Abstract: Martin Heidegger’s essay “The Origin of the Work” is self-presented as a discursive attempt to “see the riddle” that is art. Here I present this riddle as inhering primarily within Heidegger’s crucial ontological, phenomenological notion that art is the happening of truth understood as (un)concealment. This interdependent play of revealing and concealing inheres in the artwork’s work-being. I bring (un)concealment into view by primarily explicating how the work explicitly “sets up a world” and sets “forth the earth.” Within the unity of the work, the intimacy of these opponents instigates their strife. The world as the open realm of intelligibility, disclosedness, and the earth as self-concealing, that which only shows itself as refusing the disclosure of the world, are reciprocal. I argue that this circling reciprocity is what is most puzzling about the relationship between our being-in-the-world and the world as set up by the work itself. Here we find important clues to the mystery of creativity, which I find to be more a responsiveness to purposiveness in the process of creation than the having of a prior mental intention that is then adequately represented in the work, or not. All of this generates from a careful analysis of Heidegger’s understanding of human being as Dasein. Thus, I rely heavily, at first, on an exposition of his ontology in Being and Time. Finally, I attempt to make visible the significance of all this through an interpretation of Manet’s masterpiece, A Bar at the Folies-Bergère.
What is art? Is this even an appropriate or answerable question in the modern age? If everything from the beautiful and enchanting to the abrasive and shocking to the ponderous and absurd is called “art” in modernity, can we find any grounding justification or distinguishing aspect on the basis of which we judge things to be art or just cliché, playing to the art industries current fancies, and so on? And furthermore, even if such an enormous, elusive task was adequately worked through, are we be certain that it would be worthwhile?

Martin Heidegger gives us an entryway to the problem of art: ontology. Here, we try to follow his lead, working through key ontological and phenomenological notions in his magnum opus, Being and Time, as well as other essays in division I of this essay. We address the question of our being-in-the-world, specifically lingering on the often confused, multi-layered meaning and usages of “world.” A section on Heidegger’s notions of “Truth and (Un)Concealment” completes the first division. These efforts are then brought to fruition in division II as a helpful preparation of the ground, as it were, for a reading of Heidegger’s major work regarding art, “The Origin of the Work of Art.” Within this wide-ranging yet subtle, poetic text we focus primarily on understanding how, Heidegger claims, the work of art works. We will, with any luck, end up recognizing the validity of the main thrust of his essay: that art is the happening of truth as (un)concealment, and that this takes place in the works work-being as the strife of world and earth. This is achieved by elucidating Heidegger’s main example of this work-being, a Greek temple as it functioned for the ancients. I conclude by demonstrating the insight provided by a Heideggerian interpretation of a work closer to home, as it were, for us moderns – Manet’s A Bar at the Folies-Bergère.
Being and beings – The Ontic and The Ontological

Throughout Heidegger’s career, the question of Being (Sein), the task of his philosophy as ontology, was fundamental. In Being and Time (published in 1927), often considered his magnum opus, he primarily addressed how the human, through a hermeneutic analysis of its own being, comes to the question of the meaning of Being. However, he suggests in the explicit project of the book, which went unfinished, that starting with human being was a propaedeutic for a different understanding of Being itself (BT, 37). In a footnote accompanying his mention of the key missing division, “Time and Being,” he implies that, after interpreting the unique type of being that we are, we might “turn back into the source” and find “presencing from out of this source” (BT, 37). As might have been expected, he reformulates the problem in his later philosophy, after the “turn,” as he himself tellingly dubs it, to bring into focus the idea that the determination of our being “derives existentially-ecstatically” from Being itself (LH, 236). Yet, we do not lose ourselves in such turning, but, (can) achieve an understanding of our being as ek-sistence, as out-standing within the historical open clearing of Being. Ultimately, we find that our being and Being are reciprocally related. “The Origin of the Work of Art” was first delivered as lectures from 1935-6, situated firmly within this turning period. Thus, before we can deal with the notion of unconcealment crucial to beings and Being, and Heidegger’s elusive, poetic demonstration of its explicitness in works of art, we need to ground our discussion in his phenomenological ontology.

1 Throughout the text I will refer to Heidegger’s correspondent works with the following very literal, parenthesized acronyms: Being and Time (BT); “Letter on Humanism” (LH); “The Origin of the Work of Art” (OWA); “On the Essence of Truth” (ET); “The Question Concerning Technology” (QCT).
As has been suggested in the wording above, Heidegger argues that there is a vital ontological difference between *Sein*, Being, or more literally translated as the infinitive verb, “to be,” and *ein seiende*, a being, entity, thing that is disclosed, unconcealed in Being. Another way of putting this is to distinguish the ontological from the ontical. The ontical contains what we know, think, perceive, imagine, feel, and so on, about entities (i.e. what is studied in the “positive sciences”), while the ontological is about how, a priori, beings are available to us as such beings (BT, 9-11). The ontical is determined, or rather, made possible, by the ontological. And yet, “Being [Sein] is always the [how-]being of a being,” an entity (BT, 8). *Sein* is not a highest genus, an entity’s “essentia,” or the “predicative what-being” of it (Boedeker Jr, 159; see also BT, 3, 41). Nor does it merely refer to the fact that some thing exists, is a thing “objectively present” – thatness is still only of a being, i.e. the ontical (BT, 41). On the contrary, whatness and thatness are dependent upon the howness of some thing’s being. This will become clearer as we continue.

So how are we to inquire into the meaning of Being? Heidegger’s answer in *Being and Time* may seem obvious: by investigating our own being, which Heidegger names *Dasein*.

*Dasein* is,” uniquely, “a being,” i.e. entity, “which is related understandingly in its being toward that being [Sein]” (BT, 53). Being, insofar as it is functioning in the background, is already understood, albeit obscurely, by the average everyday being of Dasein in a pre-ontological way (BT, 13). Thus, an interpretation of the ways in which Dasein tends to encounter beings as significant for itself should allow us to move past the ontic whatness and thatness of the things there-in revealed to a more lucid (no longer pre-)ontological howness of their constitution as

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2 “How-being,” as a helpfully redundant expression of a being’s mode of being, is borrowed here from Edgar C. Broedeker Jr.’s “Phenomenology.” It simply marks in English translations and interpretations the ontological difference already indicated above.
such beings (BT, 7). In other words, the conditions of the possibility of beings (as disclosed to us) are intimated in, and then explicated through interpretation of, concrete ontic experiences with which we are familiar. Put differently in a footnote: “the investigation of the a priori requires the proper preparation of the phenomenal foundation. The nearest horizon which must be prepared for the analytic of Dasein lies in its average everydayness” (BT, 49 fn.10). This is no easy task for, as Heidegger points out, “what is ontically nearest and most familiar is ontologically the farthest, unrecognized and constantly overlooked in its ontological significance” (BT, 43). This method of interpretation that demonstrates the givenness of specific, ontological structures of our relation to Being is often called in the literature Heidegger’s “hermeneutic circle.”

But what is Dasein, besides a being concerned with its Being? How is it constituted as such? Here we move deeper into Being and Time.

**Being-In-the-World**

Da-sein is literally translated as “there-being,” which implies Heidegger’s critique of the subject-object dichotomy (BT, 45). Dasein, as the sort of entity that we are, is not grasped by the individual in mental isolation, like Descartes cogito, sum – “I think, I am.” “There-being” literally expresses that we have to be there, which can be interpreted as “in-the-world.” Heidegger is rejecting the traditional, fundamentally Cartesian notion of epistemology as an explanation or justification of how a subject, a “knower” with private, internal states, accesses the objects of these states in external “reality.” This subject-object divide itself is fallacious, or at least unusable for Heidegger’s task for it is concerned primarily with the ontical (see BT, 93-100).
Dasein is always already being-in-the-world as a unitary phenomenon. It is not that we find ourselves as existing outside of, but still in a relationship to some reality of things set over against me, rather “these other,” inner-worldly “beings can only ‘meet up’ ‘with’ Dasein because they are able to show themselves of their own accord within a world” (BT, 58). This “of their own accord” is perhaps an attempt to make clear that Dasein as a unification of us with the world does not simply put us in control of the world. This is not what Heidegger is doing. Even though Dasein is pervaded by fore-structures, the world is not a simple projection of the mind. I am not free to will how things show up as such, nor are my mental states sufficiently determinative of the world. And yet, our decisions, which paths (of those available, ontologically3, for us) we follow in life, and so on, do alter, if not revolutionize our world. We will find these ideas working later on in works of art – specifically, Heidegger’s Greek temple example and my interpretation of Manet’s A Bar at the Folies-Bergère.

The notion of world is crucial for Heidegger. As explicated in Being and Time, the term “world”

(1) ontically refers to “the totality of beings which can be objectively present within the world;”

(2) ontologically denotes “the [how-]being of these beings named in” (1), “indeed, ‘world’ can name the region which embraces a multiplicity of beings” – i.e. the realm or horizon4 in which things can be and are encountered as…, e.g. handy;

3 Which is also to say historically. The ontological constitution of the world changes across historical epochs. In fact, these ages are primarily marked by shifts in how the world is disclosed, how and what is available as intelligible for us. This will become clearer later on in the “Truth and (Un)Concealment” section.

4 Horizon, while used synonymously with “realm,” “region,” emphasizes that we typically do not see the boundaries between worlds as spatially delimited environments that we enter into or leave behind. And, moreover horizon better connotes that potential beings not “physically
(3) pre-ontologically means “that ‘in which’ a factual Dasein ‘lives,’” i.e. works, is moved, dwells, does…, etc.; and
(4) ontologically indicates its “worldliness” as a priori perfect (in terms of its tense, “already”) disclosedness (BT, 65). This is an aspect of world itself as a whole, as an open realm, and not the things there-in.

These numbered meanings will be used throughout this paper to mark the specific interpretation of the word “world” in Heidegger’s texts. Where the notion combines meanings I will attempt to make this known. This will become much more important for puzzling over the much more “poetic” usage of the word in “The Origin…” essay.

The wordliness of the world, when functioning correctly, is not explicit, but latent. We don’t (normally) witness the making-available, as it were, of an entity. Quite the opposite, the world ontologically, already (4) is disclosed as relevant (2) (BT, 84). All innerworldly things (1) are embedded in a network of references to other things as significant (3) to what it is for-the-sake-of, in-order-to, in need of, etc (BT, 85). The world of beings in which Dasein finds itself absorbed – for example, when working in an everyday way, without conscious reflection – is already, a priori freed to be relevant for Dasein (BT, 83). This a priori freeing to be relevant is the worldliness of the world.

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5 “The concept of facticity implies that an ‘innerworldly’ being has being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its ‘destiny’ with the [how-]being of those beings which it encounters within its own world” (BT, 56). Phrased differently, the how-being (2) of entities constitutive of the world (1) reflects Dasein’s definite way of being-in, of how things are taken care of. But, in a pre-ontological way, this is only hinted in the “publicness” of a park (or a Temple’s holy precinct, as will be shown later) or the “ownness” of a domicile as the worlds in which we live (3).
As Heidegger shows us, in a theoretical, reflective stance where we speak of ourselves as perceiving present objects “over-against” us, the operative how-being is presence-to-hand, and inner-worldly beings are in this way. Put in a way that is perhaps friendlier to an artistic relationship to the world (and less so a technician’s relationship to a work-bench), the world could be described as a horizon of relevance in which the how-being ready-at-hand reveals entities (e.g. tools, materials, subjects, settings, etc.) as appropriate or inappropriate for the evolving artistic project. There is purposiveness here, but it is not, entirely at least, dependent upon the prior having of intentions, a project. It is perhaps better captured as a sort of responsiveness to purposiveness, an attuned understanding, if you will (see the section “Attunement, Understanding, Discourse” below). For example, one who has entered into a flow of writing begins to respond to the unfolding needs of what is written. Perhaps we go back and change things or previous words take on new meaning as the work develops, emerges. Phrased colloquially, one figures out what one wants to, or perhaps what the piece seems to need us to, write in the process of writing. Similarly, the land appropriate for a building-site is assessed beforehand with the project in mind, but this grounding environment, if we are properly attuned, may end up calling for, inspiring changes in the design that we must attempt to understand. The significance of the lee shore or the north-side of the mountain comes into more explicit being as protected, right for a dwelling. Indeed also, as the edifice of the architecture is erected, the landscape may take on a new look as it becomes the “native” place of this building’s space.

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6 This is not just meant in terms of the creator, but moreover related to the preserver of the work who maintains the salience of its work-being as setting up a world. Artistic intuition is a catch-all term thrown around quite a bit but it implies a real sort of awareness that we see in Heidegger’s thoughts on our relationship to art, being-for the work’s self-subsistence. It is present in the artful museum preservationist’s careful maintenance of the original colors in a painting.
These are delicate balances that involve something less like creative imagination that thinks the artwork prior to its coming into being, and more like ontological awareness as the creative process unfolds. Heidegger’s understanding of this interplay will become more prominent later on when we get to his example of a Greek temple in “The Origin…”. However, to bring us back to *Being and Time*, Heidegger’s example of using things tacitly by virtue of their handiness elucidates the central point: there is no (clear) causal relation or direction between how something shows up, solicits our engagement, and how our comportment allows something to show up as relevant for… anything, really. We can only explicate the ontological structure found in this reciprocal, interdependent relation.

To summarize, at the risk of seemingly conflating or not plainly distinguishing the ontic and ontological, the world is an always already open, disclosed, horizon of relevance in which a totality of entities are already, pre-predicatively, referenced as significant – e.g. familiar, strange, useful, obstrusive, etc. – and so solicit action in our comportment, our mode of being-in-the-world. Depending upon the character of this mode of being-in-the-world, morally worthy or unworthy possible actions are made manifest in our deliberation, or, on the other hand, we are more intimately and directly influenced by things as helpful, useful, etc. in our practical coping. In the latter mode, as “an idea comes to me” I reach for my pencil, not because I am explicitly thinking to myself, “I need a pencil,” and thus decide to probe my recent memory or look around in search of its whereabouts. Evidence that the world simply solicits my reaching for the pencil is the fact that I do not register this action as an “attempt to write” until I actually try to and discover that the pencil is, in fact, broken. Is it not telling that the unexpressed “thought” often

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Pre-predicative here refers to what will become more important in the section “Unconcealment” – that we can have propositional statements about entities that are true, i.e. correspond to the thing, only because the thing itself is always already discovered by us, unconcealed for us. This discoveredness is further grounded in how it is discoverable, and so on.
slips from my grasp if I do not have another writing implement immediately available, as the pencil was, and must consciously examine the (disorderly) state of affairs in this room?

In other words, we do not pay “specific attention to” things in their use as useable, handy, but only in their unhandiness does the world come to the fore:

Something is unusable. This means that the constitutive reference of the in-order-to to a what-for has been disrupted. The references themselves are not observed, rather they are “there” in our heedful adjustment to them. But in a disruption of reference – in being unusable for… – the reference becomes explicit. It does not yet become explicit as an ontological structure, but ontically for our circumspection… The context of useful things is lit up, not as a totality never seen before, but as a totality that has continually been seen beforehand in our circumspection. But with this totality, world makes itself known. (BT, 74)

It is only upon an interruption of this handiness of the world, i.e. the breaking of a tool as we were using it, or the recognition that the tool is too cumbersome as we get tired, that we might step back and perceive the “objective” state of affairs in this more theoretical sense. In this inspection of what went wrong the interruption of the work does not make the ontological worldliness of the world apparent, but meaning (1) and (2) are brought forth explicitly. If it gives pause for reflection, I may even touch upon meaning (3), perhaps in the form of an “existential crisis” – e.g. wondering how the disarray of my room reveals the chaos (or spontaneity, dare I say, creativity) of my “life.”

It is also important to recognize that the world in which Dasein is embedded is constituted by the (possible) existence of other human beings. In other words, Dasein is not merely characterized by the phenomenon “being-in,” but also “being-with.” It does not merely take care of itself and the things around it, but other people too. Dasein finds its world as already pertinent to, significant for, and composed by other Dasein. Solipsism is not a meaningful possibility in Heidegger’s phenomenology. Creating and preserving art solely for oneself or the individual “aesthetic experience” is also an impossible notion for Heidegger then. There is
always a potential audience that partially constitutes the world in which the artist works.

Heidegger stresses this inherently collective nature of art, but I don’t think this means that
individuals can’t come to works of art from different angles. Rather, the work of art gathers these
different “perspectives,” as it were, and makes their shared world explicit. We will see this later
in Heidegger’s example of a Greek temple as an artwork working.

**Attunement, Understanding, Discourse**

The notion of world is extrapolated throughout *Being in Time* to an extent that cannot be
taken up here. Succinctly, here is what we need in order to continue: *Dasein* a) projects itself
ahead of itself, while b) always finding itself thrown back into the world already (as past and
passing), even as it c) engages the so-called “present” by being alongside, together with other
human beings. These three dimensions or ec-stasies are “equiprimordial,” or equally
fundamental to the constitution of *Dasein*. They are extrapolated from the interwoven, entangled
functions of our *understanding*, *attunement*, and *discourse* as ontological structures of our Being.

*Dasein* understands its potentiality: “*Dasein* is always what it can be and how it is its
possibility” (BT, 139). Potential ways of being are ontically projected as futural, but
ontologically understood in the “present,” as it were. The possible significances of the world (2)
are understood in varying degrees of breadth and specificity. At the same time, *Dasein* is always
already in its world depending upon its attunement or, put ontically, its mood, affect. This is not
meant to imply a mere psychologizing of experience, but does acknowledge that our attunement
constitutes a “disclosive submission to world out of which things that matter to us can be
encountered” (BT, 134). In our attunement we are ontologically “unveiled in [Dasein’s] being
delivered over to the there,” the factical (see fn. 5) “that it is and has to be” as such (BT, 132).
This is what “thrownness” expresses. Roughly, as an example, the tranquility of theorizing about some thing’s scientific being (say, a bear) is a dulling down, a “smoothing over,” as it were, of the significance of the thing as dangerous, which would stand out urgently if we were more fearfully attuned. Compare the attunement of the biologist to her guide, the expert woodsmen. Indifference is not a lack of attunement. We are always already attuned in some way.

And also, we are constituted by our discourse, or the (attempted) articulation of the world as primarily entailed by being-with other Dasein. Discourse is not a metaphysical bridge, as it were, between “inside” and “outside” for Dasein: “Dasein expresses itself not because it has been initially cut off as ‘something internal’ from something outside, but because as being-in-the-world it is already ‘outside’” (BT, 157). This claim is reliant upon the notion that Dasein has to be there. Discourse is not so much the path to intersubjectivity as it is the expression or explicit sharing of what is already constituted as intersubjective (specifically in Husserl’s phenomenology⁸), Dasein as being-with. We can keep secrets and communication can (and very often does) fail in an enormous variety of ways, but this is not because “my” world is only for me.

Although, understanding, attunement, and discourse are all interdependent, Heidegger seems to give priority to attunement. Basically, one does not get out of one’s current being to think about how to potentially change. Instead, we understand our potential ways to be within our attuned being-always-already there as ex-pressed in our discourse regarding this world. We will see this interplay and more in Manet’s A Bar at the Folies-Bergère: the bar-maid, who is shown in her mode of being, manifests a sense of being trapped, giving herself over to the dulled down world of the they. This uniform, monotonous world, this there in which she is thrown,

⁸ See his Cartesian Meditations, specifically the 5th Meditation for this account of “intersubjectivity.”
seems to alienate her though; she has a far-off look in her eyes that eludes easy interpretation.

Did she choose to follow this path, this life, or was it chosen for her? Were there really any other options? Is she, like so many women who occupied these spaces in Paris in the late 1800s, selling more than the wares displayed at the bar? Is she tired, has she given in to this life? Or does her facial expression hint her secret yearning for something better yet still unknown? So much of her is concealed as revealed and (even more) revealed as concealed. The painting works as it lets happen this play of (un)concealment. But we are getting ahead of ourselves…

**Truth and (Un)Concealment**

Heidegger identifies, broadly, “common” notions of truth as correspondence and, for him, this is not entirely off target. We just need to be clear about what target that is. On his view, *propositional* truth is indeed the accordance of an assertion with a state of affairs. To put it somewhat differently though, so as to bring out its distinctive ties to Heidegger’s phenomenological approach, propositional truth is the correspondence of “intellect to [the] thing” intended in asserting (ET, 118) Correspondence is achieved when the assertion is properly directed toward that thing about which it intends to speak: “[the presentative statement] subordinates itself to the directive that it speak of beings *such-as* they are” (ET, 122).

This definition may seem painfully obvious (or naively subjective, depending upon your philosophy of language), but for Heidegger the point is that the possibility of propositional truth, and indeed, ontic predicative what-being in general, presupposes ontological notions of “truth.” Here is where the modern word for and understanding of the word “truth” no longer seems to be an adequate term for Heidegger. He appropriates the Greek word “aletheia,” translated most of the time as “unconcealment.”
Heidegger argues that a proposition can only be verified in its correspondence if the thing to which it corresponds is already available to us in some way. Thus, he holds that the pre-predicative unconcealment of beings, entities is this condition for the possibility of propositional truth. In a sense, this is merely to repeat what has already been said: we, as Dasein, are embedded in a world containing what-beings that are discovered in, uncovered by, their how-being. The entities in the world are revealed in Dasein’s comportment towards those beings.

But, this is not even close to the end of the rabbit hole. Beings only show up as such, as entities, for Dasein because its world (2) is open (4) to their Being. Phrased in the language of Being and Time, “the discoveredness of innerworldly beings is grounded in the disclosedness of the world. However, disclosedness is the basic character of Dasein in accordance with which it is its there” (BT, 212). The world is always already disclosed to Da-sein, there-being. Here we are dealing with the unconcealment proper to the worldliness of world. If meaning (2) of the term “world” refers to something like “the open region – i.e. the ‘there’ [‘Da’]” then meaning (4), its worldliness, is perhaps aptly named its “openness,” how this open realm is opened (ET, 126).

We have still yet to reach the heart of the meaning of unconcealment. The word unconcealment is especially appropriate in that it conveys Heidegger’s understanding of “aletheia” as privative. Entities are un-covered, dis-covered, which seems to rely more upon our comportment to them: “Beings are torn from concealment. Each and every factual discoveredness is, so to speak, always a kind of robbery” (BT, 213). This is not simply to say that we bump up against things in the world that are unfamiliar or unknown, that require work, investigation to strip away this initial concealment. On the contrary, in this situation, “the openedness of beings as a whole can prevail more essentially than it can where the familiar and well-known [seem] boundless, and nothing is any longer able to withstand the business of
knowing” (ET, 129). “Openedness of beings as a whole” here refers to meaning (4) of world. Heidegger is not simply pointing out that we are not aware of the openness of the world in most cases, but more crucially that disclosedness relies upon closedness. This may be pre-ontologically understood or intimated when we notice something strange or foreign and seriously question its Being, how it could be so. However, for the most part, in sustaining the everyday openedness of the world, and so also the discoveredness of innerworldly things, most things are passed over; they are “what is most fleeting and most unconsidered” (ET, 129).

We take our cues and set our standards upon what we already “get” in some way. We stumble upon concealment as merely the exception to the rule: “wherever the concealment of beings as a whole is conceded only as a limit that occasionally announces itself, concealing as a fundamental occurrence has sunk into forgottenness” (ET, 132). As will become more obvious in our discussion of art, Heidegger’s characterization of concealment “as a refusal is not simply and only the limit of knowledge in any given circumstance, but the beginning of the clearing of what is cleared” (OWA, 179). If clearing is replaced with opening, it can be seen already at this point that, in this type of concealment as refusal, the openness of the open region is positively defined in relation to that which only shows itself in concealment. This will be thought of as earth in art.

Nevertheless, there is another form of concealment that occurs within the world (2), the open region. How something is discovered, the being’s how-being, for the most part, is, from a different “perspective,” as it were, distorting. The being is a semblance, although of course not experienced as semblance while we’re in the throws of engaging said being as a being. Insofar as something is taken for granted in its uncoveredness it can dissemble; other possible modes of being, of uncoveredness are covered over (BT, 213). Put succinctly, how a thing is un-covered is concealed (for the most part in its closed disclosedness) and covers (other worldly possibilities).
Remember our example above: the pencil I reach for in circumspect heedfulness is already available as handy, but I am not expressly aware of this how-being, or its other possible ways of being. In an interruption of my work, I may become aware of what I was trying to do and enter a different mode of being-in-the-world where I inspect what went wrong, where the how-being of the pencil is seen as semblance. The pencil originally looked like a usable pencil. To put it differently, again, our understanding is overwhelmed by attunement. Look back at the quick example of the bear: the scientist’s mode of being dissembles the bear as threatening, covered over as a part of a natural ecosystem or a categorization, Ursus americanus. The enthralled scientist, of course, does not notice this dissembling until the wary ranger, with deathly gravity, tells him “we’re too close.” As primarily absorbed in its operative mode of being, Dasein ontologically “falls prey” to the world in which it is thrown (BT, 213).

To summarize, “only insofar as Dasein is disclosed is it also closed off; and insofar as innerworldly beings are always already discovered with Dasein, are such beings covered over (hidden) or disguised as possible innerworldly beings to be encountered” (BT, 213). We are forgetful of this necessary co-dependence of unconcealment and concealment. Thus, “(un)concealment” nicely maintains this sense and will be used henceforth to indicate this play.

The openness of this open region is historically constituted. Only one being of say a “sun,” as it were, can occupy the foreground of this open realm, really hold sway, be unconcealed, because some are just not relevant given our comportment to the world and others are incompatible, undermine the authority of the unconcealed (think Kant’s “Copernican” turn). As a fairly literal example, the Heisenberg uncertainty principle in quantum physics means that either the position in space or the momentum of a particle can be accurately measured. They cannot be known simultaneously without leading to a deficiency in the presence of both. When
we are made aware of this play as necessary for all Being and beings, (un)concealment reveals the enormity of that which is concealed – this is what happens in art, for Heidegger.

We are now adequately prepared to enter into a fuller discussion of Heidegger’s notion of art that will eek out the artistic modes of being already budding in this division.

– II –

In his essay, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger seeks an account of art as it is actualized in the being of the artwork. Making visible and explicating how this being is the strife of world and earth, the happening of (un)concealment is our main task in this division. But first, to do so, Heidegger argues that we must be sure to avoid three major mistakes of the Western metaphysical tradition of thinking about art. First, the being of the artwork is not to be found in the “much-vaunted aesthetic experience” insofar as this is thought as the object’s transitory affect on the subject, the perceiver (OWA, 145). We have already seen that this metaphysical view is untenable for Heidegger.

Second, the work of art is not a mere representation of the artist’s intentions: “modern subjectivism, to be sure, immediately misinterprets creation, taking it as the sovereign subject’s performance of genius” (OWA, 200). Without entirely dismissing the artist as a necessary player in the artworks becoming though, Heidegger asks, “by what and whence is the artist what he is? By the work; for to say that the work does credit to the master means that it is the work that first lets the artist emerge as a master of his art,” or rather his “techne,” his skillful bringing forth of the work in (un)concealment (OWA, 143, 184).

It seems right to say that the would-be-artist is not truly an “artist” proper until she has produced something worthy of the definition “artwork.” And yet, surely the artist deserves some credit? Somebody put the necessary pieces together, right? Right; however, for Heidegger, as was
suggested above in regards to the writer and builder/architect, the artist qua creator is better defined by her responsive purposiveness to, her attuned understanding of what the work requires of her. The artist engages the work, but does not impose herself and her intentions upon it: “It is precisely in great art – and only such art is under consideration here – that the artist remains inconsequential as compared with the work, almost like a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge” (OWA, 166). The main thrust here is that “creativity” is not a sovereign controlling of work-materials. On the contrary, the artist’s being subordinates itself to the work-being of the work.

What is meant by this work-being? In its negative use, it differentiates the artworks essential being as a work from its incidental object-being, as a bunch of materials or a product of the art industry from which economic and cultural capital may be accrued. The work-being of the artwork does not reside in its thingliness, and especially not as conceptualizations which have “dominated” Western thought of the thing as 1) “a bearer of traits,” 2) “the unity of a manifold of sensations,” and 3) “formed matter” (OWA, 156). None of these get at the work-being of the artwork but only its object-being, and even then questionably so, for Heidegger (see OWA, 149-57 for a more schematic view of this).

We are primarily concerned with the positive definition of the work-being of the work. A different way of positing the question is how does the work work? The work works by “setting up a world and setting forth the earth” (OWA, 175). The reciprocal strife of earth and world is instigated by virtue of their intimacy with each other in the work. Let’s start with that notion with which we have become well acquainted already: world.

**The By-Gone Work**
As we might anticipate given his method of “the hermeneutic circle” in *Being and Time*, Heidegger’s explication of the ontological being of the work of art will first move through our initial recognition of it in experiencing a work working, as it were. He says, “it is necessary to make visible… the happening of truth in the work” through examples (OWA, 167). His first is of a painting of a pair of shoes by Vincent van Gogh that Heidegger interprets as peasant shoes. The second is a less contentious\(^9\) example, which Heidegger admits is probably easier for us moderns to grasp, steeped as we are in aesthetics and representational thinking, since this work eludes such conceptualizations. He writes, “a building, a Greek temple, potrays nothing. It simply stands there in the middle of the rock-cleft valley” (OWA, 167). To what Greek temple is he referring? Young suggests it is the Temple of Hera II at Paestum, but most Hellenic temples had similar constructions, so it matters not (Young, 20; see also Scranton, 10-1). I will address this example and the explication of the work-being of the artwork that stems from it.

Still, we should note, in his attempt to “make visible” the Greek temple’s work-being Heidegger is not suggesting that we can take up the world of the ancient Greeks as it was for them. Although we can ponder how the ancients would have encountered objects and even, by studying their art, philosophy, religion, and so on, know the distilled “essence” that would have disclosed a world and uncovered innerworldly entities as such, this will never be more than an abstraction for us. The majority of the “historically significant” works that we encounter are in this sense, for Heidegger, “bygone works,” withdrawn or displaced from the world they once had a hand in constituting:

\(^9\) Controversy surrounds this first attempt to let this happening express itself as the critic Meyer Schapiro contends that *A Pair of Shoes*, 1886 is in fact a depiction of Van Gogh’s own boots, and thus ought to be interpreted as a sort of self-portrait. His critique of Heidegger stems from this issue. See Schapiro, Meyer. "The Still Life as a Personal Object - A Note on Heidegger and Van Gogh." *The Reach of Mind; Essays in Memory of Kurt Goldstein*. Ed. Marianne L. Simmel. New York: Springer, 1968. Pp. 203-09.
The Aegina sculptures in the Munich collection, Sophocles’ *Antigone* in the best
critical edition, are, as the works they are, torn out of their native sphere. However
high their quality and power of impression, however good their state of
preservation, however certain their interpretation... the world of the work that
stands there has perished. (OWA, 166)

Museum curators, critics, historians, archaeologists, and private collectors can have the best
intentions in conserving and protecting the work but for Heidegger this will never maintain the
works “self-subsistence.”10 And, this is not simply because the work may have been removed
from the geographical area or nation for whom the work is part of its genealogy. Even caring for
“the temple in Paestum at its own site” cannot save the work from “world-withdrawal and world-
decay” (OWA, 166). The object-being of the work is what is carefully, scientifically preserved
for us today, but these efforts do little to maintain its work-being. The historically-specific world
once set up in and by the work no longer *functions* as a world for us, to be sure. But is it not still
intimated, if only as an abstraction that no longer holds sway, in what is left? Bearing all these
limitations in mind, Heidegger’s example is most likely a poetic reconstruction of how the work
might have worked for the Greeks.11

**Setting up a World**

For (Heidegger’s) Greeks of the appropriate era, the temple simultaneously opens up a
space for, and “sets up” within this openness, their world. But what meanings of the term
“world” are in use here? And, what does it mean to “set up”? Let’s begin with how this particular
work is said to do so:

10 Self-subsistence here means that “the work belongs, as work, uniquely within the realm [i.e.
world] that is opened up by itself” (OWA, 167; my addition).
11 At least the use of the present tense in the main passage of the example gives the sense of
Heidegger imagining us, at the cost of overstepping any right to do so and projecting, into the
Greek world.
The building encloses the figure of the god, and in this concealment lets it stand out into the holy precinct through the open portico. By means of the temple, the god is present in the temple. This presence of the god is in itself the extension and delimitation of the precinct as a holy precinct. (OWA, 167)

(Un)concealment is already at play here (although no where near its fruition yet). While the temple seems dependent upon the sculpture’s sanctity in a way, and vice versa, the former is not just some repository for that which is holy. Reciprocally, the latter is not intrinsically sacred before it is brought into being via its relationship to the temple structure. As its edifice, its structure, at once discloses (“through the open portico”) the god as enclosed (in the “naos” or “cella,”12 the internal, walled chamber containing the statue(s) and other cult artifacts, which was not generally open for public access), the temple both establishes the surrounding space as a “holy precinct” and presents itself as a sacred thing too. This is made even more obvious if we recognize that the sculpture is (or, was for the Greeks back then) the god himself present. The open portico allows him to look out from his “dwelling place;” the temple’s structure brings the surrounding space into his view.

Indeed, the sculpture “is not a portrait whose purpose is to make it easier to realize how the god looks; rather, it is a work that lets the god himself be present and thus is the god himself” (OWA, 168). To clarify, the word “portrait” has the wrong sense because it implies that the work represents the hypothetical physical characteristics of the god. The sculpture does not take as its standard beforehand something above and beyond how it makes (and other works have made)

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12 The Greek temple is basically “a chamber – a ‘naos’ or ‘dwelling place’ – a ‘cella.’ The naos has a porch in front and at the rear. The whole is enclosed within a colonnade supporting a roof, protecting the naos” and “the visitors from rain or sun” (Scranton, 9). It seems that this architecture historian had an inkling of what Heidegger makes explicit in the work: “nothing is offered by illusion, nothing need be projected into the design by… the observer. Everything is actually present in stone… Nor is the building, or any part of it, symbolic or otherwise meaningful of anything other than what it literally is – a temple, a “naos” for a god, and a protected colonnade for the visitor” (Scranton, 11).
the deity manifest, i.e. be. Works of art are the standard, not in terms of which works seem to represent the god in itself the best, but as the array of beings the god can be and is at once. This particular sculpture is the god as newly emergent and yet also just as he \textit{is}, in his being necessarily this being (as well as others). Whether it is “actually” the first time the deity has been made present in a work at all or only of this kind (i.e. as a sculpture, in a temple, poem, heroic epic, tragedy, etc.) matters not. The kind refers to its object-being; what is of primary interest is its work-being. Although it is true that the work-being is “fixed” in the work differently across types of artworks, they all share an essential work-being. They all set up a world and set forth the earth.

In some sense this presencing of the god is in accordance with what we learned about Heidegger’s notion of world: entities are always already discovered in their how-being, within a disclosed world. And yet this does not quite capture what has been expressed in “The Origin…”.

There is an interpretive puzzle here that is not to be resolved, but maintained: the unity or reciprocal co-arising of world and work. Heidegger writes that

In the tragedy nothing is staged or displayed theatrically, but the battle of the new gods against the old is being fought. The linguistic work, originating in the speech of the people, does not refer to this battle; it transforms the people’s saying so that now every living word fights the battle and puts up for decision what is holy and what unholy, what great and what small, what brave and what cowardly… (OWA, 169)

What does it mean that the work of art originates from the “speech” of the “people?” If this means the work originates in the discourse of the Greeks, the expression of the intelligibility of their world, then it seems that the work’s work-being is made possible by the already functioning world. Really, how could it be otherwise? And yet the work-being supposedly “sets up” a world anew for us. How does Heidegger make sense of this?
All artwork in general (not just the temple) is set up in the sense of constructed. This is not like a “bare placing” as in an exhibition (OWA, 169). Specifically, in the example of the temple, “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” (OWA, 169). This is not to say that we can go around making things sacred willy-nilly, or that all functioning works of art require an expressly religious consecration. Rather, it seems that in the experience of the work working, whether only subtly in the process of creation or in its preservation after it has emerged into Being, we respond to the work’s needs with the careful, attentive respect due to something holy. Just as we cannot presume to “see the face of G-d” and do His work, as it were, by going to church periodically and absently flipping through the Bible, allowing a work of art to emerge requires a dutiful attendance to the world as we are attuned, how it is, and as we understand how it can be.

In this notion of “setting up” as constructing or erecting the work we get some of Heidegger’s interesting word play. An artwork is “e-rected,” as in, “to open the right,” rectitude, “in the sense of a guiding measure, a form in which what is essential gives guidance” (OWA, 169). This seems to imply that, in our erecting the work, how the work is to be correctly set up arises as something essential. It is disclosed to us in the responsive purposiveness, the attuned understanding that allows one to construct, uncovering beings as appropriate or inappropriate for the work’s construction. Whether as an unfulfilled guiding “essence,” or more fully as a work, bursting into being seemingly of its own accord, in the process of (attempting to) construct an artwork, if successful, creativity is a sudden happening.13 This ought not undercut the necessity

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13 “Thus, Mozart writes of his best musical ideas: ‘Whence and how they come I know not; nor can I force them.’ In a similar vein, Tchaikovsky writes that ‘the germ of a future composition comes suddenly and unexpectedly’; while Helmholtz reports that his ideas often “arrived
of the artist’s efforts though: *Dasein* has to get into this right attuned understanding, and this often occurs only after lingering in a potential construction site or working in the studio for countless hours.

Heidegger also puts forth that the work itself works by making “space for that spaciousness” of the world: “‘To make space for’ means here especially to liberate the free space of the open region and to establish it in its structure” (OWA, 170). Heidegger is clear that establishing here is synonymous with erecting. But agency is grammatically attributed, in this part of the text, to the work. Heidegger is not simply being obscure here. He is trying to bring out the reciprocal co-arising of our being-in-the-world and the work setting up a world in its (un)concealment. The work demands being set up “because it itself, in its own work-being, is something that sets up” explicitly (OWA, 169). The artist very likely only becomes consciously aware of the influence of these demands after his response, the work emerges. Hopefully this will become more lucid if we explicate the notions of world involved here. Still, we should stress that Heidegger wants to make obvious that there is no causal account to be had here, no set of necessary and sufficient conditions to determine that the outcome will be an artwork, no way out of this circling and re-circling puzzle of creation and creativity.

We already have cited meaning (2) of world: the work “holds open the open region of the world” (OWA, 170). Nonetheless, it needs further clarification. Let’s return to the poetic example of the temple. Heidegger tells us that the temple-work as a holy precinct

suddenly, without any effort on my part, like an inspiration.’ Equally, Gauss, in referring to an arithmetical theorem which he had for years tried unsuccessfully to prove, writes: ‘Finally, two days ago, I succeeded, not on account of my painful efforts, but by the grace of God. Like a sudden flash of lightning, the riddle happened to be solved.’ Such quotations could, in fact, be multiplied almost indefinitely; so consider finally, and more lightly, Desmond Morris’s recent report that a journalist once asked Picasso: What is creativity? Picasso answered, ‘I don’t know, and if I did I wouldn’t tell you.’” (Briskman, 18).
first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline, acquire the shape of destiny for human being. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people. Only from and in this expanse does a nation first return to itself for the fulfillment of its vocation. (OWA, 169; my italicization)

As has been demonstrated, the temple established a space in which votive offerings, sacrifices, supplications, and other rituals were in view of the god as enclosed in and disclosed by the temple’s structure. The god is present and thus heeds, ignores, or condemns each person within the temple’s realm. Even if the religious acts within this space seemed to have “personal” significance or motives they were brought together – i.e. in harmony as the rapture of collective ritual or perhaps in bitter juxtaposition as one person joyously gives thanks while the other piteously supplicates – as taking place within the same world.

In this sense, the temple as establishing a holy center for the polis, the city state, literally “gathers around itself” the notion of world (3) pre-ontologically understood as the shape of “life,” the “paths” that are “taken up and abandoned by us,” which constitute “those utterly essential decisions of our history” (OWA, 170). “Destiny” is invoked in the sense of the world as that in which a factical Dasein has to be, is thrown. As was clarified in fn. 4 earlier, this factical quality is generally only pre-ontologically grasped as the “publicness” of a world, meaning (3).

This specifically historical, Greek world takes “the shape of destiny” as the gods’ intervention in and sanctification of mortal affairs constituted the explanatory sense and importance of events, the formation of narratives, and acceptance of actions as expressions of fated “disaster or blessing” and so on. A votive offering is set up and sets up explicitly the prior victory, success (in war or athletic contest) within a world where the god had a gracious hand in the outcome. It was fated to be so. The temple, as it “gathers” a “unity,” is the space in which “a nation,” a
“people” first bring into actuality “the fulfillment of its vocation,” realize their destiny as a whole.

Meaning (2) and (1) of world are at work in the work too. The “all-governing expanse of this open relational context” refers to meaning (2), the world as a horizon of significance. It is not just the works itself, the temple and the statue(s), that are brought into being. “Men and animals, plants and things” are brought explicitly into their being. For example, certain animals are appropriate or inappropriate for sacrificial rites, feasts. But, they do not just disappear into their usefulness for the ritual. Their sanctity is conspicuous in the temple’s midst. The rightful value and status of people are not expressed as social markers attached to the individual, but are constitutive of who the person is, or put perhaps more poignantly, whether the person is a “who” in relation to the temple’s precinct. You either belonged as a citizen, a devotee within the sacred space or were spurned, alienated by a realm that was not yours as a slave-by-nature or a barbarian-slave, those conquered in war. Put generally, outside of the example, “by the opening up of the world, all things gain their lingering and hastening, their remoteness and nearness, their scope and limits” (OWA, 170). However, it is important to emphasize that the work sets up the world explicitly. The explicitness of the world as set up by the work is distinct from our normal experience of world. Above we showed that, for Heidegger, if we are successfully engaged with and in the world, it tends to fade out of our self-consciousness. We are “in the flow,” as it were. And yet this normally tacit, everyday “first expressly comes to the fore through the work and only in the work” (OWA, 160). The work shows the ordinary as extraordinary.

While the first three meanings of “world” have been shown as explicitly set up in the work, the worldliness of the world, it’s a priori perfect disclosedness, openness has not yet been brought forth. This is only achieved by bringing into view the play of (un)concealment.
Primarily, the disclosedness of the world is brought out in its strife with the closedness of the earth.

**Strife of World and Earth – The Happening of (Un)Concealment**

In a way, our dealing with “earth” here may seem insubstantial or at least far shorter than our concern with the notion of world. This is not meant to imply that earth is a less important notion for Heidegger. It more reflects the fact that earth is that about which we can have only little to say. The term “earth” refers to the ontological notion of “the spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continually self-secluding and to that extent sheltering and concealing” (OWA, 174); and, to the pre-ontological notion of that upon which Dasein dwells, as in building and cultivating, nurturing (BDT, 348-9). Let’s look to Heidegger’s example, his attempt to “make visible” (or at the very least plausible) how the temple-work worked for the Greeks, to get a sense of the first notion of earth and its relation to world.

Standing there the building rests on the rocky ground. This resting of the work draws up out of the rock the obscurity of that rock’s bulky yet spontaneous support… The luster and gleam of the stone [of the temple], though itself apparently glowing only by the grace of the sun, first brings to radiance the light of the day, the breadth of the sky, the darkness of the night. The temple’s firm towering makes visible the invisible space of air. (OWA, 167-8; my addition)

As much as the world that is set up by the temple-work opens up a realm of intelligibility, closedness as refusal, i.e. the earth (almost too literally connected to “nature” here) is brought out in contrast to this disclosedness, literally set off by the temple “standing there.” The “rocky ground” in this passage does not refer to the paths leading up to the temple or the surrounding plot of land open for the movement of worshippers. The “rocky ground” is not available for appraisal; it solicits no action, is not significant for… in the network of references to entities within the world set up by the temple-work. Insofar as the temple rests on the “rocky ground,”
i.e. doesn’t (noticeably at least) sink or collapse, the building is supported by it. However, if we take soil samples, tunnel under the site perhaps, and otherwise examine the geological constitution of this land, the “rock’s bulky yet spontaneous support” vanishes. The result of this research is not the answer to the “how?” or “why?” of the earth’s support. The earth is only as abstruse, if not utterly incomprehensible.

While the Greeks of the relevant era were obviously not equipped with the geological, archeological tools necessary for this hypothetical investigation, Heidegger’s main point still holds that we lose sight of the earth in a worldly attempt to “possess” it:

If we try to lay hold of the stone’s heaviness in another way, by placing the stone on a balance we merely bring the heaviness into the form of a calculated weight… Color shines and wants only to shine. When we analyze it in rational terms by measuring wavelengths, it is gone. Earth thus shatters every attempt to penetrate it… The earth appears openly cleared as itself only when it is perceived and preserved as that which is essentially undisclosable, that which shrinks from every disclosure and constantly keeps itself closed up. (OWA, 172)

The pale “lust and gleam” of the stones out of which the colonnade is constructed is not better revealed by an analysis of how the angles of sun (or moon) light are diffusely reflected by the stone. Here we can locate the ontological notion of concealment as refusal: “beings [of this sort] refuse themselves to us down to that one and seemingly last feature which we touch upon most readily when we can say no more of beings than that they are” (OWA, 178). However, this refusal, concealment goes hand-in-hand with the ontological possibility of unconcealment.

As we noted earlier, the revealing of this concealing as refusal does not so much constitute a limit of our knowledge so much as it allows us to realize the openness of the open realm. We do not recognize earth as that outside the bounds of our human comprehension; rather, the earth as self-refusing only shows up for us within an open region as (one) of the possible forms of our constant errancy (remember “dissembling” from earlier) (ET, 133). As
both contained in the work’s work-being, in this intimacy, the work instigates the strife of earth and world. This is not to say that they’re mere opposites that, without the work’s unity, would push away from each other. This strife is a reciprocal, never-ending striving-beyond one another: “the world, in resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it. As self-opening it cannot endure anything closed. The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world into itself” (OWA, 174). The earth is brought forth through the world as that on which the world is set up, which grounds it, fixes it in the work. This will become clearer if we consider what is often thought of as the “work-material” employed in artistic creation:

The self-seclusion of earth, however, is not a uniform, inflexible staying under cover, but unfolds itself in an inexhaustible variety of simple modes and shapes. To be sure, the sculptor uses stone just as the mason uses it, in his own way. But he does not use it up. That happens in a certain way only where the work miscarries. To be sure, the painter also uses pigment, but in such a way that color is not used up but rather only now comes to shine forth. (OWA, 173)

The artist, in his attuned understanding, uses those “materials” which are uncovered as appropriate, but in using them, constructing a world with them, recognizes this seemingly infinite movement as simple: that which is set forth as not-worldly, as impressing so much and so little (in terms of meaning or significance) upon us. While we will primarily be concerned with the way the world is set up in the work, earth is very much present in Manet’s famous painting, which we now, finally, have an opportunity to discover.

**Manet’s *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère***

Let us now, as a final example of Heidegger’s notions at play, turn to Édouard Manet’s last masterpiece of French modernity, *Le Bar aux Folies-Bergère* (1882). This and other of Manet’s (1832 – 1883) paintings are widely considered momentous works around which the transition from realism to impressionism pivots. The reverence for his art is undeniable today;
but in Paris at the time (the world in which his paintings emerged and, as I will suggest, that this work sets up) the vast majority of critical responses were unfavorable, but mostly just missed the mark.

Put very brusquely, the painting’s subject, known by the title to be a bar at the Folies-Bergère, a cabaret, would have been identified immediately by any Parisian of the Belle Époque (late 19th century to WWI, approximately) and perhaps guessed by foreign viewers as well.

Indeed, “an article of 1878 describes the Folies-Bergère:

What is the first thing the foreigner asks for when he reaches Paris? The Folies-Bergère. Because there more than anywhere else you find the very essence of the city. You can see the Parisian way of life there[…]in all its lightness, amiability, panache, charm, polish, dazzling brilliancy and sophisticated mockery… There are bars everywhere…tended by charming girls whose playful glances and delightful smiles attract a swarm of customers. [The director] has filled his magic garden with every seduction. The Hanlon Lees team [of acrobats], pantomimes, ballets, music that carries one way… nothing has been left out of this wide range of pleasures. (Perutz, 201)\(^{14}\)

Alluring descriptions and more overt advertisements of this and other (in)famous “café-concerts or cafés-chantants” pervaded guides to Paris, newspapers, and the like (Clark, 206-7).

Perceptions of the Folies-Bergère were not all as scintillating and positive as the article above implies; and yet, the magnetism of the place, for aloof “respectable” people and moral decriers as well as the petite bourgeois and lower-class visitors, was its blatant, almost always sexual, debauchery. Manet was not the only artist who chose the cabaret as his subject. Contemporaries of his, including Degas, Jeanniot, and Seurat painted them and “all the best novels had a scene at [a famous one] in which the seal was set on a character’s ruin” (Clark, 206). Even the people who frequented these establishments, in characterizing the entertainment provided, used terms

\(^{14}\) In her footnote, Perutz cites this from “Wilson-Bareau, Hidden Face of Manet, 77 and 89, n.107, from ‘an unidentified journal in the Blondel topographical collection, B. N. Estampes [Va 286, vol. 13, H71021]’” (Perutz, 223).
like “idiots,” “betises,” and “absurdes;” insults, however, that were “casual and not meant to be wounding” (Clark, 208).

While one’s socio-economic class determined some of the opinion and attitude one was supposed to at least outwardly display at a café-concerts, part of the appeal of these places was the chance to shed, or perhaps more aptly, reconstitute one’s identity. Clark writes that the café-concerts “produced the popular, which is to say that it put on class as an entertainment. And part of its doing so, the critics [of the time] thought, was that the customer should entertain himself with some material, putting on class for the evening, playing at being a baron or a navvy,” a laborer that worked on canal projects (Clark, 234). The working-class, petite bourgeois and full-fledged bourgeois lost themselves in the style they adopted for the night. Indeed, Clark argues, “the idea that places or persons where class was inessential seems to have been a great comfort in this society,” shadowed as it was by a century of revolution, political upheaval, and the rise of capitalism (Clark, 234). “It was one of the courtisane’s tasks to provide a similar reassurance” and it was generally (and by and large correctly) assumed that the barmaids and other waitresses at the Folies-Bergère offered such services, were “for sale,” so to speak (Clark, 234; 245). Clark proposes (and a Heideggerian interpretation of A Bar powerfully supports) that some of Manet’s works, especially Olympia, which had as its subject a nude prostitute, were so unpopular at the time because they brought the Parisian face-to-face with this truth (Clark, 100).

Although this historical, sociological background is helpful for imagining ourselves in the world of the Parisian as distilled in the café-concerts, we should be clear that this painting reveals essential dangers of modernity still prevalent today. In brief, Heidegger argues

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15 Manet’s A Bar as a Heideggerian work-being is perhaps, for this reason, in a less essential stage of world-withdrawal. If this is the case then our reconstruction of how the work might have
that modern technologically-constituted being is enframed, disclosing everything (including, and here-in lies the danger, the earth and us humans) as ordered into a standing-reserve, mere resource:

Only to the extent that man for his part is already challenged to exploit the energies of nature can this revealing that orders happen. If man is challenged, ordered, to do this, then does not man himself belong even more originally than nature within the standing-reserve? The current talk about human resources… gives evidence of this. (QCT, 323)

Let’s follow Heidegger’s lead and try and “make visible” some of this works work-being.

To give ourselves a starting point, we ask, how does the work set up a world? (I will indicate the meaning implied with the familiar numbers, but I will be spare to avoid distracting too much from the vision of the work.) Atop the marble counter, at the fore, all offering themselves for our immediate enjoyment, consumption, are an array of things (1): golden-foiled champagne; bottles of Bass ale and rosé; refreshing oranges. They are crowded together, each begging to be purchased before the other. Accompanying these goods are “two fragile roses” (that are equally in being, but that we would pass over as ornament if they didn’t stand out from the “dark expanse of the barmaid’s jacket”) that “carry us up to the flowers pinned to her bosom and thence to her face…where we sense but can never quite seize the movement of life within” (Perutz, 201). Who is she…? This is not the face of the body presented to us as a male patron. That body is seductive, dressed to play the part, tastefully keep adorned with a little pair of

functioned for the properly attuned Parisian is perhaps more valid insofar as it still functions, to some extent, for us.

16 The Parisian viewer of the painting does not have to be male in order to see the barmaid as seductive. Insofar as she is defined by the assumptions of her occupation, as more than a barmaid, as a prostitute, she is a seducer. She might not solicit the comportment of a male, a potential client, but instead might be someone away from whom you would keep your husband or lover.

earings, a gold locket and wristband.\textsuperscript{18} Leaning on the marble bar, she is brought into the relational context (i.e. world) of the wares as some thing (not someone, not a \textit{who}) for sale (2). The youth apparent in the modest style of her hairdo (which “with its straight, simple fringe was one popular with the young rather than fashionable”) brings us back to her face (Iskin, 204). Her explicit intentions or state of mind are not discernible from her expression. But we can’t help but feel like she is not simply a void or utterly expressionless either. Her gaze is averted off to the left behind us. Is she bored or tired or uninterested by our banter? What is she looking at? It is not us; we do not seem to occupy her (full) attention. What, if anything in particular, holds her regard?

All this time, however, we have had in our view as reflected in the mirror behind her, the open, seemingly endless expanse of the Folies-Bergère. Furthermore, everything there-in revealed is less distinct, less determinate in its being than the things that occupy the foreground with the barmaid. We can distinguish a number of discrete individuals if we try and pick them out of the throng, but they mostly withdraw into the whole. Top hats are noticeable, but we lose them as the crowd extends out to a horizon (2). The particular commodities in front of the mirror are presented as alluring, while the disclosedness of the open realm in which we find them, as reflected in the mirror, is altogether uniform, almost bland.\textsuperscript{19} Even the reflection of the barmaid and her customer are murky, lack in the entrancing, determinate splendor of her in front of us.

\textsuperscript{18} It is worth nothing that these are strikingly reminiscent of those worn by the prostitute in Manet’s \textit{Olympia}.

\textsuperscript{19} Indeed, critics at the time noted that the brilliant, white glare of the only very recently invented lights (depicted as white circles in the “reflection”) was not properly represented. One critic tries laughably to explain this phenomenon: “the bar and the room are lit by two globes of electric light, that white, blinding light we all know; but Monsieur Manet has probably chosen a moment when the lamps were not working properly, for never have we seen light less dazzling; the two globes of polished glass have the look of lanterns glimpsed through a winter’s fog” (Clark, 240). The lamps were probably working just fine the day(s) Manet surveyed the Folies-Bergère as part
But, wait, something is not right about this reflection… We don’t need any diagrams of the physics of specular reflection as it should be represented in the painting to recognize the incongruity of the fore-ground barmaid’s bearing toward us and the (other?) “reflected” barmaid’s focus on the man on the left. The play between the two perspectives is boggling: we are not quite directly in front of the barmaid, nor are we utterly inculpated as the male customer toward which the barmaid leans. Any attempt to explain this disjunct is crudely misguided.\textsuperscript{20} It is part of how the work makes manifest the (un)concealment constitutive of this world’s disclosedness as everydayness and enframed. But, what is the closedness that sets this off? Where is the earth to which the world is bound in reciprocal, intimate strife? Here we come back to the face, the gaze, the indiscernibility of the barmaid’s existence. She is thrown in this world, to be sure. And yet, she still has that far-off look in her eyes, as though she pre-ontologically understands that the paths of her life laid out for her in this world are not exhaustive of the possibilities. Is she yearning for something better? Or is she resigned, having failed to see any other way? Truly, her being at once, inexplicably, \textit{Dasein} in the midst of this uniform, bland world, and her being (and not-being) a thing standing by for consumption, reveals her as alienated, opens up this world as essentially alienating. These people are homeless – where is the earth they respect and cultivate, upon which they dwell? Do we now not see how a Parisian would be unnerved by the happening of this (un)concealment? This painting undercuts the “comfort” of absorption, falling prey in everydayness alluded to by Clark. It incriminates the viewer as within the world set up by the work.

To be sure (and make explicit what has been implied and referenced in our interpretation of Manet’s *A Bar*), Heidegger gives us a quite pessimistic ontological structure of our typical, everyday experience of Being-with which “mostly has the character of being lost in the publicness of the They,” *Das Man*, which is perhaps more accurately translated as “the One” (*BT*, 169). This alternative translation emphasizes the inauthenticity of mistaking Being-with for a vanishing or collapse of the self, the individual own-ness of *Dasein* into a public homogeneity. This is precisely what is seen in the “background,” as it were, of the painting. This inauthentic mode of Being-with, identifying with *Das Man*, is characterized by a leveling-down, a reduction of the world’s disclosedness to averageness, to the point where we fall into a shallow curiosity constituted by “not-staying in the surrounding world taken care of and distraction by new possibilities” (*BT*, 166). Is this not the easy appeal of the variety show? This everyday mode of *Dasein* that “constantly uproots itself,” that is “never dwelling anywhere,” finds expression in groundless idle talk, a “gossiping and passing the word along” (*BT*, 163).

Mostly, this is what we see “in the mirror,” as it were. Clark almost gets the phenomenon right: “the great room, the lights, the crowd, the trapeze, the elusive atmosphere – the mirror fixes and flattens them all, before the painter begins” (Clark, 252; my emphasis). This last qualification and attributing the setting up of the everyday world of *Das man* to the mirror are mistakes we can probably chalk up to his representational thinking of the artwork. However, the how-being of this world as “leveled-down” or “planed” (which we might say, however wrongly grasped, still inspired this comment) is intimated in his use of “flattens.”

I will end with a ponderous question: are we far enough removed (as we may or may not suppose ourselves to be) from the world set up in Manet’s *A Bar* that this artistic exercise
remains a bold attempt at reconstructing that world? Or are we still unsettled by this painting?

Does it threaten the comfort of our leveled-down, everyday?

**Conclusion**

We have attempted to explicate Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology and its vital use for understanding the happening of truth as art, and the way artwork’s work-being manifests this, as setting up a world and setting forth the earth, instigating in their intimacy a reciprocal strife between them. If we have been successful in broadening and deepening our understanding of Heidegger’s work, it is then only hoped that this has not done so in the disguise of answering the fundamental questions involved. What is art? How does the artwork work? And how does it relate to our being, *Dasein*?

Heidegger himself, in taking stock of “The Origin of the Work of Art” in its “Epilogue” writes

The foregoing reflections are concerned with the riddle of art, the riddle that art itself is. They are far from claiming to solve the riddle. The task is to see the riddle. (OWA, 204).

He reiterates this point in an Addendum to the work first published in 1957:

What art may be is one of the questions to which no answers are given in the essay. Whatever gives the impression of such an answer are directives for questioning. (OWA, 210-11)
Bibliography


