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The Curation of Worldviews

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The Curation of Worldviews

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by

Jason Toney

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Introduction

When I began writing this piece I thought it would focus specifically on the implications of curated algorithms. I wondered how a curated algorithm could shape a worldview, contribute to political and cultural polarization, and prevent people with different curated algorithms manifest on their personalized computer technologies from being able to communicate. As I wrote, though, I came to realize that I had to develop a notion of what a worldview is, what it consists of, how we come to construct a worldview, how we communicate and reshape our beliefs, and what underlies the construction of those beliefs. With these inquiries my project dramatically changed form — as it ought to happen. My project is about first coming to grips with persuasion and its use. I do this in order to investigate how technologies of today impact persuasion and its diminishment, a phenomenon I have taken note of in my day to day. My work leads to an attempt to carry the many threads that develop to the end, and the primary thread that unites the work is a consideration of the body and its relationship to language.

My attempt involves an approach to worldviews and the curation therein using a Wittgensteinian lens. My first chapter lays the groundwork for my conception of a worldview by orbiting the themes of persuasion, the body, belief, and the irrational, all of which are fundamental components in my imagination of worldviews. Persuasion, I argue, is a concept that cannot be detached from considerations of the body.

My second chapter deals with defining curation. I explore Heidegger's "Question Concerning Technique" as well as "A Letter on Humanism." Both of these texts will be essential in developing a sense of what curation means. I draw on the Heideggarian notion of enframing, or *Ge-stell*. This understanding of enframing is further expounded upon with an analysis of lyrics by Phil Elverum, which delves into the issues of the absurd.

The third chapter deals explicitly with the actual curation of worldviews, the whole phrase, at this point, well defined. My exploration in this regard is predominantly original and therefore dangerous. Working with the epistemological implications of the work, I present space for ethical questions to arise, but pose no answers. My purpose is merely to bring these questions up, to define them, and to investigate the way in which the irrational — the absurd in life — serves as a way of thinking about them.

Chapter 1

Persuasion, Coercion & Body

To say what persuasion essentially *is* would be a fruitless affair. Persuasion in context is what is of concern. Context, however, may lead to the blurring of persuasion on one hand and coercion on the other, which are commonly spoken of as opposites and two words worth separating only to show how in ordinary language¹ they are entangled. That entanglement is of initial concern, as it represents the connection between the body and language, which is, to be clear, a concern distinct from mind-body dualism.

Consider, as a preliminary working example, a course on conflict management, especially as it relates to conflict in politics or in the context of office work relations. Here, there may be a functional distinction between the terms persuasion and coercion. Jim, the Human Resources Manager, might want to use the distinction as a way to distinguish between punishable offences at work, i.e., coercive action (wherein one physically, or emotionally forces one to get a job done), and acceptable practices, i.e., persuasive action (convincing a co-worker that an idea is worthwhile and they should do it). To be clear, the distinction here has a functional purpose. It

¹ By ordinary language I mean to awaken the notion of words in their everyday use. Philosophers have long attempted to subvert the everydayness of meaning by divorcing words from their utterances, like in a great deal of metaphysics. By considering words in their ordinary uses, the difficulty of crystallizing a salient definition or deciphering an isolated meaning becomes clear. Accepting and exploring that language and the meaning of words are often convoluted is itself a philosophical approach that can assist in attempts to understand extrapolate concepts, while simultaneously recognizing the limits of concepts more broadly. This point is elaborated further in Donald Davidson's "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," which plays an important role in my thinking throughout this paper.

represents an ordinary (that is, ordinary insofar as it is ordinary within the language game² posed here) use of the words persuasion and coercion. It separates coercion from persuasion to emphasize the inappropriate role of physical or emotional torment in a particular context: the office. If the office example is stripped from its context and we take the working, functional definitions as rigid absolutes, what we are left with is a deeply warped understanding of the distinction between persuasion and coercion, as the rigidity of this distinction outside of this language game is not so neat.

To persuade is to interact with the emotional, physical, and psychological states of another, all of which are intertwined.

Persuasion, the attempt to impart a belief, necessarily involves the body, which is to say, emotion, passion, mental states, the space that the body³ is in, etc.. I mean to emphasize the role of the corporeal in persuasion. In a polemical sense, I am deliberately prioritizing gesticulation that is concerned with persuasion as it reinforces the notion that persuasion is an embodied practice. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* provides an early account of this line of thinking. While Aristotle is undoubtedly entrenched in Platonic essentialism, which I am by no means espousing, his work on persuasion and the role of emotion, or *pathos*, in *Rhetoric* opens up avenues for exploring the persuasion-coercion dichotomy. *Pathos*, in my language, represents the mode of persuasion discussed in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* that involves the invocation of emotion and a care for context and audience. Using *pathos* as opposed to simply emotion, which will happen throughout this

² I use language game in line with Wittgenstein in order to indicate that I am speaking about a form of language that is limited and not representative or claiming to speak to the whole of language. Language games are a way of exploring concepts by investigating ordinary life.

³ In my terms, body is meant to encapsulate a great deal. It by no means excludes the mind or constructs a dualism, but instead invokes not simply emotion and that which is tied to the discourse I frame in that sense, but it reinforces the Davidsonian notion that is implicitly prevalent throughout this project that in thinking through concepts we are thinking in, at, from, (etc.) a perch, or a vantage point. (Davidson, 7).

project, indicates that more than simply appeals to emotion are happening, but instead speaks to the complexity and depth of the role of emotion in language. In order to hop on board with my analysis and use of Aristotle I invite the reader to drop Aristotle's baggage which is the residue of Platonic essentialism. Platonic essentialism attempts to say what something *is* and presumes that this naming aligns with a higher conceptual order, an order that asserts itself as severed from ordinary life.

While in many regards Aristotle's focus on everydayness is a way out of this, the background of essentialism lends itself to a kind of realism that presumes that the everyday, while maybe not connected to a higher order, still is what it *is*. Realism, in this sense, is born out of a Platonic essentialism that informs Aristotle's work, but by no means casts it into the realm of the archaic. Indeed, much of Aristotle's work does not rely on this kind of realism, it simply espouses it in its given historical context. It is in this way that we can usefully bring Aristotle into conversation with Wittgenstein in an attempt to elaborate a theory of persuasion.

The body, for Aristotle, has an important role, in a preliminary and rough sense, in the language one uses and the way one interprets language. Role, in this sense, means a part, insofar as the body is a part of language, the body grounds language in its everydayness, the kind of everydayness of language that metaphysics often attempts to transcend via the abstract. On a very basic note, the same comment will strike me differently when I am happy than when I am sad (same so far as it is the same on the set of criteria like phrasing, inflection, body language, etc. on the part of speaker). Indeed, Aristotle explicitly argues that "our judgements when we are pleased and friendly are not the same as when we are pained and hostile" (Aristotle, 168), which may strike the reader as intuitive, but this claim is a seed laid for the argument against essentialism. This is grounds for an argument against essentialism insofar as it gives thought to

the realization that perception is — in a rough sense — a projection. I mean projection in the sense that one's sense data is carved up based on their personal experiences.⁴ How I view the world, how I, in a given moment, interpret or intend to carve out what *is* depends not on the thing itself necessarily, but my role, my state, in defining, in constructing a cohesive image (literally and figuratively) of that thing. The reason Aristotle does not see it that way has a great deal to do with the fact that this statement is framed in the context of *pathos*.

Pathos, in Aristotle's terms is a discourse devoid of truth-value of the higher platonic order. Regardless of the philosophical and more specifically epistemological value we give to the *pathos* discourse, it stands fast that our judgements are subject to our state of being in a given moment. Again, for Aristotle, judgement is distinct from truth. To be persuaded by an idea raised by a speaker and believing in it — even if it is not true in the highest order in a Platonic sense — does not have epistemological implications for Aristotle, only rhetorical implications. Fundamental here though, is the entanglement of judgement and the body, and specifically, pain. Here, the body, in a physical sense, is playing into Aristotle's consideration of persuasion. The line between persuasion and coercion is made fuzzy again.

To be persuaded is to make judgements, to make *decisions*, which are contingent upon one's habitus, a condition of the body that is itself contingent on the context that body inhabits. These decisions, these judgements, come to form the foundation of our beliefs. This is part of the nebulous web of words and one's associations with their own vocabulary (with other words, with

⁴ To elaborate this point further, for the skeptic, consider a motorcycle mechanic. When I look at a motorcycle, I see a mess of metal that I cannot possibly understand, and I see it in large clumps. When my father, a mechanic, looks at that same machine, he sees a world of complexity, an abundance of parts I cannot even begin to imagine, as I have not engaged the materials. It is in this sense that perception is a projection. We see the same object differently as a result of our prior personal experience with the object at hand. My purpose here is to consider how one's emotional state, their bodily disposition, can further complicate this relationship.

experiences, emotions, etc.), which we come to use to order the world. This is a practice, like riding a skateboard. In the same way that one comes to deepen their skateboarding abilities and begins seeing staircase railings as grind rails, one who comes to deepen their belief in a god might start seeing that god in the fog on their windshield. Here, I am beginning to literalize a metaphor. Worldview, or *Weltanschauung* in German, comes down to the ground. A worldview is not only a metaphor for the notion that our language, the words we use, the things we carve out and individuate, impacts how we carve out meaning regarding the world, but worldview is literalized insofar as language has a profound impact on how we see *things* in the world, how we literally perceive the world around us.

“Moving” Beyond Reason

Zeke’s roommate is amiable, handsome, etc.. His roommate panders in the halo effect. His roommate also despises when dishes are left in the sink. No amount of reason has ever led Zeke to believe that dishes are worth doing immediately after they eat. Comfortable digestion will permanently outweigh any suggestion otherwise. For Zeke, there is no sensation better than sitting on the couch and lazing away with some warm tea. When his roommate really wants the dishes done, and he knows Zeke has just eaten and is digesting, he persuades Zeke with appeals to emotion, which is to say the tone of his voice, his facial expressions, his visible annoyance, etc.. There is a clear physicality to this act of imparting the belief that the dishes are worth doing immediately. But is it not odd to call this imparting a belief? In the end, Zeke puts down his tea and exclaims “alright! You have persuaded me. I will do it.” But wasn’t he forced to do it? Did he have another option?

If we continue with a false sense of rigidity regarding the definition of persuasion — one that takes persuasion as distinct from coercion insofar as that distinction would suggest that the body, force, threats, etc. are not involved in the encounter — Zeke’s comment would be nonsense, as it is clear that a great deal influences the interaction beyond the actions in the circumstance itself. The setting is not the office. Does it matter what we name the cause? Does it not only matter that we can name the conditions and that we move from there? What matters here is that so-called persuasion, with all of the ambiguities that lie therein when one attempts to transcend context in their discussion of the word, still seems to come into use when dealing with that which is beyond reason. If persuasion is the mode through which we impart belief, then the implications are of significant interest. Even if persuasion is the mode through which we impart something other than belief and it entails new behaviors and interactions with the world, its implications are still deeply important for us to consider. This case, as opposed to the office, shows that persuasion involves the kinds of things in language and in the body that cannot be easily transcribed unless we can name what resists naming, what moves away from naming — note the irrational, the absurd.

Wittgenstein argues that “at the end of reasons comes persuasion,” (OC, S. 612) but I do not take this to mean that persuasion does not involve reason. Note that the quote is about “reasons,” not *reason*. What Wittgenstein is getting at is the relationship between bodies in attempts to impart belief — or stated differently and more broadly (and more problematically) — to alter one’s view of the world. The relationship between bodies involves going beyond reason exactly because the body, in my terms, represents the irrational, the emotional, and yet it serves as the vessel through which we communicate, it is a part of communication in a fundamental way. Aristotle’s exploration of *pathos* is concerned with the appeals to emotion we make amidst

persuasive speech acts. Wittgenstein is exploring the exact same question in distinct terms, but the role of the body cannot be understated, as it is home to the sensory apparatus that form the foundation for *pathos*, for emotional appeals, for the irrational. Wittgenstein's point is that we can be made to believe something by that which goes beyond reason, beyond *logos*⁵ in the Aristotelian sense. Indeed, Aristotle would take no issue with this, he views *pathos* as fundamental in the context of persuasion. *Pathos* is beyond reason insofar as we do not, at least typically, reason our emotions (though, in the context of something like theater, this claim obviously breaks down). The difference for Wittgenstein however is that persuasion is part of how we construct meaning and systems of knowledge — how we come to see the world, which allows us to begin speaking about worldviews in a way that is useful.

Indeed, if “language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination” (OC, S. 475), then how could we ever subject it to the supposed rigor of rationality and expect this approach to lead to Truth? How might we provide a logic for language if language itself did not develop logically, with consistency? It seems that pain, the emotional, that which Aristotle and Wittgenstein both explore as places of blurring in language, all involved in an exploration of the body and its role in language, are the best place to evidence the claim that language is not born out of a rational ordering that belongs to some higher order. If one's pain can be said to affect their judgements, then how might we transcribe this pain? How might we transcribe the body? What does it mean when one is sad? How much can be grasped that is intended? That language did not emerge out of a kind of ratiocination is evidenced by persuasion — the attempt to impart belief — being beyond reason. The office has every reason to draw a line that seems subject to a kind of *logos*,

⁵ In Greek, *logos* connotes a contrast with *pathos* insofar as it indicates that which involves logic, as opposed to that which is subject to emotion. For the purposes of this project, this brief description is adequate.

but Zeke, it seems, does not, as Zeke's case is mired in *pathos*. Despite the difficulty in transcribing the body, it plays a fundamental role in what we come to believe and what we come to see in the world. This is no mere irony, nor a truism, but a nod to the irrational and an acceptance of the uncertainty we must encounter in philosophy if we give due diligence to the everyday and to the body. Even if we could rationalize an emotional expression, if we could name the neural pathways and the sensory modalities that were involved in the event, as modern science attempts to do, how much would we learn about the experience itself? This question might not be philosophical in its nature and it is certainly beyond the scope of this attempt, but it is worth a wink, as philosophy is best served by opening more doors than it closes.

Interpretation Beyond Reason

Now, I will frame persuasion again, with the intention of deliberately blurring: the act of coercing another into believing an idea. In a rough sense, persuasion is contingent upon two basic criteria (to be fair, this could be said of many phrases): (1) the existence of a community of speakers and (2) a space for speakers to enter discourse.

One might be tempted to say that, in light of 1, without a common language one could simply not persuade another person into a desired end, but only physically coerce them, like trying to catch a mouse in a trap. You could not very well tell a mouse, "come here and stand on this trap." In this context, coercion, as an approach to moving from a means to an ends, involves force or threats necessarily, as opposed to reasoning. This would suggest, then, that two humans without a common language are like a mouse and a human, but who is the mouse? Clearly, neither. To be the mouse, so to speak, would be to have a language that is untranslatable, in a sense this would add up to having a private language, a notion which, for now, we will defer to

Wittgenstein's complex dismissal of. Individuals can express themselves with⁶ their body and interpret the moves of others, consider gesticulation and the whole lot; however, even the language games of the body may be different, the whole lot might include that which cannot be easily interpreted, or interpreted at all. To interpret a gesticulation as pained, one must believe that the other is in pain. How might we substantiate that belief? What circumstance would even require that one names the reasons for this belief? This mode of belief, the belief that someone is in pain, is odd exactly because to doubt that someone was in pain would require a special circumstance. For instance, at the theatre. And yet, our conception of a worldview must incorporate this kind of belief, belief that is involved with that which moves beyond reason, because — while it may not be neat and convenient for the sake of argument — belief of this kind can be sensibly spoken of despite its evasion of doubt.

A particular intention behind a gesticulation may be entirely misinterpreted by another viewer with a distinct language, operating in their own language game. To be a speaker is to have a language, which is to interpret and intend, to persuade, and to be persuaded, and even to assume and to doubt. This does not necessarily require the same language as another, but any language at all — a capacity to think. And yet, force and threats, when they cannot be spoken can only be acted out by a body, by the physical. While this dichotomy is useful for the sake of the argument, the reader ought to pause and question the notion that what is spoken is somehow not itself a form of physical violence. Do we not hear through our ears, are our ears not physical apparti responsible for the processing of particular sense data?

One might, for instance, use peanut butter to increase the chance of catching the mouse in the trap. Is it not odd though, that it makes sense here to speak of coercing a mouse into a trap,

⁶ The use of “with,” as opposed to “through” or something of the sort helps avoid a claim I am not trying to make. I am not trying to construct a distinction between the body and language, but rather explore them by investigating the blurred connections.

through the use of force or threat via physical objects, but it would be nonsense to speak of persuading the mouse to enter the trap, unless it was here spoken about metaphorically, or if our understanding of persuasion were flexible enough to allow for physical coercion to be a part of the criteria. If that were the case, what language game would one be operating in? Well, it seems that this rigidity is rarely the case. I wonder how often a friend has ever been called out on nonsense for claiming they could persuade a mouse into a trap.

What might the realization that bringing any notion of persuasion into the mouse context tell us about a theory of persuasion more broadly? Anything at all? Does this insinuate that persuasion is contingent upon a common language and that coercion is not?

Consider the case of Cyrl leading a clearly parched traveller, a traveller who does not speak Cyrl's language, to a pond with potable water. The traveller, lets say, was immensely hesitant to drink the water from the pond and of course one could not introspect their mental state and unveil why.. It is plausible that they the traveller was uncertain if the water would get them sick, but it is just as plausible that the traveller believes water is boring and the traveller would rather perish than drink it. Without a common language, how might we contradict this claim? Let us also add — to ground the example before we derail it — that this traveller knows empirically, based on a map, that very soon they will be at a campsite where they have a water purification device and hence the traveller is not acting out of necessity if they do drink from the pond. In response to this possibility, let us say Cyrl cups the water in their hands and sips it, and wave the other person over, all with a smile. The parched traveller crouches down and drinks. It seems, then, they were persuaded that the water is safe. The idea was that the water was safe to drink, the goal was to get the traveller to believe said idea, and the goal was achieved. Though, this was clearly not coercion, as no force or threat was used. Clearly, persuasion has a great deal

to do with the body, with physical objects. If we assume that language is limited to letters and speech acts, there was no language game unfolding. Though, we can still maintain (1) as a quality, insofar as the traveller is a speaker, with their own community, and despite not sharing the same language, a language, any language, was fundamental in the exchange. Even without a common language, one can persuade and persuaded, so long as they can be moved — moved to think, moved to feel.

Judgement & Body

To pretend that one is persuaded without coercion requires that one separate rational speech on one hand and the body (emotion, neurochemical reactions, pains, etc.). The body is a central component in persuasion, whether in speech or when reading a text, all of the factors mentioned are at play.

While Aristotle saw philosophy as a discipline entangled with forms, with facts, amidst the pursuit of knowledge, he says that “the arousing of prejudice, pity, anger, and similar emotions has nothing to do with the essential facts, but is merely a personal appeal to the man who is judging the case” (Rhetoric, 76), and he is speaking of this circumstance in the context of persuasive speech. *Pathos* comes to be a fundamental part of meaning-making, of framing a worldview. The danger can be said to be that emotion, *pathos*, can be employed to distract from truth claims, to lead us away from essential forms, and henceforth, knowledge. This danger, though, is only dangerous to essentialism. It only clears the way for a deeper understanding of how we come to see the world and how that view may come to be curated. Indeed, with all of

this in mind, we can begin to bridge the gap between Aristotle and Wittgenstein, and see their philosophies as compatible, allowing that the essentialist baggage⁷ is dropped.

Close attention to *pathos* is what leads to effective persuasion in a practical sense. The tone of voice when a speaker utters a word, the way the listener feels when they encounter those words, the space they are standing in, the memories the speaker and listener may have fostered in that space, etc. all have an impact on the meaning they derive from the speech act. We must not be concerned merely with the speech act itself, but also with what lies around it. This view, in the context of knowledge, is incompatible with Aristotle's understanding of Platonic forms and cannot make sense within his framework, insofar as essential forms become subject to context and subjectivity; however, in the context of persuasion, of judgements, it is fundamental for Aristotle. In the context of unearthing truths, arriving at knowledge, the body is a useless consideration for Aristotle. But when, with Wittgenstein, we begin to see knowledge as "related to a decision (*Entscheidung*)" (OC, 47, S. 362), a decision necessarily mired in idiosyncrasies, and we understand decisions as requiring judgement to come to those decisions, decisions that involve the body, we begin to see that a consideration of *pathos* in the context of knowledge is entirely pertinent.

Indeed, Wittgenstein flips the idea of forms on its head in a transfiguration of the word 'form.' In order for propositions to be liable to doubt, he argues, there must be things we do not doubt. We are apt at cutting down trees, and any doubt about the existence of a tree would be an absurdity, besides in the context of a philosopher's dilemma, or something in that vein. But, through his questioning of whether or not the tree exists, Wittgenstein arrives at what he names "comfortable certainty," which can be chocked up to the kinds of things, like the existence of a

⁷ Keep in mind the description of Aristotle's flavor of essentialism described earlier in this chapter.

tree, that we can know and would be impossible if it were otherwise in an ordinary context and if that impossibility was challenged it would lead to complete and utter bewilderment. He calls this “comfortable certainty” a “form of life” (OC, 46, S. 356). Here the word ‘form’ comes to represent a deep-seated subjectivity. Rather than forms suggesting a kind of essentialism, Wittgenstein uses the word to get at the contingency of our comfort with certain propositions. Forms of life come to represent the messy idiosyncratic associations that one has with the words that they employ in particular language games that form a nebulous web of meaning that informs the way they see the world. If our certainty is subject to the conditions of particular context, than a truth necessarily becomes a foundation for only that context — it does not extend beyond the particularities of the language-game.

I am not arguing that truth is merely relative. Rather, truth can be spoken of in objective terms, within a particular language game; however, we must be careful in our imagination of the limits and extent of the meaningfulness of terms like truth beyond their context. This is distinct from the charges of relativism insofar as it does not at all reject the notion that objective speech is not only plausible, but constantly used. The limits of my vantage point are the limits of my capacity for objectivity, but that by no means rules out the notion of objectivity that relativism attempts to do away with. Donald Davidson describes this saliently when he argues first “that the truth of a sentence is relative to (among other things) the language to which it belongs” (Davidson, 11) and later that the “truth of sentences remains relative to language, but that is as objective as can be” (Davidson, 20).

Aristotle’s understanding regarding persuasion and his emphasis of the role of *pathos* within that context has a great deal of overlap with Wittgenstein’s understanding of the body in the context of certainty. Wittgenstein argues that “it is not that on some points men know the

truth with perfect certainty. No: perfect certainty is only a matter of their attitude” (OC, 52, S. 404). A missionary attempting to convert another is not relying on certainty, but faith, and their certainty is not a factual certainty, but is rather made manifest in their disposition, in their tone, in their body language, their attitude. This disposition, the embodiment of certainty, is instrumental in constructing a worldview.

The coupling of the notion of forms of life with the idea that comfortable certainty is often an attitude rather than a thought come to be at the foundation of a theory of language games. The taking away or taking on (*nehmen an* or *annehmen*) forms of life and certain attitudes in particular contexts means having assumptions, explicit or implicit, about certain things which cannot be doubted. Indeed, *nehmen an* and *annehmen*, both are translated as “assumption” in the English translation of *On Certainty*, but they reflect taking away or taking on respectively. In this sense, an assumption is dynamic. It is dynamic insofar as it involves both intending an interpreting, which come to be at the basis of how we construct beliefs, act on certainties, and frame a worldview. We do this when we throw words out there and see what lands, what moves work within a language game, and by seeing what fails.

The realist might argue that we are a passive receptor of what *is* out there. This view does not object to the notion that there are things out there (things in a much more limited sense insofar as those things, as material itself is something to be carved out by a perceiver), but takes issue, in a more limited sense, with the notion that what is perceived is not subject to the idiosyncrasies that are involved in crafting a perception. Our faculties are subject to our selves. Indeed, in our engagement with language, we *take on* what works. What one sees as working comes to be a part of how they see the world, how one approaches problems. In the same sense, we do this by listening to others, by *taking away* their moves, the phrases that have use in a

language game. Assumptions allow for moves to be made without every move being subject to doubt. The assumption “forms the basis of action... of thought” (OC, 52, S. 411). We assume that the sensation of pain means that one is in pain, and this clears the possibility that we may be moved to do something about it.

It is these assumptions, assumptions about certain things that we do not even name in ordinary language, like the existence of a tree, that “belong to the foundation of a language game... the entire system of our language-games” (OC, 52, S. 411). But these assumptions can come into conflict. For instance, the assumption that there is, or is not a god, or that there are many gods. How can a missionary convert a native who assumes there are many gods, not just one. Certainly reason does not go far enough. Any reasons contrary to the notion that there are many gods is built into the notion itself, it accounts for attempts to evidence otherwise. Religions have been built on their ability to persuade others, to transcend reason and to create new language games, new foundations, all while harnessing the attitude of certainty. Now, we can find a parallel in contemporary life with political parties. Certainty regarding an agenda is not only embodied though, but employed across new technological mediums. That these active techniques, manifest in technologies, involve in a certain sense a lack of embodiment of the attitude of certainty. The body becomes loosely tethered to the attitude as it becomes acted on through technologies that evade the hands. This claim will be given much more labor in the next chapter, but it is important to begin introducing it here, in somewhat vague terms, to pre-empt a more thorough investigation.

What changes these assumptions about whether there is one god or many gods is not reason, but persuasion. While Descartes and others were debating the existence of God, framing the question, and constructing arguments, missionaries were out in the field persuading people of

their beliefs. The employment of persuasion, which relies on a range of assumptions, requires a series of decisions and judgements, has long been a means through which humans come to get each other on board with a particular or general worldviews. The idiosyncrasies of a worldview seem to have a great deal to do with the range of ideas one has encountered — that one has encountered persuasively, that is.

Belief & Body

An attempt to impart a belief, to instill a conviction is a deeply muddled process, one not defined simply by reason. If there is a man who believes that the world came into being fifty years ago — one who grew up in a circumstance so special such that the reasons for doubting this are already considered in the worldview which is his lens — reasons are not enough. If one simply provides reasons, nothing more, in an attempt to dissuade this man from his belief, it will do nothing, so long as reason is all that is at play. All those reasons are already a consideration in his worldview and therefore any other reasons are disregardable. But how can only reason be at play? What does it mean to say that? In its longer form, Wittgenstein says, “I said I would ‘combat’ the other man,—but would I not give him reasons? Certainly; but how far do they go? At the end of reasons comes persuasion. (Think what happens when missionaries convert natives.)” (OC, S. 612). Persuasion is being contrasted with mere argument, with justifications that do not account for things like emotion, or the body, or, as Aristotle conceives of it, *pathos*.

To engage *pathos*, to look towards context, to examine language games as language games is to subvert the polemical paradigm, to lead language back to the self, and to foster a sense of self that is opposed to other individuals, such that the polemical suddenly turns back in, self-annihilating, and clears space for the body to enter. If thinking was manifest in a standing

out, in the Heideggerian sense, or a leading back, in the Wittgensteinian sense, or a turning around, in the Emersonian sense, we would not be able to think without a spine to rise with, legs to be led, or hips to turn. Just as thinking, in all of these metaphors, calls on a kind of motion, an action even, we think because we are *moved* to think, just as we are moved to tears. The body, emotion, what Aristotle sums up with the term *pathos*, defines a mode of persuasion that, at its core, uses the body, the irrational, as a means of imparting belief, of getting one to move from uncertainty to certainty while subverting the strictly rational. Indeed, the etymological connection between emotion and moving are at the source of my analogy. Further, though, I'm tempted to ask, why do we think? To call thinking an inert seems, on one hand, to mean very little, to be nearly vacuous. By equation, it would seem the same could be said of calling thinking a moving affair. Although, it seems to me that thinking requires a motivation, to think beyond necessity involves a kind of going beyond the immediate, this involves emotion, this involves a kind of moving. To be struck by a thought is not only to be thinking, but to be embodied, to be emotional, to be capable of moving or being moved in this sense.

In January, during an ice storm, I read Camus's "On Suicide." Upon reading the final sentence, my tear ducts emitted a liquid. I laid in a hammock for an hour, in the cold, on the back porch. I read the same essay again, a year and a half later. It was summer, I was on the beach. I wondered why I read it again. Clearly, the argument never changed. I had. And sure this suggests perception as a projection, but only in the former circumstance was I persuaded. To be persuaded is to be in such a way that the contingencies of a given moment open you up to even considering a series of propositions. "Whether a proposition can turn out false after all depends on what I make count as determinants for that proposition" (OC, 2) claims Wittgenstein, bluntly. Well, does confidence of the speaker and/or a writer count as a determinant? If this was a determinant,

certainly our certainty is founded upon shaky foundations. But that foundation is a principle, and are not all principles based on judgements about those principles being justifiable principles? So are not all judgements then premised on principles that are themselves judgements?

If someone believes the earth is only fifty years old, and all evidence contrary to that claim fits neatly into their worldview, as it has already been anticipated and reasoned away, how might they come to change their mind? Certainly reason would fall short. If an argument is persuasive enough, maybe their belief will be altered. But once again, we encounter the issue of persuasion. Here, we must again recall the *pathos* in which Aristotle frames his conception of persuasion in *Rhetoric*. The time of year, the unique circumstances surrounding my current lot, the very room I am in, will all have an impact on my perception and interpretation of certain propositions. Just as the one proposing something will have the nature of their proposal altered by the same ephemeral and innumerable possibilities at play when they utter their proposition. All of these factors involve the body and its faculties. So we see that circumstance and belief are entangled. This is only to echo the notion that the body and belief are entangled, and very word body involves its habitus, what lies around it.

Contingency & Body

The totality of one's certainties, of one's beliefs, constitute a kind of worldview, or at least part of the notion of a worldview. Richard Rorty argues that one has a final vocabulary which they employ in communication — a final vocabulary is never *final* insofar as it is unchanging, but something that constantly moves, transforms, and alters. It is final only insofar as words are doing things and the words in play are, well, the words. A final vocabulary represents a nebulous web of not only the phrases in use, but the language game at play, the

associations with particular words built on idiosyncratic experiences, etc.. This totality (roughly) of one's vocabulary is made up of beliefs, convictions, feelings, etc. and it is not exactly static or additive, but flexible and viable to change dramatically from one moment to the next, from one mood swing or memory to another. The philosophy of language cannot merely be concerned with vocabularies, but with what "lies around it" (OC, 21, S. 144) as Wittgenstein frames it. What lies around it, in a simple sense, is a comment on the importance of what makes a belief hold fast, which is the context in which the belief is brought into being. The belief that is held fast, as opposed to the belief that is liable to shift, is said to be held fast by the system that lies around it, the system of knowledge, the system of "what is believed" holds in place a particular belief. If a particular belief does not fit into the system, it is liable to be shifted. But what causes the potential for a shift? What opens one up to the possibility that a particular belief is not held fast, that it is not entirely compatible with the system that lies around it?

Rorty argues that in order to see how one can be opened up to the possibility that a belief is incompatible with a worldview, with their system of beliefs, we must limit our examination of "the opposition between rational and irrational forms of persuasion to the interior of a language game" (CIS, 47-48). This is to say that to construct a division that puts reason (or rational conviction, in Rorty's terms) on one side and emotion (or passion, in Rorty's terms) is not useful on its own, unless it is qualified as being a persuasive speech act. Further, he tempers the distinction by making clear that we ought to understand the terms reason and emotion as reason being akin to rational conviction, and emotion as being the sort of thing that arises due to causes, as opposed to reasons. The claim that reasons can be a cause for emotion is entirely justified, at this juncture, but Rorty means something very particular by causes.

For Rorty, causes are specifically, simply put, “not reasons.” (CIS, 47-48) Though, causes cannot be usefully spoken of outside of the limitations of a language game. In order to delineate this distinction, Rorty notes the obvious differences between what is conveyed in a Socratic dialogue as opposed to the diminished role of reason and the employment of cause in hypnotic suggestion. While there is a kind of intuitive inclination to accept the distinction, it only scratches the surface of the distinction, and Rorty does not deny this. Indeed, to accept the distinction so simply would be self-defeating, as it has no proper place within the confines of a contextualized language game. Rorty, though, is less concerned with truth values than he is with the use value of such a distinction: “within a language game, within a set of agreements about what is possible and important, *we can usefully distinguish reasons for belief from causes for belief which are not reasons*” (CIS, 47-48). Causes for belief which are not reasons falls into the rough category of persuasion. Rorty argues that since there is “no neat way to draw the line between persuasion and force” there is “therefore no neat way to draw a line between a cause of a changed belief which was also a reason and one which was a ‘mere’ cause” (CIS, 48). Nonetheless, what is made salient through this analysis is that within the interior of a language game, we can begin to parse out rough sketches of these distinctions, such that we can begin to imagine what the curation of these facets of language might mean.

Pain

In order to further clarify the close of the last section, I will lay out a consideration of pain and curation. This will begin to clear space for a discussion about curation in the context of persuasion, which the next chapter will focus on. Rorty thinks it is not only possible, but meaningful, to “separate the question “Do you believe and desire what we believe and desire?”

from the question "Are you suffering?" (CIS, 198). The implications of such a distinguishment cannot be understated, for Rorty. This is fundamental in creating human solidarity, which is the central concern of his book. While a great deal of his philosophy reinforces the ideas herein, this is where we differ. Suffering, belief, and desire are deeply entangled. Indeed, they cannot be separated. To disentangle them would be to subject belief and desire to exactly the kind of rationalization that Rorty sees himself sees as rebelling against, the Enlightenment sort. Rorty recognizes this problem, but tries to portray it as purely problematic when it transcends the limits of a language game, but he understands the separation to be useful, only somewhat problematic, when one works within the limits of a language game.

It is not that any line is fuzzy, it is that speaking of a line in the first place is riddled with metaphysical ambiguity that *cannot* be parsed out. Let us revisit the example of the parched traveller. Does it make sense to speak of the sensation of dizziness, of a dry throat, of thirst itself as a reason for wanting water? Maybe so, but it makes more sense to speak of it as a cause for a desire, a cause that would lead one to believe that the water from a stranger is safe. So, can bodily sensation be said to be a reason? Or is it merely a cause? How can we disentangle sensation from reason? Do emotions, sensations, the body, its parts, its ephemeral needs and desires play a role in our persuasion, or our resting potential to be persuaded, in what we take on or take away, which is to say does not the body still, even within a language game, behave not as one side of a line, metaphorically speaking in Rorty's term, but as a part of a whole that cannot function without its other parts? By limiting ourselves to the vocabulary of the language game in an analysis of claims makes us vulnerable to forget, in the Wittgensteinian sense, what lies around it. In the effort to separate the questions "Do you believe and desire what we believe and

desire?" from the question "Are you suffering?" we must tread carefully to not forget what lies around suffering, what lies around belief and desire.

If I was tasked with removing all of the parts of a body that are divisible from the faculties that facilitate thinking, god forbid, such that one would continue to think, to reason, unimpaired what could I remove? If I remove a thumb, might that change a person's thoughts? And if the thoughts are now different, while they can still think, what they think about will be different, and I have now changed the way that the faculties perceive and hence think about the world. If a book must now be picked up differently, is the book, as an object the thinker carves out in the world, now different? Does the person believe the book to be one way, and after losing a thumb, now believe it to be different? They certainly would have to approach the object differently, that is. Let us say that the difficulty of raising the book and reading the book has now become such a task, that the person no longer reads books. The sight of a book is now a trauma, it triggers a memory of what once was. Does that count as an impairment? How might I even begin to parse causes for belief and reasons for belief in this context? Does it make sense to even speak of belief here? Well, what if they believe that books are a source of pleasure, but since they cannot engage them, they believe they are a sore sight. But a person would not believe this, they would feel it. But how do you name this feeling, how might we even begin to parse this out, even within the language game itself these phrases do not split apart? So when Rorty speaks of separating the questions "Do you believe and desire what we believe and desire?" from the question "Are you suffering?" we have to wonder if we can limit belief, desire, and suffering to a single language game, when it seems they come to be at the foundation of many language games. Now, this process, the process that leads to the blurring of these separate questions, is the kind of thing that happens in an attempt to curate a reality.

Chapter 2

Curation

This chapter will give a broad overview of curation, a term I mean to intertwine with and build out⁸ of Heidegger's *Ge-stell* — for now, this can be roughly translated as enframing. Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technique" deals broadly with the impact of technology on life and language.⁹ In order to elaborate my understanding of curation, to prepare for a full-fledged exploration of the idea of the curation of worldviews, it will be necessary to explicate the complexities of Heidegger's essay, as it is the starting place for my thinking about curation. Indeed, curation, in the highly particularized sense in which I will employ it, will rightly be interpreted as akin to *Ge-stell*. I will not be writing about Heidegger's essay in a chronological way, but will tackle fundamental phrases, one by one, which will be sub-headings, as a way of giving a broad preface to the relation between *Ge-stell* and curation. To temper the investigation of the themes in "A Question Concerning Technique" I will use Heidegger's "Letter Concerning Humanism" and selections from *Being and Time* to illuminate key terms and ideas that would otherwise be nonsensical in "The Question Concerning Technique."

For our purposes, Heidegger's "Question Concerning Technique" can be roughly broken into two parts. The first half of the essay is concerned with an account of the way in which the world is brought forth to man, by man. The second half of the essay is an attempt to nuance that

⁸ I use the word 'build' as a first move to unpack the role of the hands in Heidegger's argument regarding technique. For Heidegger, *Ge-stell*, or enframing, is *built* out of the employment of techniques in our creation of the world in a sense that is both physical and metaphorical.

⁹ One could use Heidegger's language here, but it would be of no help in the elaboration of his ideas for the sake of the argument I put forward. Regardless, one might trade life and language for terms like being, the destiny of mankind, objectification, homelessness, and more.

description in light of modern technologies My purpose is to illuminate both the practical and insidious impact that the use of technology can have on language and worldviews. I will come to name specific technologies that highlight this, but intend to clear a space for thinking about these issues in new ways, as the philosophical and political implications are both worth considering.

On Translation

The word technique is given in the title of Roger Berkowitz's translation of "Die Frage nach der Technik"; however, many translators often translate the title as "The Question Concerning Technology." to translate Technik as technology misses the breadth with which Heidegger employs the term, which will be revealed and elaborated throughout this chapter. Further, translating *Technik* as technique allows an English reader to get a sense of the development of the pre-Socratic, post-socratic relationship, and specifically the modern relationship that mankind has to technique. Technique describes not only the processes through which we construct technologies, but the way in which we approach life and language in a world with technology. In addition, technique speaks to the relationship between art and technology (in the sense of poetics and hands-on crafting).

I argue that while Heidegger creates a dichotomy between technique and modern technique — a distinction I will explore throughout this chapter — it doesn't account for a new form of technique. I make the dichotomy into a tripartite distinction by introducing the idea of post-modern technique.¹⁰ In a preliminary sense, post-modern technique is a byproduct of new

¹⁰ Post-modern in my terms has nothing to do with postmodernism and the ideas therein, though one is welcome to explore any potential connections and report back to me.

technologies that separate the body from technique. I introduce this distinction here as it is subtle and is helpful to understand before delving into the arguments herein.

τέχνη

τέχνη is typically translated as craftsmanship, or craft, or art. τέχνη is the Greek root of Heidegger's *Technik*. Technique, which again is from Heidegger's *Technik*, harkens to τέχνη. In Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism," he argues that since Plato and Aristotle, thinking has garnered its value by establishing itself as a kind of τέχνη, that is, as "a process of deliberation in service to doing and making... already seen from the perspective of πράξις [acting] and ποίησις [creating]" (LOH, 240). Heidegger's argument presents a negatively connotated interpretation on this "technical interpretation of thinking," arguing that "such a characterization is a reactive attempt to rescue thinking and preserve its autonomy over against acting and doing... such an effort is the abandonment of the essence of thinking" (LOH, 240). It is in this way that thinking, for Heidegger, "slips out of its element" (LOH, 241).

Heidegger's argument in "The Question Concerning Technique" sheds more light on the word τέχνη. Heidegger argues that "τέχνη is not only the name for handworkly doing and skill, but also for high art and the fine arts. τέχνη belongs to bringing-forth, to ποίησις (poiesis); it is something poetic" (QCT, 9). τέχνη belongs to the process of bringing-forth certain realizations that may have otherwise remained hidden. Heidegger is arguing that the technique one employs in the construction of technology is rooted in artistic creation, but that artistic creation itself has been hijacked by public domination, the realm of the masses, of herd mentality. His concern is explicitly with the way in which the hands-on nature of technique is changing. My concern, which I will work towards elaborating, is with the way that technique is less tethered, and

potentially untethered from the hands — the body — altogether. What happens when our vantage point, in the Davidsonian sense, is obscured from technique?

Heidegger writes that “τέχνη unconceals what does not bring itself forth by itself and does not yet lie present, what therefore can look sometimes this way, sometimes another, and can drop-out. He who builds a house or a ship or forges a sacrificial cup, unconceals what is to be brought-forth” (QCT, 9). τέχνη, for Heidegger, is a mode of unconcealing, of bringing what is hidden from plain sight forward. Yet we must ask, for whom is this unconcealing happening to? It is the shipbuilder for whom something is unconcealed as she builds the ship. It is the creator, the poet, etc. who experiences or witnesses the unconcealing of their craft as it happens. Unconcealing of what? Of technique, of the world and its way, a way of working of happening, a way of viewing the world — worldview.¹¹ In this sense, τέχνη is a form of rendering privacy¹² manifest. Heidegger’s argument is that τέχνη is a mode “of rendering beings manifest” (LOH, 259), but since this manifestation is only immediately available to the one involved in the τέχνη, we struggle to locate τέχνη in the context of public and private. Everyone can see the shipbuilder building, but only she can see what is unconcealed amidst her creating — the blur. The shipbuilder sees the ship unlike anyone else. Is this an obvious remark? It seems vital in the effort to ride against realism as I work towards my own conclusions.

Moreover, Heidegger casts aspersions on τέχνη as it relates to thinking. As a technical process τέχνη is active, it connotes a doing. Yet, Heidegger argues that “the essence of thinking”

¹¹ To be clear, Heidegger does not use the language of worldviews — this is my peppering.

¹² Privacy here is limited insofar as the creator unconceals something new amidst their creating. What the nature of that which is unconcealed *is*, is not the topic of this paper. For what it is, for Heidegger, has a great deal to do with diminishing its thingness, abstracting from the senses, imaging that which may or may not *be* anew. As you can tell, these waters get murky and require too much German to break down. Fortunately, we can maintain the sense that what is unconcealed has something to do with intimate experience, with something entirely idiosyncratic, and in that sense, necessarily private. That’s good enough for our purpose.

(LOH, 240) is something solitudinous, as something involved not in acting, but in dwelling, in private (LOH, 239). This dwelling is necessarily a private affair. Heidegger presents this as a kind of essentialized, even divine mode of being. However, “private existence” itself has been altered by “its subservience to the public realm” (LOH, 242). Heidegger’s argument is that since thinking and hence language have come into the service of acting and doing (τέχνη) in a very practical sense in the public realm, thinking and hence language “comes under the dictatorship of the public realm, which decides in advance what is intelligible and what must be rejected as unintelligible” (LOH, 242). As a result, even when we go into our dwelling place, our language can no longer foster truth. This is why, for Heidegger, it is the poet, the one who abstracts language, makes it their own, can arrive at so-called truth. Heidegger names this state of being alienated from “the truth of being,” this aimless stumbling that we do in light of our inability to think about so-called “divine truths,” *Heimatlosigkeit*, or homelessness. (LOH, 258).

Homelessness, for Heidegger, is not a socio-political term, but refers to the alienation of man from his “essential being” (LOH, 258). Homelessness is the alienation of man from his potential to speak truth, to experience truth. What matters most to my argument is that Heidegger’s connection, that thinking is a kind of dwelling with oneself that is challenged in important ways when τέχνη’s technical nature gets tied in, is making explicit that thinking, as a dwelling, involves oneself as a whole. Thinking requires sitting with oneself and navigating more than simply thought, but body. Thinking includes the Aristotelian *pathos*. Heidegger’s snapshot of the so-called essence of thought requires that we take seriously the body and its role in thinking. This is where the body is not merely a tool for persuasion, where Heidegger brings the body, brings emotion and what that word has come to mean in my usage, into the realm of meaning

making. The body enters the meaning of words insofar as it is involved in the use of words and the body influences the choice of wording one makes.

Technique

Heidegger clarifies between technique and the essence of technique. Technique is not only a “means to an ends,” but a “doing of man,” which together come to be the “whole” of the arrangements that establish technique (QCT, 2-3). Technique connotes that which we actively do, whether artistically or otherwise, in order to “unconceal” (QCT, 9). And again, unconcealing connotes a “bringing-forth” of that which was previously hidden from plain view. Unconcealing is akin to ἀλήθεια, or truth (translated plainly).

Technique can be employed to merely represent (*Vorstellen*), to bring forth appearances, or it can belong to τέχνη, to a kind of poetic doing. Technique as a mode of merely representing, as *Vorstellen*, is akin to *poiesis* to a kind of poetic bringing-forth, a bringing-forth that, in its very physical manifestation, in its hands-on bringing into being, it unconceals a truth that could not have before been seen. That technique can be a surface level appearance oriented doing or one that is more poetical, requires that we frame our understanding of technique around a doing, rather than as a thing, an object, with thingness, as that which we can not only objectify but also essentialize. As a doing, a happening, technique unfolds, there are steps. Unconcealing may happen in a moment but it *becomes* manifest because of this or that. In that sense, unconcealing (and a great deal else) necessarily, for Heidegger, is involved in causality, a causal chain.

Causality & Affect

When a bat hits a ball, the ball is effected. It flies away. One needs no background in physics to believe me. When one hits a ball at a championship game, the ball is effected. It flies away. The audience is effected, they jump up and down. Is this merely effect? This is also a description of an affect, an emotional engagement. But why does it take a championship, why does it take stakes for people to jump up and down? There are states of being, affective states of being. An argument might not only effect our behavior, but being persuaded might also mean a profound affectation.

Heidegger writes that “for centuries philosophy has taught that there are four causes: 1. *causa materialis*, the material... 2. *causa formalis*, the form... 3. *causa finalis*, the end... 4. *causa efficiens*... the effect” (QCT, 5). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to outline each, they indicate the scientification of philosophy. The scientification of philosophy is, in part, due to the Platonic essentialism that attempts to say “*what* something is” (QCT, 3), which is a scientific pursuit insofar as it attempts to organize and objectify what, in Heidegger’s words, is *not*, which is referred to as *Sein* in German.¹³ To split causality into a neat fourfold system involves the risk of oversimplification, reductionism, and a whole host of other issues, but there is undoubtedly use-value. This use-value though can be easily overstated, insofar as pieces of causality that are irrational, or based on one’s idiosyncrasies in their observational apparti, can be overlooked, or pretended to be arbitrary. To bring this back to the question of technique, if we examine technique through the strict lens of the four causes, we are likely to miss these potentially irrational idiosyncrasies. These bits that resist objectification are most concisely represented by the idea of *poiesis*. The poetics, or the metaphorical, or the associative (insofar as our words are

¹³ *Sein* is translated to being, but it speaks to that part of beings, specifically human beings, that cannot be objectified, that which resists naming and rationalization in every person, but that we can easily lose sight of and instead blend into the masses.

constituted by idiosyncratic associations, many of which are shared, but some of which force us to dig for meaning in self and others), come to be fundamental in the unconcealing born out of one's technique.

Heidegger goes on to describe "the four causes" as "ways of being-responsible" and here we must give thought to the double meaning of the phrase "being-responsible" (QCT, 5). On one hand being-responsible is the sort of sentiment you might hear from your parents on a weekend night, but it also speaks to the responsibility to not only oneself, but to the world, to the poetic, to the potency of the potential for truth that may arise during one's wonder about the world. Importantly, the notion of being-responsible, as I begin to unpack it, comes to be deeply relevant to the employment of modern and post-modern technologies¹⁴ and their role in enframing worldviews.

Being-responsible as it relates to the four causes is elaborated with an example, the silver cup. When one makes a silver cup, it is made out of the material silver, which is co-responsible for it being, after one has formed it, a cup. Indeed, "the silver into which the outer-look as cup is let-in, the outer-look into which the silver appears, are both in their ways co-responsible for the sacrificial instrument" is a convoluted (though in the grand context of Heidegger it is fairly concise) way of saying that the material of the cup and the form it is given are both co-responsible for the cup as a whole. This represents the *causa materialis* and the *causa formalis*, which involves naming the form of something, a definition that leads to a conception of *causa finalis*. From out of the end, "the thing does not cease to be" but rather "the thing begins to be

¹⁴ Modern technologies connotes not only the technologies that emerged in the post-socratic era, but also includes the notion that thinking itself changed with these technologies and the techniques people began employing were by no means different from philosophers, and in that sense the scientification of philosophy begins. Post-modern technology is an extension of this phenomenon that represents the disembodiment of technique.

what it will be after its being-set-forth” (QCT, 6). To be named, to be objectified, is to be “lying-ready-before-us” in Heidegger’s language (QCT, 6). To lie before one as an object is to have an effect on one’s world, as something carved out, as a thing (QCT, 6). Stated differently, Heidegger is laying out the argument for how something comes to be named, but he does so with the intention of problematizing it. How a thing becomes a thing undoubtedly involves the formation of it, but that carving out is contingent not only on the thing itself, but the language that carves it up. That language, as I have argued, involves the body. Naming is a way of ordering. What is ordered is perceived, it stands out, it is individuated.

Order & Bestand

Being-responsible means not only bringing something into appearance, whether it be a cup or a painting, but forces us to consider what our role is in the process of carving things out in the world, whether we use a technique in bringing them forth or we use a technique or a technique informs what is individuated. Once we do that, it is ordinary for one to then communicate their picture of their world, to attempt to get others to see things their way, to persuade them of a particular view of the world. Heidegger calls this a *Ver-an-lassen*.

Veranlassen, without dashes, ordinarily means to cause, occasion, or to bring about. By using dashes — as Berkowitz points out in a footnote — Heidegger means to restore the root sense of the phrase, which means “completing a letting-in” (QCT, 7). Here we have a play with bringing forth and letting in, two phrases that illuminate contrast. Technique brings forth insofar as it makes appear, technique lets in insofar as accepts a carving out, a definition, and objectification.

There is a sense in which what I have described is both a passive and active affair. Technique can be employed to individuate objects or to construct them. This parallels with the

notion that there is a worldview I construct and one that is constructed for me. A worldview I actively make sense of and persuade others of and a worldview that I have been persuaded by.

What comes to be an object is what comes to stand. What stands is necessarily ordered, it is put forth in such a way that we can see it stand, this is *Bestand*. *Bestand* can be curated by or for us. We can make things stand or we experience the way in which things are made to stand by others. In this sense there is a way in which I actively construct a worldview and a way in which a worldview is constructed for me by others. Things stand insofar as they appear to us, but beyond the question of causality, what does this standing consist of? "The ordered has its own stand. We name it *Bestand*" (QCT, 13). To order, to make *Bestand*, is the first step in curation, it precedes *Ge-stell* insofar as *Ge-stell* relies on enframing what has been ordered. Curation in this sense is very similar to the process of hanging art in a museum. The ordering of the art has its own stand, creates its own story, it involves a view of the world that would be different if ordered differently, in very plain terms. What is ordered is only so because of its ordering (*Bestellen*) and is ordered out of the orderable (*Bestellbar*). *Bestand*, *Bestellen*, and *Bestellbar* are described as having their "ground in what comes to language" (QCT, 14). It is in this sense, for Heidegger, that what is ordered, while it has its stand, while it constitutes a kind of image, is still subject to an individual's perspective, yet that perspective is necessarily going to be tied into the ordering itself. To illuminate this idea, Heidegger says that "Man can of course represent, shape, and pursue this or that in such or such a way... man does not have at his disposal the unconcealedness into which the actual shows itself or withdraws... The thinker only answered what addressed itself to him" (QCT, 14). This is echoed by my previous mention of the Davidsonian vantage point. Fundamental to understand here is that technique informs that vantage point, alters it in both subtle and notable ways. In constructing conceptual schemes we

cannot escape our perch, our body, and the limits of our language. And yet we are persuade and do persuade people of all kinds of concepts, especially those that claim to transcend our place in the world. On the whole, this highlights is the interplay between what is ordered, how it is ordered, and how one perceives that ordering, which is inevitably tied into the ordering itself.

Technique involves an ordering, a way of putting things together, of gathering in order to have some object, something carved out, stand on its own. *Bestand* speaks to the order of the thing itself, what is intended as the thing itself amidst the technique that constructs it. Importantly, *Bestand* doesn't speak to what lies around the thing, what lies around or beneath technique. For this, Heidegger uses *Ge-stell*. A term we will now dig right into.

Enframing & Ge-stell

In order to understand *Ge-stell*, it was vital to introduce terms like τέχνη, technique, causality, being-responsible, unconcealing, and *Bestand*. *Ge-stell*, given its fundamental role in the arguments to come, must be reckoned with carefully. To this end, I will provide a relatively significant portion of text. As a form of *stellen*, Heidegger uses *Ge-stell* in line with these other terms, which are mentioned in the quotes to follow. Heidegger's use of words that share roots leads to an etymological continuity that is near impossible to capture in one-to-one translation. The continuity he employs reflects the way in which curation functions, it is a seamless part of our lives that is difficult to identify unless we explore what underlies technologies and consider the techniques that technologies are founded on.

While *Ge-stell* is ordinarily, and perhaps most appropriately, translated as enframing. In order to maintain the etymological connections that Heidegger is carving out, I'll stick with the German *Ge-stell*, but it can be aptly, though not fully, translated as enframing. Heidegger's

initial definition of *Ge-stell* is difficult to stomach on its own and requires more work to get a sense of, but it is a useful starting point:

Ge-stell is the gathering of this putting (*Stellen*) that puts (*stellt*), i.e. summons man to unconceal the actual in the way of ordering (*Bestellen*) as *Bestand*. *Ge-stell* is the way of unconcealing that sways in the essence of modern technique, and is itself nothing technical. To the technical belongs by contrast all that we know as barring, pushing and framing, and what is a piece of *Bestand* of what we name montage (QCT, 16).

To gather the putting that puts means to enframe insofar as in one's gathering, in one's employment of a technique, one necessarily constructs a frame through which they see the world and what is in it. This is a summoning insofar as, for example, one is creating a silver cup, we are not only seeing silver as a thing with a use, but drinking as a practice facilitated by cup. The technique employed for drinking changes when one stops using their hand or tongue to lap it up and instead uses the silver cup. In this sense, the summoning sways through the essence of modern technique insofar as with each of our creations, with each of our engagements we begin to carve up the world anew, and it is not simply the objects carved out, but the way in which we see the world itself that is of concern. *Ge-stell*, enframing, means not only framing a thing, but framing how it is that we see all things. In a sense, in making a cup, I make my world anew in a nebulous range of ways. What is ordered can be ordered by me, it can be a result of my own creation, or it can be ordered for me. If I do not create the cup, but I use it, the ordered, what is brought-forth comes to inform my worldview despite my disconnect from the construction of the object itself.

Heidegger goes on to explore the importance of *stellen* in *Ge-stell* especially as it relates back to the idea of τέχνη, insofar as τέχνη is entangled with *poiesis*:

The word ‘*stellen*’ in the title *Ge-stell* does not mean only summoning, it is at the same time to preserve the resonance of another ‘*Stellen*,’ out of which it stems namely that of the setting-forth-and-there, in the sense of *poiesis*, that lets what is present come forth in unconcealedness” (QCT, 17).

In this sense, *Ge-stell* speaks to the idea that with technique, with a kind of bringing-forth, a setting-forth, in our poetic creations, we are unconcealing insofar as a creation brings something new forth, and yet, this enframes insofar as what is unconcealed to us is unconcealed within a frame, insofar as creation entails limitations. To enframe, to *Ge-stell*, is for something to be summoned, but that summoning is part of the sway of *Ge-stell* through modern technique, “which requires the orderability of nature as *Bestand*” (QCT, 18). The ordered is brought into a frame through our ordering and hence summoning. What comes to hand, comes to hand with all that lies around it, but that context is necessarily altered by the new object that is carved out within it. Heidegger’s mention that there is a poetic element to *Stellen* supports the idea I posed earlier in the section on causality. There is a sense of affectation. A sense that what is enframed, what comes to stand within a frame, has the capacity to affect one, that is their body and their language. That what is framed by us and for us, what constitutes our worldview, that we come to be persuaded by or persuade others of is deeply related to the affective state, the habitus of the body.

Heidegger notes a highly particular and relevant concern regarding the essence of technique resting in *Ge-stell*. As enframing, *Ge-stell* makes it such that in our handlyworking we

are distanced from *poiesis*, from the poetics of creation, because “technique must employ the exact science of nature” (QCT, 19). This is to say that in order to bring something forth, we must navigate the frames that have been provided for the utilization of our techniques. This is a deeply hands-on oriented remark. To see an object as an object that has been brought forth by a technique is to see an object that has been brought forth according to the science of nature that man has and continues to try and master.

Curation & Ge-stell

To live in the modern world with modern technologies is to live amidst the frames of technique. I use the word curation as one deeply intertwined with the idea of *Ge-stell* that Heidegger presents. Modern technologies of late not only have the capacity to enframe according to the exact science of nature, but have the capacity to enframe by generating an objectifiable sense of one’s self. To be in the modern world is to be understood according to the *Ge-stell* that sways through the technologies we engage and the techniques we employ. Post-modern technologies — algorithms¹⁵ being an excellent example — have the capacity to enframe our interests, our passions, and to encircle them with data points, hence turning the parts of self previously held as subjectivity idiosyncrasies as outlined and utilized points of interpretation in order to present a feedback loop that speaks to our imagined sense of self and our imagined sense of the world. This is to say that those aspects of self that are so nebulous that they constitute a kind of darkness that is only accessible as an imagination are now traceable and manipulatable, which is to say that our worldview can be curated accordingly for practical and insidious

¹⁵ Algorithms will be given a more substantial definition in the next chapter.

purposes. This doesn't just constitute a set of circumstances but a way of life as a modern amidst modern technique.

Curation & The Absurd

The curation of worldviews in the era of the modern human condition presents one with inevitable absurdities. Phil Elverum (AKA Mount Eerie), a philosopher and artist, captures the circumstance of the absurd in the modern human condition amidst the enframing and curation of worldviews aptly in a two part song called "Through the Trees."¹⁶ The song's two parts are on two different albums, as if to highlight the disjointedness of perspectives that contemporary humans cope with, the way in which the seemingly irrational bubbles up, reinforcing itself. His songs focus on the unbuilt world and reckon with the realization that humans now navigates the unbuilt world from our worldview that is informed by and enframed in the built world, a world of technique.

The song lyrics are a poem. The first part of the poem begins with two lines that construct a dichotomy between the built and unbuilt world and the subjects view of them both simultaneously: "from up on the hill I can see the lights / of town through the trees" (TtT, Pt. 1). To inhabit the modern human conditions and live amongst technique is to view the unbuilt, which is specifically unbuilt nature (nature can be crafted, think of the forests in Europe for example), through the frame of the built. The built, technology, sways through, *Ge-stell*, enframes, how we view the unbuilt. Indeed, the notion of swaying that arises throughout Heidegger's "Question Concerning Technique" is reflected in the line "and there is wind. / there

¹⁶ Songs can be heard on the albums *Clear Moon* and *Wind's Poem* on <https://pwelverumandsun.bandcamp.com/>. Further citation is in bibliography.

is only wind” (TtT, Pt. 1). The subject struggles not only to cope with the circumstance of modern life, but to isolate some piece of causality, some piece that makes the irrational sensible. The poem continues: “do I disdain them? that "land of dreams" / from up here you can see them living / on the way home, through the trees / I have climbed the hill at twilight / to find the source of wind / from up on the hill / I can see the lights of town / that land of dreams / through the trees” (TtT, Pt. 1). The subject is not only in a reckoning with the implications of seeing the unbuilt world through the light of the town, but is so taken by the allure of the unbuilt that the subject seeks out the source of the wind, an entirely fruitless engagement, one so without end it represents the kind of alienation that Heidegger describes man has with the rise of modern technique. While the trees are causally revealed by the trees, the causality of the unbuilt is fleeting, concealed. To seek out the source of wind is to stumble through the darkness of the unbuilt, and yet one seeks the source because in the era of modern technique all sensation demands explanation, the unbuilt itself because subject to the four causes and involves a rational engagement with that which is beyond reason. How do we find the source of the wind? In a given moment, how might we answer that query? While the wind is strongest on the hill, the hill itself surely isn't its source, and yet from that vantage the built is unconcealed anew again. The subject is engaged in a yearning for description of that which avoids description, of that which sways through, of that which is concealed to us because of modern technique. The subject, entrenched in a worldview curated by modern technique, is engaged in an absurd pursuit.

While it's unclear if Phil Elverum is deliberately in conversation with Heidegger, the poem serves as a potent way of communicating profoundly subtle remarks. Poetry's affective capacity not only helps move our argument forward, but it reinforces, through its employment, the argument made in Chapter 1. Part two of “Through the Trees” grapples more explicitly with

the absurdity of modern technique. With the drive to describe that which evades description the subject of the poem encounters, in entirely explicit terms, the dichotomy of the built and unbuilt:

I go on describing this place
 and the way it feels to live and die.
 The “natural world”
 and whatever else it’s called
 I drive in and out of town
 seeing no edge, breathing sky
 and it’s hard to describe
 without seeming absurd.
 I know there’s no other world:
 Mountains and websites. (TtT, Pt. 2)

Grappling with the absurdity of life with post-modern technique and *Ge-stell* is captured in the final lines. The entire section illuminates the idea I have been thrashing at, the idea that in the era of modern technique, the way in which we come to know the world, the way in which we describe it, is enframed by the techniques we employ and are affected by. While it is tempting to begin to indulge in an attempt to trace the causal chains at work in this paradigm, one would be, as the poem reveals, damned to being absurd in their attempt to describe.

Yet, as I described in Chapter 1, this realm, the realm of being which goes beyond reason, is the realm of persuasion. To describe this circumstance, to convey it to another in hopes that they begin to see it my way, would be to rely on persuasion. To reiterate, poetry reaches into the realm that works with concepts beyond reason. Poetics and persuasion are intertwined, but

clearly distinct, a distinction that has been sketched out throughout this project in many moments. In this sense, persuasion and poetry are intertwined. Though, as I will argue in Chapter 3, persuasion is in a state of dramatic decline in the world of post-modern technique. In the world of modern technique, in a world of the enframing of modern technique, we are engulfed in the rational and yet it falls out of sight. Technique, despite its reliance of the laws of nature, conceals its cause. In developing a sense of self, a worldview, in the world of modern technique, we are simultaneously engaged in the objectification of the self, a self guided by objective causes, whether algorithms and laws of nature, and yet that objectivity obscures, it conceals and entails a sense of absurdity in the attempt to describe the state. Indeed, in the world of modern technique, in our attempt to describe our circumstance, we are, as Elverum describes it, “clawing for meaning” (TtT, Pt. 2).¹⁷ Yet that meaning is made in a world in which one may very well be inhabiting the absurd, which Elverum gets at with the final lines of the poem: “A pile of trash / the fog on the hill / standing in a parking lot squinting” (TtT, Pt. 2). The final lines sum up the crux of my belaboured point, that in this absurd circumstance, living in the unbuilt natural world enframed by the built world of technology, our worldview is curated, the way we see all is profoundly impacted by this circumstance the nature of that enframing is profoundly important in the quest for description of self and circumstance. Indeed, no matter where we stand, on the hill looking through the trees, or in a parking lot next to a pile of trash, our very view of the world, both metaphorically and literally, is influenced, and our clawing for meaning is aptly described as a kind of squinting.

¹⁷ Worth noting that Emerson describes an immensely similar search for meaning in his essay “Fate.” This is beyond the scope of this project, but worth investigating if this point strikes you.

Chapter 3

The Curated Algorithm in Theory & Practice

I am arguing that persuasion — in the era of post-modern technique — is dramatically diminishing (insofar as being persuasive is an artform that is rarely employed) and the two arguments posed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 — of persuasion and technique — add up to the claim that there is a new mode of alienation from the body and hence that which belongs to *poiesis*, that which involves *pathos*, insofar as a worldview is less tethered to the body and subject to profound degrees of curation. The curated algorithm gives me grounds to make that claim stronger.

An algorithm is a process or set of calculations intended to solve a problem. Algorithms are used for computers and help not only organize data for the sake of presentation, but are also used for computer programming. The reason that algorithms have the capacity to curate a worldview is because they can be used to organize data about an individual, based on their computer usage, and present them with information that is relevant to their interests based on their data footprint. Algorithms are immensely practical and entirely prolific in the 21st century, but have the capacity to be used for insidious purposes. Regardless of their use, they have a profound impact on how we come to be presented with information (whether factually consistent or not) about the world and henceforth profoundly impact ordinary communication and language itself.

Algorithms are entirely prolific, yet are mostly hidden in contemporary life. Economic markets, social media, databases, and various facets of our digitally enabled lives are guided by algorithms. Algorithms are nothing new and have long been important in solving mathematical

and technological problems. The data that an algorithm uses regarding a particular individual has come to determine what information is presented to the individual through their technology — this is the crux of a curated algorithm. Many online services use curated algorithms to improve the experience for consumers using the technology. Stated again, but differently, a curated algorithm is a process through which a user's experience is made more efficient. Its purpose is to tailor to the user by using previously collected data points about them in order to improve their current experience on an online platform. For example, there is a music group named Porches. “Porches” as a search term also refers to a part of the structure of a home. On my personalized web browser, I often visit Porches’s website, that is Porches the music group. I listen to their music on various devices, read news about them, I even have them as friends on social media platforms, and so on. I have never once looked into owning or building a home. If I type “Porches” into a search engine, their curated algorithm has enough data about me to prioritize presenting me the music group's most recent news over porches on a house. The search results, the links to different media presented to a user, would be dramatically different with the same search term “porches” if another user had recently purchased a home. Indeed, if I began searching for a home online, my results might begin to change when I type in the word “porches.” While this is a benign example of how the internet, as a technological medium, curates how one sees the world, it gives immediate insight into how a curated algorithm functions, and how it can come to carve out what one engages with when they use this kind of technology. Indeed, a curated algorithm has the capacity to frame how one sees the world, insofar as it necessarily prioritizes certain information. This is an immense power to wield, and it is indeed wielded as algorithms are designed by human beings, but human beings also set them to their task and let the algorithm work as it will. Process can be prioritized over outcome.

The purpose of a curated algorithm is to curate what is brought forth into one's view of the world. While the previous example was entirely practical and benign, there are insidious uses of curated algorithms that have a profound impact on communication. For instance, Facebook, uses a curated algorithm that gives preferences to posts that you are predisposed to like, based on your previous internet data. Political news, for example, is organized such that only news that fits your established political leanings will be shown to you, but news that may be dissonant, unfamiliar will likely not be prioritized, such that you may never see it, one's worldview may never account for a side of a story you may be entirely inundated with.

Curated algorithms have mass effect. They necessarily impact billions of people on earth, whether they have investments in markets, they use the internet at all, or actively engage in social media. In light of the last two chapters, the implications that this kind of technology has on communication are pertinent to consider. Heidegger's arguments about technique were based on the subtleties of *Ge-stell* in the era of modern technique, but no longer is *Ge-stell* a subtle swaying, but it has come to be programmed into some forms of technology itself. *Ge-stell*, in this context, doesn't sway through technique, but is now part of the technique itself. Employing a technique is the employment of a frame, and it can entirely subvert the role of the body and lead to a kind of post-modern disembodiment, wherein persuasion becomes a useless affair insofar as the body is not engageable in the ways that the likes of Aristotle and Wittgenstein describe.

Technology's Implications for Worldviews and Persuasion

Heidegger's analysis of technique leads to the basic claim that modern technique, represented aptly by technology, enframes our worldview insofar as modern technologies force us to see the world in particular ways, because it reveals only what is revealed and conceals a

great deal more. So much of Heidegger's analysis revolves around examples that involve some kind of hands-on practice that it is hard to detach the body and its role from his theory. The hands are tethered to the technique. For Heidegger, how we come to know the world — the ideas we come to believe in the world — has a great deal to do with how we physically engage the world. Post-modern technique alters that, insofar as post-modern technique is defined as a way of the hands — the body — being untethered from the technique.

I make a cup with my hands, I build a house, I change the landscape, I change the mode of reaching ends and my worldview alters. I construct an algorithm and it builds without me, it carries forward without the body, and my worldview still alters. With that said, in Heidegger's terms, persuasion still has an active and fruitful role in communication. In the world of modern technique, persuasion has no significantly diminished role that I can name, the body is still tethered to technique. In the world of post-modern technique, however, persuasion is diminishing in its activity and effect. Also, consider, beyond the causal claim I made in the previous sentence, the affective impact.

To be clear, persuasion, which involves ideas beyond reason, is still employable today. It is not as if persuasion has somehow disappeared from our language in totality. However, when we try to persuade by reaching beyond the frame of post-modern technique, we often run into issues insofar as seeing beyond that frame is made difficult for one's worldview to account for. Reaching beyond the frame of post-modern technique is best understood as an attempt to unsee the world that we are constantly inundated with, an attempt to contradict what constitutes a cohesive system of beliefs that are constantly instilled by technologies that one cannot even see. Consider the man who steadfastly believes that the world has only been in existence for fifty

years What we are seeing today, with what are in this context post-modern technologies, is the hands, the body, becoming untethered from technique.

To engage post-modern techniques is not at all to involve the hands — the curated algorithm is the clearest and most prolific example. Persuasion diminishes not because the frame shrinks, but because what is presented in the frame is now curated by that which lies under it. A curated algorithm orders the enframing without any hands-on engagement being involved. To persuade in the paradigm would be to not just present claims that counter one's pre-existing beliefs, but to make claims that counter one's view of the world, a much more difficult task indeed. In the era of post-modern technique we become disembodied, our beliefs can be ordered without our knowing, and curated such that a seamless worldview is presented, again and again, on so many platforms that anything counter to it would seem an absurdity. To persuade someone in this context becomes all the more difficult if persuasion relies on so much that has to do with *pathos*, with that which involves the body. Our worldviews, then, for those of us engaged with these technologies, comes to be constituted differently. One might argue that this constitution is more narrow. This involves a kind of value judgement that seems hard to reinforce, as narrow is a pejorative, but the argument by no means seems to be unfounded.

Persuasion & Disembodiment

There is a sense in which there is a worldview that is of my own making and a worldview that I take on, but am not the creator of. It is the latter sense that represents curation. It is the latter sense that is subject to be disembodied. The former sense, in my terms, necessarily involves the body. The latter sense, in Heidegger's terms, does involve the body, but the nuance I mean to contribute is that this embodiment is not necessarily mutually inclusive.

The question must then become this: how can we persuade a worldview that is disembodied?

To be clear, when I speak of disembodiment, I do not mean to say that the body is entirely removed. The body has a shifting role. Disembodiment is a kind of detachment from a person's role in the construction of their own worldview, and this disembodiment is a of a physical kind. Curation is not mere manipulation, as it is with *Ge-stell*, but a hidden way of ordering, of making things stand, *Bestand*. This kind of ordering is detached from *pathos* insofar as it is not formed by persuasive speech acts that involve the body, but instead rely on presenting an image of the world that presents itself as entirely objective, as totally cohesive, even if this is far from the case. Total truth in the mode I described is a tactic of totalitarian regimes in their propaganda, but post-modern techniques conceals so much of what might be visible, and not only does it conceal, it tailors a worldview to an individual. Curated worldviews involve the employment of big data, of massive numbers of people's data footprints used and analyzed to construct a worldview that is not only accounting for one's idiosyncrasies, but constructs a common vocabulary amongst a variety of users who can be viewed as similar. Curated algorithms are in the business of constructing vocabularies to unify particular groups of people and to reinforce those views, such that one would have to actively seek out opinions that are different, rather than encounter them as they come according to a unadulterated set of opinions might.

To be sure, humans have always been able to group off, to choose their own kinds of people, and construct vocabularies with people similar to themselves. But these spaces are meant to constitute the merely social, or the private, not the public sphere; however, our public sphere has come to be curated and polarized in this way by post-modern technique. To tailor

information to one's idiosyncrasies, to subvert the body, and to curate a worldview that instills what has been framed out and orders it cohesively is the impact of post-modern technique and that has profound implications for communication and how we impart belief in everyday life. My purpose has been to argue that there are indeed implications and to make suggestions about what those implications are. I leave it to the reader and to myself to, in new works, explore the implications further and wonder whether the changing modes of communication that are taking place require turning our technologies in new directions.

Beyond the Trees: Concluding on the Absurd

In my view, poetry has been the most effective means of getting at the crux of many ideas posed herein. The ideas that demand poetry tend to be those that have implications on that which is beyond reason. The argument I have posed in this paper might leave one wondering about authenticity or the possibility of subverting the circumstance of post-modern technique. I do not pretend to have solutions to these issues, but have only just begun the process of identifying these new problems for philosophy, and philosophers, in hopes of contributing to a nuanced understanding of communication in our world. The philosophy of language, like all genres of thought, relies on new ideas being born out of a particular ordering of past ideas that make a discipline pregnant with a new thought. That this ordering can be done by an algorithm, one designed by humans that then operates independently of us must be considered seriously for its implications on communication itself, which has both philosophical, political, and ontological implications that requires ethical investigations into the technologies that mobilize these massively impactful techniques. Just as a teacher curates the readings for a class, new technologies, new techniques can curate a view of the world that has a profound impact on the

public. The absurd, the irrational might be one viable mode of being to subvert the curation of worldviews that are of the kind that are disembodied.

Wallace Stevens's "Of Mere Being" presents a working sense of what I mean by the previous statement:

The palm at the end of the mind,

Beyond the last thought, rises

In the bronze distance,

A gold-feathered bird

Sings in the palm, without human meaning,

Without human feeling, a foreign song.

You know then that it is not the reason

That makes us happy or unhappy.

The bird sings. Its feathers shine.

The palm stands on the edge of space.

The wind moves slowly in the branches.

The bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down. (PWS, 169).

There are a few distinct threads to distill from this poem that inform the ideas in posed herein. Stevens employs a pun. Palm, on one hand, is a kind of tree. Palm, in Greek, is the name for a phoenix, a gold-feathered fire-fangled bird. It is in this sense that the bird, which "sings in the

palm,” is also the palm. Eleanor Cook writes about this play on words saliently: “the bird ‘sings in the palm’ and through a pun *is* the palm. So also the poem is contained in its words or its leaves, and vice versa; it also *is* its words or leaves. So also space is contained in the mind, and vice versa; it also *is* the mind” (Cook). She goes on to say that “the ‘last thought’ is the last thought possible before we move beyond reason, whether toward imagination or toward death” (Cook). While her purpose is merely to examine the word-play that Stevens invents, it helps reveal some of the philosophical underpinnings of this poem. To be amidst modern and post-modern technique forces the palm, in its dual sense, to be concealed. The disembodiment of post-modern technique involves — as a result of its constant objectification and drive to reinforce a consistent worldview via curation — blurring the song “in the palm” that is “without human meaning, without human feeling,” because there is no place for it to neatly fit.

If that which is beyond reason is blurred, if it is out of reach, than *pathos* falters, as emotion becomes something to be rationalized. Stevens is clear in his saying that “it is not the reason that makes us happy or unhappy,” which is to say that it is not reasons that makes us happy or unhappy, but that which is beyond reason. That which extends beyond the frame of reason, that which challenges *Ge-stell*, that which is “the palm” which “stands on the edge of space.” In a moment that unifies the aforementioned Elverum poem and this Wallace Stevens poem, Stevens describes the wind as moving “slowly in the branches.” The unbuilt world sways through itself, unconcealing emotion, whether happiness or otherwise. We are persuaded by that which blows the palm at the end of the mind, or we are shocked by it. We may be moved to resist it or embrace it, but that move to resist or embrace is itself contingent on the body.

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