open, or foundationless, character of our day-to-day lives to illustrate the difference between a merely instrumental comportment and a comportment invested with a sense of the unknown, an investment he calls the “reliability” of equipment. Through the reliability of equipment—the sense that our ways of doing and speaking are invested with that which most matters to us—we are capable of sustaining a relationship to the unknown, a relation Heidegger captures with reference to the peasant woman who figures in the essay: “This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy at
having once more withstood want, and trembling before the impeding childbed and shivering at the surrounding menace of death” (PLT 33/Holzwege 19). The reliability of equipment consists in its capacity to absorb and orient our experience of the unknown, our fears, anxieties and hopes, towards the world of which we are a part. Insofar as our projects remain grounded on an experience of the unknown, they themselves become the site of our negotiations with the foundationless character of our existence. In other words, our projects mean something to us only in the face of an experience that discloses to us our lack of foundation and our fundamental involvement in something, in an existence that matters to us despite our inability to comprehend it. When our projects tie us to the world, they appear to us as the opportunity to store ourselves up against our lack of foundation by transforming that lack into the contextualizing world. As Andrew Mitchell describes it:

> The openness of reliability keeps the tool from closing in on itself and falling into orbit around Dasein. The tool thus serves to maintain a relationship with this beyond, to manage and negotiate it [...] Reliability names an excess of the tool directed toward this beyond. But insofar as the tool provided Dasein with a certain worldhood in Being and Time, a rethinking of the tool likewise entails a rethinking of world as permeable to this excess. (Sculptors 9-10)

By maintaining our access to the excess or unknown that characterises our existence, our “use” of equipment necessarily exceeds its instrumental function. Invested with significance, our equipmental endeavours are both task-oriented and the medium of our relationship to that which exceeds our comprehension.

According to Heidegger, it is the work of art that invests the unknown, and thus our experience of our projects, with a distinct experience of significance. Thereby, our equipmental
interactions exceed the confines of utility and take on a definite meaning for us; a hammer, for example, is not simply for nailing, it is the hammer I use to build a house, to make a home for myself. Thus, while the dynamic through which our equipmental interactions exceed the domain of utility requires that they be related to the unknown, these same interactions have a definite significance to us only when the unknown is experienced in terms of a definite significance and ceases to be simply “unknown.” For Heidegger, the transformation of the experience of the unknown into the experience of a definite source of significance is accomplished by art and occurs as the “setting up” of a world (PLT 42/Holzwege 29). As we shall see directly, a world is set up through our capacity to attribute significance to the unknown and to experience that to which we attribute significance as the center of and reason for our worldly affairs. Through art, our own work of attribution and interpretation can be experienced by us as the inherent significance of some definite beyond. Let us turn to Heidegger’s words:

Such setting up is erecting in the sense of dedication and praise. Here, “setting up” no longer means a bare placing. To dedicate means to consecrate, in the sense that in setting up the work the holy is opened up as holy and the god is invoked into the openness of his presence. Praise belongs to dedication as doing honor to the dignity and splendor of the god. Dignity and splendor are not properties beside and behind which the god, too, stands as something distinct, but it is rather in the dignity, in the splendour that the god is present. (PLT 42-43/Holzwege 30)

The work of art sets up by pointing to something beyond it and by delimiting that beyond through a projection of significance, a context in which things matter in certain ways. Through its capacity to point to something beyond it and incommensurable with it, the work of art is able to colour and shape the experience that occurs within the domain it opens up. The work of art,
thereby, gives shape, density and substance to an experience of the beyond, and, insofar as we experience the beyond in a definite way, we allow our experience to be shaped by the work of art and its implicit claims about the character of our wants, needs, fears, hopes and endeavours.

Heidegger describes the implicit claims of the work of art in terms of the “dedication and praise” it performs. The work of art praises, celebrates, a domain it opens up, and does through its self-dedication to it. The work of art “works,” in other words, in terms of the historically and culturally specific experience of the significance to which it gives rise, the significance to which it points through the “dedication and praise” it performs. Art thus opens up the possibility of relating to something greater than ourselves by attesting to the importance of that which contextualizes and thus always exceeds our endeavours. Thus, the work of art reveals for us a meaningful domain by praising something only indirectly available to us; the domain of significance contextualizes our experience only if it also remains ungraspable and unknowable in itself. The domain of significance, the world, is, in other words, the counterpart to our inability to comprehend ourselves and our existence, and its reality, its Being, is related to our own lack of comprehension and certainty with regard to our existence. In Heidegger’s work, the god marks the place of our own lack of comprehension as this very lack is manifest to us as that which we praise, that which sets the terms for excellence and insignificance, praise and blame, success and failure: “As a world opens itself, it submits to the decision of an historical humanity the question of victory and defeat, blessing and curse, mastery and slavery” (PLT 61/Holzwege 50). The god exists in the dedication and praise performed by the work of art. Through the work of art, humanity gains a definite experience of the source of experience, the god, and thereby experiences a world as a reflection of the divine. The work of art thus establishes and shapes the
space in which definite entities and events can mean something and does so by making manifest that which both renders meaningful our goals and projects and exists beyond our comprehension.

By pointing to that which appears to us to have inherent significance without disclosing any specific information about that thing, art shapes our experience of worldly affairs and thereby accustoms us to acknowledging the inherent worth of something without being able to prove or define its significance. Art is able to perform this seemingly contradictory function because the domain to which it opens us is experienced as inherently worthy, as impervious to the demands and standards of everyday life. Indeed, it is by appearing to be praiseworthy despite not being subject to obvious terms of praise that the domain revealed by the work of art appears in its “dignity and splendour.” Art mediates between our experience of concrete reality and our experience of the unknown. Art does not tell us what the god is, but it enables us to experience our own interpretation of the god as substantial and as a proper account of what is valuable and worthy in human life. Thus, art shapes our affairs and gives them a definite look by evoking our interpretive capacity. While we must interpret and decide upon the particularities of the dignity and splendour of the god, we are capable of doing so by virtue of the contextualizing significance art offers us.

According to Heidegger, art has this capacity only insofar as it offers itself to us as a concrete work; fundamental experiences of the affirmation of our own interpretive capacity are associated with definite works. These key works stand for us as distinctive interpretations of the unknown and we look to these works to characterise and justify our worldly affairs. Our sense of what is justified and how our affairs should be ordered corresponds to the “holy” [Heilige]. What we consider “holy,” beyond question and reproach, depends on what we celebrate and admire, on what we interpret as mattering to us in a particular way. As in the quotation above,
what appears in the holy as the god is always also an appearance of the role played by the work of art. Neither appears in itself, but we depend on them equally to store up and secure, to “shelter,” our interpretations in what seems to us to be permanent, whether that permanence consists in the material presence of the work of art or in our representations of the god. It is our experience of the work of art, our experience of the god, that is always specific to our historical and cultural situation, and this specific and seemingly durable and secure experience of what matters is always an experience of our interpretive capacity as the proper ground of our own existence, an existence defined by a capacity to experience its own groundlessness and respond to it through the experience of a significant world and the significance of its own projects. Our experience of the nature of our existence and our experience of the god are inseparable and always specific to our time and place.

To restate what we have just discovered, the work of art enables us to experience our day-to-day affairs in relation to an inherent significance disclosed to us only by the implicit affirmation, performed by the work of art, of our own interpretive capacity. Heidegger’s account of the work of art is, then, equally an account of our interpretive capacity as it relates to our experience of our projects and the equipmental interactions through which they are performed. Heidegger’s account of art in the modern context can now be understood in light of the effect of the work of art on our projects. Heidegger explains that the modern experience of instrumentality is related to an incapacity to engage in the interpretive possibilities opened up by the work of art when he distinguishes between bare equipment, on the one hand, and reliability,

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Bruns offers a view that is slightly different from the account I have just provided. According to him, the work of art is the in-appropriate, and, rather than give rise to the resolution through which all aspects of human life are constituted in a meaningful whole, it offers an experience of “estrangement” though which it becomes evident that the human interpretation of aspects of the world never fully captures them (44). As I see it, both my account and Bruns’ are descriptions of different sides of the same phenomenon; indeed, no resolution could be achieved if the interpretations were not fundamentally unfounded.
on the other. This same distinction is at play in his explicit references to art in the modern context. In “The Age of the World Picture” Heidegger writes, “A third, equally essential phenomenon of modernity lies in the process of art’s moving into the purview of aesthetics. This means the artwork becomes an object of experience [Erlebens] and consequently is considered to be an expression of human life” (OTBT 57/Holzwege 75). Heidegger’s diagnosis of modern art thus brings together the experience of instrumentality characteristic of modernity and the incapacity to engage in the properly interpretive relationship with and to the work of art. The direct relationship between our instrumental institutions and our “aesthetic” experience of art points us towards the possibility of understanding our failure to perceive the inherent limitations of our modern instrumental institutions as a failure to experience our capacity to experience the unknown, an experience in which the nature of our own interpretive existence is implied.

If we want to retain the understanding of ourselves that Heidegger’s work on art offers, we must consider how Heidegger’s insights pertain to our current modern world. Heidegger himself undertakes this task through his analysis of poetry; we shall consider below his analysis of the poet as this analysis pertains to our possibilities of self-understanding, interpretation and meaningful experience.

(b) The Modern Poet

In “What are Poets For?” Heidegger relates the task of the poet to the demands of the modern world. In the essay, Heidegger identifies Rilke’s “valid poetry” as accomplishing the poetic task of reaching “into the abyss” that characterises modernity (PLT 94/Holzwege 274). Heidegger does not simply point to Rilke as the distinctive poet of the modern experience.

Elden argues that the idea of the abyss in Heidegger’s Contributions can be understood as an attempt to experience time-space without recourse to terms of calculation (“Spaces” 821). This account suggests another way that poetic experience is capable of resisting the domination of technology. In this case, it is capable of doing so by regaining the original experience of the terms it deploys and thereby regaining an understanding of everyday experiences such as “nearness and distance, emptiness and gifting, energy and hesitation” (“Spaces” 821).
Instead, he frames his analysis of Rilke with his understanding of Hölderlin’s account of the poetic task of which the modern poet must be capable.\textsuperscript{207} Heidegger’s understanding of Rilke’s timely status derives from his reading of Hölderlin’s “Bread and Wine,” the poem in which Hölderlin asks, “and what are poets for in a destitute time?” (PLT 89/\textit{Holzwege} 269).\textsuperscript{208} Let us look to Heidegger’s account of Hölderlin’s poetry before considering why and how Rilke is, for Heidegger, “a poet in a destitute time” (PLT 94/\textit{Holzwege} 274).\textsuperscript{209}

When Heidegger defines the task of the poet in the time of modernity, he identifies the poet’s capacity to experience the world-inaugurating capacity of poetry in a world in which there are no longer collectively agreed upon bearers or sources of significance—no gods—and in which there are no longer any collectively agreed upon modes of living that arise and develop in relation to a celebrated god. In order to be such a poet, Heidegger explains, it is necessary to have made the need for poetry a subject of poetic questioning and expression: “It is a necessary part of the poet’s nature that, before he can be truly a poet in such an age, the time’s destitution must have made the whole being and vocation of the poet a poetic question for him” (PLT 92/\textit{Holzwege} 272). The poet must be capable of affirming and realizing the inherent necessity and significance of poetic expression in a time that denies to it a specific and culturally affirmed role. The modern poet’s task is, then, distinguished from that which pertained to poets of other ages. Greek poets, for example, told the tales of ancient heroes and divinities and established poetry as the site in which that which distinguishes between heroes and slaves is established.\textsuperscript{210}

\textsuperscript{207} For an extended account of this analysis, see Foti, \textit{Poets} 30-43. John Lysaker notes that Heidegger also invokes Hölderlin when America entered WWII, and “in 1934, when the engines of death had begun to solidify their hold on the future of the European Jewry” (183).

\textsuperscript{208} In his analysis of other works by Hölderlin, Heidegger attributes to poetry the capacity to inform and incite “politics” defined as the people’s self-constitution through a state. While Rockmore takes this to indicate Heidegger’s continued allegiance with totalitarian politics (129), I am arguing that that the recognition of the distinctively modern state changes the nature of the poetic response.

\textsuperscript{209} For an account of Heidegger’s understanding of Hölderlin as the poet of the German \textit{Volk}, see Fried 162.

\textsuperscript{210} Lysaker describes possible subjects of modern poetic expression:
In the modern world, however, to invoke Heidegger’s lexicon, borrowed from Hölderlin, “the gods have fled” and, with them, the reason for poetry as such. Their absence marks humanity’s lack of an orientation towards something that asserts that human life is worth living and that offers itself as that against which individuals and groups can measure and interpret their actions. In this context, the poetic task is to transform this lack into a poetic concern. Thus, the modern poet ultimately celebrates the fact that human beings have the capacity for interpretation even though there is nothing on which to ground that capacity. Explaining our circumstance Heidegger writes that “Only in modern times does this nature begin to unfold as a destiny of the truth of all beings as a whole; until now, its scattered appearances and attempts had remained incorporated within the embracing structure of the realm of culture and civilization” (PLT 109/Holzwege 289). The task of the modern poet, then, is to experience the loss or emptiness characteristic of the modern world and to attempt to transform that loss into an experience of significance and into a way of life that is worthy of humanity.

It is in the context of the lack of gods and our blindness to our own interpretive capacity that the modern poet receives her task. For Heidegger, the poet is able to experience the destitution of the modern world only by simultaneously experiencing her own nature as an interpreter. He writes, “there is a turn with mortals when these find the way to their own nature” (PLT 91/Holzwege 271). 211 To turn into her own nature, the poet must experience herself as the site where the experience of significance is inaugurated and thereby come to see that the

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211 Sheehan explains the distinction between Heidegger’s account of the “turning” required of modern humanity, on the one hand, and the “turn” in Heidegger’s own work from the transcendental analysis of Dasein to a more direct engagement with Being, on the other (“Kehre and Ereignis” 3-5). The language of turn is generally credited to Richardson who identifies Introduction to Metaphysics as the clear beginning to Heidegger’s later thought. For Heidegger’s own comments on the shift in his thought, see “Preface” in Richardson’s Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought.
possibility of a god, of significance, arises only out of that capacity: “That nature lies in this, that mortals reach into the abyss sooner than the heavenly powers” (PLT 91/Holzwege 271). In Heidegger’s account, this abyss is the Abgrund, the lack of ground and, thus, of “the soil in which to strike root and to stand” (PLT 90/Holzwege 269). To experience a lack of ground is to experience it as that in which the possibility of significance still exists. The poet who experiences groundlessness also experiences the stirrings of the possibility of significance: “He among mortals who must, sooner than other mortals and otherwise than they, reach into the abyss, comes to know the marks that the abyss remarks. For the poet, these are the traces of the fugitive gods” (PLT 91/Holzwege 271). According to Heidegger, the poet is capable of staying within the experience of the groundlessness of significance and of experiencing within that groundlessness the rise and happening of significance that has had the capacity to shape the affairs of historical humanity; the poet experiences our responsibility, our capacity to be responsible, for the shape of our affairs. As Heidegger says of Rilke: “When Rilke experiences the Open as the non-objective character of full Nature, the world of willing man must stand out for him, in contrast and in a corresponding way, as what is objective” (PLT 110/Holzwege 290). According to Heidegger, the validity of Rilke’s poetic response consists, at least in part, in Rilke’s ability to face the technological world in terms of the appropriate poetic experience. This response consists in bearing his capacity for the open in the face of the objective world.

If Heidegger ascribes the explicit recognition of the conditions of possibility of our participation in an interhuman reality to the poet, it is both because of his view of the place of art

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212 As Lysaker points out, Heidegger refers to this essential experience of groundlessness throughout his corpus: “he does write of a Grundstimmung (1934), a dichtende Wort (1942), a Gedichtete (1943), Grundworte (1946), and a Gedicht (1954), all of which supposedly articulate the essential site of whatever poetry is in question (respectively, Hölderlin’s Germanien, Andenken, Der Ister, and the corpuses of Rilke and Trakl)” (185).

213 Sallis offers an account of the abyss in Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy; see “Grounders of the Abyss” esp. 189-196.
in human existence and because of his view of the dire state of modern humanity for whom, in his account, only the experience of the instrumentality characteristic of modern technology is possible. Unless we come to recognize the fundamental influence of the essence of technology on our basic attitudes and orientations, we are not capable of the mode of engagement required for the experience of those dimensions of human life that exceed calculability. Furthermore, because the technological character of the modern world has informed our everyday activities and our experience of reality—and, indeed, how we perform the reality that has shaped us—it is this very technicity that must be experienced as the result of our interpretive relationship with an alterity that exceeds us. In other words, the demand to which the poet responds is seeing our modern projects in their destitution, their lack, without being lulled by the pretense of significance offered by our world, and, thus, seeing in this world the limitations it imposes on our own capacities.

Thus far we should have been able to see that Heidegger’s account of the modern poet is compatible with our interpretation of the work of art. Above, explaining the “work” accomplished by art, we came to see that the work calls for and mediates the fundamental interpretation of significance and shapes the influence of such interpretation on the course of human affairs. The account of the modern poet, meanwhile, demonstrates that it is the poet’s task to disclose the nature of human involvement in an interpretation that was otherwise mediated and concealed by the work of art. While these two point to the same structure of interpretation, they also point to the fact that the work of art must answer to a different task in the modern age; in the modern world, rather than conceal our interpretive involvement in the inherent significance of the beyond, the work of art must explicitly disclose the inherent possibility of our own
interpretive capacity and, thereby, render this capacity explicit for us. The work of art must also somehow secure for us the sense that our own interpretation is the proper foundation of our meaningful reality. If art can accomplish this task, two further things will have been achieved. First, we will have gained a sense of our own responsibility for investing our projects with significance and, on the basis of that, the ability to judge with respect to the limits of our interpretation. Second, we will have come to understand the contingent character of interpretation and, without undermining the validity of any one interpretation, have found ourselves open to the possibility of the validity of the interpretations of others. Let us now come to see that Heidegger’s work supports the idea of the distinctly modern role of art.

(c) Art and the Modern World

In the modern world, the experience of a lack and of the demand to answer to our capacity for interpretation cannot be experienced by us in a unified way. In other words, in the modern world, we must affirm the partiality of our perspective, our place within a larger instrumental whole, and answer to the demand that we interpret from within the locality afforded to us. To experience ourselves as interpreters, we must accept that our experience of definitive significance is necessarily local and delimited, and that, given the global reach of the

214 Compare Lefort’s account of democracy as oriented around an “empty place” devoid, in particular, of sovereign power, and, consequently, of the possibility of constituting a unified political community; see 223-226.
215 What I am advocating here is different from the view Heidegger expresses in the epilogue to “The Origin of the Work of Art.” There, he asks, “is art still an essential and necessary way in which truth happens which is decisive for our historical existence, or is art no longer of this character?” (PLT 78/Holzwege 68). In the essay, the happening of truth defines a historical people, and Heidegger is, therefore, asking whether or not art still has the capacity to give rise to an authentically historical people. There is much evidence to suggest that Heidegger never forgoes his conception of an authentic Volk. Nevertheless, the view I am advocating, and for which I am arguing Heidegger’s work provides evidence, is that the demands of art are different in the modern world precisely because our institutions have changed the nature and scope of our authentic interactions.
216 Dallmayr explains that from the 1930s to the beginning of the 1940s, “Heidegger’s political thought was preoccupied, with growing urgency, with the issue of world domination seen as the goal of competing global ideologies” (27).
technological mastery of the world, a local experience is nevertheless the sole possibility of interpretation and significance now available to us. Let us turn to Heidegger’s work to find support for the idea that our modern experience of significance is necessarily local.

When speaking of the loss definitive of the modern world, Heidegger refers repeatedly to the need for a “measure” and does so by following the third stanza of Hölderlin’s elegy “Bread and Wine.” In Heidegger’s account, it is the task of the poet to be the receiver of a “measure,” a sense of herself, that also admits various interpretations on the part of others:

One thing stands firm: whether it be near noon

Or close to midnight, a measure ever endures,

Common to all; yet to each his own is allotted, too,

each of goes toward and reaches the place that

He can (quoted in PLT 93/Holzwege 273)

I propose the following interpretation of these lines: “measure” refers to that which allots to entities their way of presenting themselves, and such a way of presenting is always related to a fundamental experience or interpretation of our existence.217 If it is the modern poet who receives this measure, then we may recognize it as having to do with the very fact that we interpret, and with our self-recognition as otherwise groundless interpreters.218 If, in our time, there exists a measure common to all, but that can also be distributed among individuals in different measures, this measure consists in a recognition of our capacity for interpretation.219

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217 By pointing to the idea of measure in the context of poetry, Heidegger contrasts the possibility of poetic measure with that which denotes the kind of calculation at work both in technology and in the political organization of the Nazi regime. For a brief account of the use of the word “measure” that stands in contrast with the use of measure in the poetic context, see Elden “Spaces” 816-817.

218 Lysaker explains that poets offer a measure at the end of metaphysics (183). Lysaker’s account of this measure is developed by considering Heidegger’s own distinctive way of “reading” poetry, a way that stands in contrast to established poetics such as, for example, those of psychoanalytic or Marxist readings.

219 Compare Heidegger’s claim about the “undecided character of the being of the gods, whether there be one or many” (Contributions 308/[437-438]).
Inasmuch as a recognition of this capacity is itself an experience of significance, it is one that admits of different ways of being realized.\footnote{While I will not be taking it up here, it is worth noting that Heidegger develops strategies for coming to understanding what is essential in the work of great poets, and that this work of clarification and understanding is, according to him, necessary for coming to understand poetry in way that can fundamentally transform our Dasein; see Lysaker 186.}

Let us now consider how this interpretation is related to our capacity to experience the limitations inherent to our modern institutions. As we saw above, the modern world has organized projects to such a degree that they do not open out onto a significance that is distinctly their own, but remain, instead, caught within the system of instrumental economic value. The poet may be able to disclose to us the meaninglessness of this instrumental orientation, thereby allowing us to experience the fact that our subordination to economic terms is alien to our own nature. That is, if we come to understand our nature as interpreters through a transformative experience made possible for us through the poet’s work, we shall also come to see that the uniform, instrumental character of economic value does not correspond to our human capacity for interpretation, and that, insofar as our projects are reducible to that value, the projects we adopt cannot answer to our nature as interpreters.

Finally, we need to consider how and where the experience of the poet is made manifest in our modern world. Let us turn to Heidegger’s account of the “preservers” of the work of art to see this.\footnote{Compare Heidegger’s account of “Dwelling” that we defined, in Chapter Two, as coming to understand together our specific moment and the possibilities available to us. Lysaker describes the relationship between dwelling and poetry, emphasising how poetizing is, according to Heidegger “at the heart of \textit{Wohnen}” (187).} In Heidegger’s account, the “preservers” of the work of art respond to what is revealed by the work of art by incorporating what is revealed into the shape of human affairs. The work of art has a “displacing” effect in that it has the capacity to move us such that we experience the ordinariness of our affairs as questionable by virtue of the experience of the
extraordinary offered to us by the work of art, and it is to this displacement that the preservers respond. Heidegger writes:

To submit to this displacement means: to transform our accustomed ties to world and to earth and henceforth to restrain all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to stay within the truth that is happening in the work. Only the restraint of this staying lets what is created be the work that it is. This letting the work be a work we call the preserving of the work. (PLT 64/Holzwege 54)

We act as preservers of the work of art when, in response to it, we disavow our ordinary interpretation of aspects of human life. Such a disavowal is necessary in order for us to perceive the technological, systematic and instrumental character of our institutions.222

Zimmerman explains that at its peak, the ordinary experience of technology would involve our acceptance of the determination of all things as subject to consumption, and that this acceptance would amount to a disavowal of the constitutive role of our interpretive capacities: “Were such domination complete, there would be no alternative way of disclosing things other than as flexible raw material. Hence, there could be no recognition, however dim, of the fact that human Dasein contributes in some way to the disclosure process” (“Authentic Selfhood” 128, emphasis in original). To overcome the effect of the technological perspective, it becomes necessary to disavow the authority and obviousness of our everyday affairs. This disavowal, however, is never simply a negative perspective on our day-to-day affairs; it is, rather, an experience of the fact that all our affairs arise on the basis of that interpretive capacity that opens us up to the shared public world.

222 Consider Lefort’s claim that democracy renders visible the institutional and instrumental systems of power, and hides the social basis of unity: “In my view, the important point is that democracy is instituted and sustained by the dissolution of the markers of certainty. It inaugurates a history in which people experience a fundamental indeterminacy as to the basis of power, law and knowledge, and as to the basis of relations between self and other, at every level of social life” (228, emphasis in original).
Heidegger points to the intersubjective aspects of preservation. Explaining that preservation consists in a knowing on the basis of which we are capable of facing steadfastly the “unconcealedness” of Being, Heidegger describes the domain in which preservation occurs:

Preserving the work does not reduce people to their private experiences, but brings them into affiliation with the truth happening in the work. Thus it grounds being for and with one another as the historical standing-out of human existence in reference to unconcealedness. (PLT 66/Holzwege 55)

To preserve the work, then, is to experience the disclosure it performs as the ground of our being “for and with one another.”223 To be for one another or with one another corresponds, as we saw in the second chapter, to our capacity to experience ourselves in and through others. Insofar as our experience is inherently open to the other and necessarily invested with the character and shape of our worldly interactions, to experience ourselves in terms of our interpretive character is to experience our openness to others as the condition of possibility of the interpretive engagement that constitutes us as the individuals that we are. Accordingly, the preservation of the work of art occurs through a recognition of our interdependence which awakens in us the capacity to recognize in our interpretive capacity the shared ground of our identities. Thus, preservation is related to how we experience ourselves to be part of a particular group that constitutes itself as such through a collective agreement about the significance of its (our) own affairs.

Since, however, the modern experience of art is tied to the experience of the instrumental character of our institutions and the consequent “insignificance” of our ways of doing things, the

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223 In Being and Time, Heidegger points to the place of communication in the explicit constitution of our Being-with (162/205). There, he explains that through discourse, the constitution of the “there” of Dasein is understood as a collective accomplishment. This same disclosure is at work in the later essay, but the later essay elaborates more on the effect of this disclosure on the sense of being a member of a historical community. For an account of the role of communication in the disclosure of the “there” of Dasein, see Powell.
modern experience of art can only disclose the impossibility of our self-constitution as a historical people; when our institutions, their broad scope and their instrumental character—our modern mode of “usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking”—are revealed to us, also revealed is their fundamental distance from the experiences of significance that create for us a meaningful shared world (PLT 64/Holzwege 54). Thus, in the modern world, works of art enable us to experience and affirm the foundational character of our own interpretive natures, to experience our openness to one another as a condition of possibility of any foundational interpretation and to experience our institutions as insufficient to the intersubjective reality that enables our experience of inherent significance. Thus, art in the modern world can move us to acknowledge the necessity and role of others in the realization of the significance that we recognize ourselves to be capable of affirming. Further, because the modern experience of art makes us capable of recognizing the fact that our modern institutions are fundamentally instrumental and do not offer themselves as sites open to the experience of the inherent significance of human affairs, the modern experience of art reveals to us that it is only the interactions with others that take place beyond the confines of our institutions that enable a collective affirmation of the significance of our affairs.224

224 The structure though which extra-institutional communities constitute themselves as a meaningful group is also relevant for the structure of resistance against global-scale institutions. As Nancy Fraser explains, there are modes of oppression that occur on a global scale rather than by remaining confined to the nation-state. Fraser writes, “Faced with global warming, the spread of HIV-AIDS, international terrorism, and superpower unilateralism, many believe that their chances for living good lives depend at least as much on processes that trespass the borders of territorial states as on those contained within them” (Fraser 14). Other problems include the fact that transnational corporations are responsible for the ongoing struggles of “peasants and indigenous communities,” and that “the new governance structures of the global economy” have empowered large corporations and investors by exempting them from high taxation and regulatory restrictions (14). Many of the strategies of resistance employed by those who are most affected by these issues are also transnational; networks of solidarity and resistance tend to form around shared issues rather than groupings determined by issues that fall within the economic or social organization of the nation. For example, Fraser explains that while issues of recognition still arise around the demands for citizenship on the part of those who live within the confines of the nation, new kinds of groups are forming around different sorts of issues. She offers as examples anti-World Trade Organization protestors and “critiques of transnational corporate predation and global neo-liberalism” to illustrate the fact that affected individuals and groups are linking their struggles to global resistance against global forces (14). Issues of women’s rights, the discrimination of religious and
The collective affirmation of significance we have associated with the task of preservers is itself associated with our ability to recognize the legitimacy of experiences of significance that differ from our own. Inasmuch as we are able to recognize one another as co-creators of a significant reality, we become capable of recognizing the legitimacy of the claims of others. This is so because my distinctly local experience of significance is always also an experience of what exceeds my locality, and, inasmuch as our global, instrumental institutions exceeds our local experiences, we must recognize the necessarily local experiences of others.\textsuperscript{225} Thus, by pointing us to the definite localities as the proper location of our experience of the inherent significance of human life, the experience of art and of its preservation allows us to perceive the instrumental character of our institutions, how this character limits them in relation to our experience of significance, and how our always local experiences of significance must accommodate the local experiences of others who depend on the same instrumental institutions as we do.\textsuperscript{226}

Let us now conclude by tying our understanding of the importance of culturally rich communities to the analysis of modern political institutions offered above.\textsuperscript{227} Above, we saw that ethnic minorities and human-rights activists are linking specific struggles to global movements aimed at reforming international law, mobilizing international opinion and setting up institutions, such as the International Criminal Court, that can address injustices that ostensibly occur within the confines of the nation-state (14). Those involved in efforts of resistance are both recognizing the force gained by addressing issues on a global rather than national or community level and thereby strengthening their ability to fight their particular battles by referring to transnational issues, and engaging in resistance against global structures of power.

\textsuperscript{225}The need to recognize the legitimacy of the other’s claims is, as I see it, also connected to the possibility of self-criticism and the criticism of the larger social whole to which we belong. For an account of how Dasein is tied to its particular community through a “critical” type of belonging that requires it to interpret handed down possibilities in light of the exigencies of its own time see Odysseos 37-61.

\textsuperscript{226}Dallmayr explains that Heidegger’s later writing on Hölderlin, Schelling and Nietzsche mark a turn away from attempts to revive the spiritual powers of Germany and towards an acceptance of “the disempowerment of spirit.” His description of Heidegger’s attitude is compatible with a recognition of the sense of significance, the “spiritual powers” of others:

he parted company with the long standing preoccupation of Western thought with rule and dominion and particularly with the the spirit’s right to rule (epitomised in the Platonic Philosopher King). Only by abandoning the right to rule, by enduring dispersal and submission—he slowly came to realize—could spirit of any kind be salvaged and subsist as a generous source of human empowerment. (47)

\textsuperscript{227}Lefort points to the importance of maintaining what he calls the symbolic dimension of individual and group interests in order to avoid the (totalitarian) reification of diversity that can arise when political institutions appear strictly instrumental (132-233). See also Dallmayr 94.
our modern political institutions depend on the capacity of individuals to recognize the limitations of such institutions, as well as the roles they can play in revealing the common good. As we have now come to see, through our involvement in culturally rich community life we gain the capacity to recognize the proper role of instrumental institutions, as well as a sensitivity to the concrete interests of others insofar as those concrete interests pertain to their capacity to live out of a possibility of the inherent significance of human life. It is insofar as we recognize that we are engaged in the project of making our lives meaningful, and that this project has no definite shape, that we gain the capacity to recognize that other groups are making just this same effort and to recognize that just as our shared institutions must support our local projects, they must also support the projects of others, not by determining the shape of projects, but by allowing others the freedom to shape their own affairs. By acquiring a self-understanding as interpreters, we can come to understand that our particular interpretation of significance should not be made universal, and that the limit to its possibility of universality implies the legitimacy of the experience of significance that defines other communities. Dallmayr describes the political perspective of Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy: “Only through self-transgression or openness toward difference can a people escape the danger ‘of becoming mired in itself and of idolizing the conditions of its existence as something absolute or unconditional’” (103). The openness or self-transgression of a people opens it to others through its own self-recognition as fundamentally open and interpreting. While this sustaining diversity is always the goal of our modern political institutions, what I hope to have demonstrated is that these institutions can only move towards achieving this when culturally rich communities become the norm. I hope also to have demonstrated that the instrumental relations and endeavours that undermine community life
are fundamentally in opposition to the very purpose for which our instrumental institutions were first imagined by us as possibility—making a home for ourselves in the world.

Conclusion

Our modern, political institutions are an accomplishment. However, as we have seen in this chapter, they are accomplishments that were only ever achieved through our recognition of a particular possibility and that remain forever vulnerable to our ways of seeing and understanding them and the life to which they ought to contribute. Through an analysis of Mead’s work we came to see that the antagonistic attitude that was necessary for the rise of modern, liberal institutions has repercussions for the way the universality of such institutions came to be understood primarily in relation to self-interested, economically delimited political subjects even as these same institutions were supposed to provide the resources that contributed to the development of individuals capable of orienting them towards their ability to make visible the common good. Having identified the importance of the perspective of individuals for our modern institutions, we returned to Heidegger’s work to relate this political situation to the metaphysically bereft instrumental institutions of modernity we analysed in the previous chapter, and to consider the role of the work of art in cultivating in us the capacity for understanding ourselves as interpreters and, thereby, for understanding both the limitations of our institutions and the inherent necessity of local and culturally rich community lives in a world governed by global-scale institutions, lives that necessarily include developing the capacity to respond to how other local groups realize their own distinct ways of living meaningfully.
Conclusion: Responsibility and Possibility

Let us now consider and summarize what we have accomplished. In the first two chapters of this dissertation, we focused on basic features of our interactions with the world and with others. In Chapter One, we came to understand that we develop into determinate individuals and find ourselves in determinate worlds only on the basis of, and by drawing on, such basic, implicit and persistent features as they make manifest through us and for us a culturally and historically specific world of things with determinate significance, a significance shared by others and through which we experience of the meaningfulness of our projects. While we found that our own sense of the worth and value of our projects is indeed predicated on our concrete bodily interactions with the world, we also found, more essentially, that it is through such interactions that we are open to the culturally specific sense of the world, and that what we do and who we are fundamentally depend upon how we take up this sense and realize it in an historically specific way, and as the medium of our specificity. We found, further, that our process of self-realization in the terms and through the possibilities afforded to us by our world invests us with an enduring sense of the significance of our specific actions and modes of accomplishment as these express and constitute our unique stake in the world, and that precisely because the way we experience the significance of our actions and modes of accomplishments remains implicit to us, our actions and modes of accomplishment can become barriers to our capacity to continue to contribute effectively and rewardingly to the very worldly possibilities in which our culturally
and historically specific sense of the world was first manifest to us as significant features of the meaningful world we share with others.

Chapter Two began with a consideration of our constitutive openness to others. We found that, just as our basic bodily engagement with the world is foundational to our more developed meaningful experiences and possibilities, it is out of the possibilities of significance manifest in our way of being open to others that the various concrete and implicit interpersonal features of our shared, public contexts arise, and that such features are always manifest in and as the institutions of our world. Indeed, we found that our very sense of ourselves as mattering to others is itself realized in the implicit norms that correspond to our Indifference to one another; in the concrete social infrastructure of our world whereby, by Leaping in, we attend to the carrying out of the tasks we recognize collectively to be necessary; and in our capacity for Leaping ahead by assessing and criticising effectively the interpretations, and the executions of them, that pertain to the public identities, resources and possibilities by which our world is constituted. We came to recognize, further, the institutional dimensions of such features, and to recognize institutions as sites of interpersonal negotiation constituted both by a public articulation of the roles we recognize as possibilities for individuals, and as the implicit effect on us of the public articulation of our world, the articulation out of which we involve ourselves in the process of negotiating the ways in which we matter to one another. We found, further, that it is out of the sense of the world accomplished by our institutions that we are first able to orient ourselves within the world, that this orientation always involves encountering a world rendered determinate by efforts on the part of others, efforts that made manifest their ways of realizing themselves with and for one another; and that, rather than encounter a determinate institutionally governed world to which we must submit, we are always engaged in the performance and realization of our institutions.
Finally, we found that institutional critique must begin with a recognition of the contingency, vulnerability and changeability of the institutions for which we are responsible, and that our responsible and meaningful recognition of one another, a recognition only ever enabled and inspired by our originary openness to the sense that we matter to others, involves us reciprocally in the recognition of one another; moreover, we found that such recognition always occurs in our specific efforts to contribute meaningfully to the possibilities that define each of us by orienting ourselves helpfully and considerately towards one another and, thereby, realizing and making manifest in specific ways the very institutional resources that derive essentially from our sense of mattering to one another.

The third chapter presents a Heideggerian account of distinctly modern institutions as these correspond to a basic disavowal of the dimensions of our interactions that, as we came to recognize in the first two chapters, are the medium of our meaningful experience of the world. Modern institutions correspond, we came to see, to the objectification of the inherently intersubjective resources of human life in the form of “values.” Instead of being realized as attempts to live up to a shared sense of the significance of our world, such institutions are constituted instrumentally and driven by economic value which has become the ultimate measure of the possibilities afforded to us through our meaningful interaction with the world and with one another, as well as that which risks suppressing such possibilities. While recognizing ways in which instrumental, profit-oriented modern institutions both draw on and contribute to the disappearance of distinct possibilities of intersubjective life, we also recognized the accomplishment and the potential inherent in the capacity of such institutions for organization and coordination. We recognized, further, that because the means by which organization and coordination are accomplished are transparent, such institutions offer to us the possibility of
recognizing these capacities as accomplishments, and indeed as accomplishments that do not need to continue to be oriented towards profit making. Additionally, we recognized that even as our modern institutions objectify, and thereby undermine, significant human possibilities, they continue to point to these domains as possibilities we may, once again, take up. Heidegger’s account of the art museum and the modern university allowed us to illustrate the distinctive features of modern institutions, and, finally, his account of “decision” allowed us to consider our responsibility for identifying and realizing the potential for significant life that can be realized in ways supported, but not circumscribed, by the distinctly modern institutions that derive from a suppression of the dimensions of life that contribute to such potential.

In the fourth and final chapter, we considered the political implications of distinctly modern political institutions, concluding that liberal, democratic political institutions tend to undermine the cultivation of individuals capable of engaging with such institutions in the way those institutions require in order to serve the common good. To attend more concretely to modern political institutions than Heidegger’s work allows, we turned to G. H. Mead’s sociological work and found there resources for analysing modern political life that are compatible with the analysis of Heidegger’s work accomplished thus far: Mead’s focus on the intersubjective constitutions of institutions is related to his critique of modern institutions, especially to his critique of their disavowal of the dimensions of intersubjective life out of which they first arose, of their cultivation of a self-interested attitude on the part of individuals and of the specific injustices to which they give rise. Given the scale and diversity of modern society, as well as the very real possibility of social cooperation out of which modern political institutions arose, Mead endorses modern political institutions despite their inherent risks, affirming not only that such institutions are dependent on individuals capable of responding adequately to them and
to what they disclose, but that such dependence is a feature of all institutions inasmuch as institutions are realized through the presuppositions, perspectives and actions of individuals. According to Mead, we would be wrong, therefore, to continue to criticize modern political institutions without also considering ways of cultivating responsible attitudes towards such institutions on the part of individuals. Mead’s analysis of the weaknesses, accomplishments and needs of modern political institutions resonated both with the analysis of the first two chapters, and with the Heideggerian account of distinctly modern institutions presented in Chapter Three. As a result, it allowed us to relate Heidegger’s work on art and poetry to the political situation of modernity; we considered Heidegger’s account of the role played by the work of art in the experience of a meaningful world. More specifically, we attended to the distinct task of the poet in a world increasingly bereft of the intersubjectively constituted interpretations of significance, interpretations that enable our projects and institutions to contribute to our interactions with and recognition of one another in ways that do justice to the nature of our existence and to our constitutive openness to one another. On the basis of these considerations, we concluded that the experience afforded by art, especially shared meaningful experiences of art in the contexts of culturally rich community life, are important resources for cultivating our ability to recognize the limits of our modern institutions and of orienting these institutions towards the very possibilities that, if left to run their own course, they will continue to suppress.

Overall, we found that Heidegger’s rich account of our involvement in the world helps us to understand the nature of our embeddedness in institutional life, as well as to understand the fact that institutional life is ultimately an accomplishment of our inherent openness to one another and of our fundamental experience of mattering to ourselves. In this way, Heidegger’s work contributes to our understanding of distinctly modern institutions, the instrumental
character of which can be contrasted with the ways institutions shape and realize our shared worlds, and contributes also to our understanding of what is required of us as fundamentally interpretive beings in cultivating a world adequate to the possibilities of significance bequeathed to us by the very nature of our existence.


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