Heidegger’s Conception of World and the Possibility of Great Art

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It is the temple-work that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being.

–– Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*

**1. Introduction**

In *Strange Tools*, Alva Noë (2015) describes art as a strange tool, one which helps organize us as human beings and make sense of the ways we are organized. Martin Heidegger (1935-1936/2003, 2001) makes a similar claim in *The* *Origin of the Work of Art* when he says that great art discloses a world in which we can live.[[1]](#footnote-1) Great art for Heidegger is thus often thought to be monumental, at the heart of a community and, consequently, the Greek temple and the cathedral are key examples.[[2]](#footnote-2) But this interpretation leads to two related questions. First, what are we to do with artworks in the essay that clearly are not monumental or communal in this way? What unifies the apparently dissimilar artworks Heidegger discusses as great art?[[3]](#footnote-3) Second, how should we understand our experience of works such as the Greek temple, which once were but are no longer central in this way? Heidegger (2001, 40) seems to give a clear answer to the second question when he says that great works of bygone ages “now stand over against us in the realm of tradition and conservation.” But he then describes the ancient Greek temple—an architectural work whose world is firmly in the past—in ways that belie his claim about the lost vitality of art of past epochs (40–43) and thereby leaves open the question: what can great art of the past still do?

Hegel (1975, 7) thought there was a time when art could express the “deepest interests of mankind, and the most comprehensive truths of spirit.” But now, as he puts it, “art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past” (11). In some versions of his essay, Heidegger quoted Hegel’s pessimistic pronouncement with approval. But in the final version, he expresses a guarded optimism about the current and future possibility of great art.[[4]](#footnote-4) To understand Heidegger’s views on art—including his guarded optimism about great art in the future, his explicit claims about the limited vitality of great art of the past, and his unintentional case for the continued power of great artworks of the past—it is crucial to understand his conception of world as a practical context within which actions are meaningful.[[5]](#footnote-5) Doing so will also help us better answer the first question about the apparently dissimilar and potentially anomalous works of art in the essay.

Heidegger thinks art can play a fundamental role as it discloses a world, a practical context that makes actions available and shapes their significance. Because art simultaneously shapes and is shaped by the world in which it is created and received, we can get a sense of different (including past) worlds through their art. I argue, in some sense contra Heidegger, that art from the past can continue to play something like this fundamental role. I hedge here in two ways. First, my argument that great art of the past can still perform this role depends on a Heideggerian framework but goes against Heidegger’s claim about the lost vitality of great art of the past. Second, I hope to make clear that there *is* a sense in which great art of the past is not the same as it was, but that there are good (and again, Heideggerian) reasons to think that great art of the past is not limited to the “realm of tradition and conservation” but can do *something like* the work it did previously.

Part of the challenge in answering the questions posed earlier stems from the fact that important interpretations of *Origin of the Work of Art* sometimes conflate two views of what makes art great for Heidegger: (1) the world-disclosure view and (2) the world-gathering view. In the world-disclosure view, great art discloses a practical context within which humans can live.[[6]](#footnote-6) For the world-gathering view, art is great as it finds a society of “preservers” to live within its world (Heidegger 2001, 64–65).[[7]](#footnote-7) World gathering presupposes world disclosure, so these two views can overlap, but they are distinct. However, Young’s (2001) and Dreyfus’s (2005) focus on world-gathering leads them either to draw problematic conclusions or to overlook or downplay artworks in Heidegger’s essay that do not gather worlds (such as Van Gogh’s *Shoes* or Meyer’s “Fountain”).[[8]](#footnote-8) In this way, their answers to the first question fall short. Béatrice Han-Pile (2011) helpfully separates world-disclosure from the world-gathering emphasized by Young and Dreyfus, further illuminating what art can do—whether world-gathering art of the past, art shaping our world, or some other art. But whereas Han-Pile thinks her position distances her from Heidegger’s own view in *Origin of the Work of Art*, my claim is that Heidegger’s theory of art can explain his own experience of great art of the past, even if it differs from his explicit description of the status of great art of the past. Heidegger’s framework explains how we can experience art in more than purely aesthetic ways, including how art of the past can function as more than mere aesthetic objects or historical artifacts. These artworks can reveal important things about the world we live in, even if the worlds they disclose lie beyond our practical grasp.

**2. Heidegger’s Conception of World**

Although very different stylistically, there is significant continuity between Heidegger’s conception of world in *Being and Time* (published in 1927) and that in *Origin of the Work of Art*, published about 8 years later (1935­­­­–1936/2001).[[9]](#footnote-9)

In *Being and Time* (2006, 64–65), Heidegger outlines four senses of “world.”

1. World1 as “Universe” is the sum of entities that actually exist or that share a particular kind of being. World1 is populated by all things “present-at-hand.” One example of World1 is the physical universe: “the totality of the physical entities . . . as investigated by physics” (Haugeland 2013, 99).
2. World2 as “What Unifies These Entities” is the shared kind of being of entities in World1. It is what a particular region or realm of entities has in common.[[10]](#footnote-10) When talking of the physical universe, World2 refers to what unifies the entities of physical world—the physical.
3. World3 as “Existential Referential Totality” is that wherein a “factical Dasein” (a human being) lives. Heidegger thinks World3 “may stand for the ‘public’ we-world or for one’s own closest (domestic) environment” (Heidegger 2006, 65). The World3 of physics refers not to the physical universe (World1) or to the physical (World2). Instead, the World3 of physics is an agential context involving research projects, funding agencies, and journal articles.[[11]](#footnote-11) Heidegger calls World3 “pre-ontological” because usually we live in it without explicitly noticing or articulating how the equipment, practices, and so forth fit together.[[12]](#footnote-12)
4. World4 as *Weltlichkeit*—translated variously as “worldhood,” “worldliness,” and “worldishness”—is the structure Worlds3 have in common.[[13]](#footnote-13) Heidegger (2006, 65) writes, “Worldhood may have as its modes whatever structural wholes any special ‘worlds’ may have at the time; but it embraces in itself the a priori character of worldhood in general.” World4, then, describes the structural features that are constitutive of Worlds3.

Heidegger focuses on World3 and World4, emphasizing the human, agential dimension by exploring how the “world shows itself in everyday concern” (1992, 186) as a practical context of everyday activities. He thinks the philosophical tradition has “passed over” the world as experienced in our ordinary engagement, instead tending to understand world as nature (186). Although nature is one way to apprehend the world, it is not the primary way the world shows up for us.[[14]](#footnote-14) This passing over is not mere coincidence. We are typically “absorbed” in the world of our everyday activities and rarely try to articulate it explicitly. And when we do, we tend to do so poorly.

It is not that World1 or World2 are illegitimate uses of “world.” But these commonsensical understandings miss (or pass over) our original experience of the world. Heidegger believes our default theoretical conception of world is World1; we typically conceive of world as nature. But we distort our original experience if we think of entities in the “environing world” [Umwelt] as “value-laden thing[s] of nature” (Heidegger 1992, 183). World3 is not the sum of physical objects, but “that wherein a ‘factical’ Dasein can be said to ‘live’” (Heidegger 2006, 65). The way we talk of the worlds of baseball, business, or fashion can help illustrate Heidegger’s conception of World3.[[15]](#footnote-15) But if we think of the world of baseball as a collection of baseball-related objects—bats, mitts, fields, peanuts, and cleats—we have World1. And if we understand it as the coherence of those objects, we have World2. In both cases, we miss what Heidegger calls the “worldhood of the world.”

To understand World3 and World4 (worldhood), we need to look at our everyday engagement with the world, at the “concern which manipulates things and puts them to use” (Heidegger 2006, 67). We experience the world of our practical, everyday engagement as a referential context or referential whole (*Verweisungszusammenhang* or *Verweisungsganzheit*) (75). When writing, I encounter my pen, books, and paper not as isolated objects, but as already related in a referential whole. The pen shows up as “for writing” on the paper and also refers to books and articles. Heidegger emphasizes the priority of the whole, “of the referential totality and of the references over the things which show themselves in these references” (Heidegger 1992, 188).

We usually engage unreflectively in this whole, smoothly going through our day-to-day activities without reflectively noticing how our world is structured (Heidegger 2006, 69). In the engaged sight of “circumspection” (*Umsicht*), we grasp the referential whole, fluidly reading, taking notes, and writing, and this is prior to the theoretical sight of observation.[[16]](#footnote-16) Breakdown cases—when my pen runs out of ink or my computer freezes, for example—are important, because breaks in the referential relations help us see the parts composing the whole. As my writing comes to a halt, I see the (now ineffective) connections among things in my office. Our agential familiarity with the world leads us to experience broken tools like the inkless pen as a “break in the familiar totality of references” (Heidegger 1992, 188). Even the unfamiliar workshop appears as a workshop, as a space someone could move and live in, and not as a “mere conglomerate of things scattered in disarray” (188). We see “hand tools, material, manufactured, finished pieces, unfinished items in process . . . Even though it is strange, it is still experienced as a world, as a closed referential whole” [*Verweisungsganzheit*] (188).[[17]](#footnote-17)

In short, understanding a world, such as the world of a student, is different from knowing the objects of student life. The equipment of the world—paper, pens, laptops, and so forth—is connected in a whole that invites or affords certain actions, and the student understands the world by grasping those actions. But even when we lack the skills to engage in a particular world, we see it as a coherent whole. World3 is thus a referential whole soliciting us to act and guiding how we respond to things around us; World4 (*Weltlichkeit*) is the shared structure of these referential wholes.

In *Being and Time*, the world as a collection of objects (World1) is secondary to world as referential context (World3). Similarly, in *Origin of the Work of Art*, which has world disclosure as a central theme, experiencing art as an object of aesthetic experience is secondary to experiencing art as world-disclosive. This order of priority resists the modern emphasis on aesthetic experience, in keeping with Heidegger’s worry that experience could be the element in which art loses its vitality or, more poetically, dies (Heidegger 2001, 77; 2003, 67). Truth (as *alêtheia*) happens as the artwork discloses a world. He writes, “To be a work means to set up a world . . . the work opens up a world and keeps it abidingly in force” (Heidegger 2001, 43). “World,” here, “is the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into being,” and “by the opening up of a world, all things gain their . . . remoteness and nearness, their scope and limits” (43–44). In world disclosure, a context of significance is opened that “forms and guides one’s interests” (Keller 1999, 141). The world “to which we are subject” both makes possible and circumscribes our options. As we pursue ends, (2006) we respond to the spatiality of the world—including the “remoteness and nearness” of things.[[18]](#footnote-18) When working on a paper involving library research, the library across campus is in some sense nearer than the empty room across the hall.[[19]](#footnote-19) The remoteness and nearness of things depend on a prior disclosure of a referential context which shapes, among other things, our sense of the good and the worth of different life paths, our ways of valuing people and things, and the ways to pursue ends.[[20]](#footnote-20) In any world, certain things matter more than others, some considerations carry more weight than others, and these things and considerations have their appropriate domains and limits. The speed of one’s fastball or one’s command of various pitches factor greatly into whether one should be a starting pitcher or a closer but do not matter if the same person applies for a job as a marketing director.

Our world’s significance is largely not up to us. In large measure, the language(s) we learn, our society’s cultural norms, and the equipment available shape what we can do. I do not choose the first language I learn or the family dynamic into which I am born. Neither can I choose to be a feudal serf; that option is not available. We often have options and some control over what we pursue and how we value things, so we can influence what is significant in our lives. But I am not the sole arbiter of the world’s significance. “The world worlding” is a cultural, societal, and historical process: “Wherever those decisions of our history that relate to our very being are made, are taken up and abandoned by us, go unrecognized and are rediscovered by new inquiry, there the world worlds” (Heidegger (2001, 43). The world worlds, or the referential context creates and recreates itself, as we individually and collectively live out decisions about our time, ideals, and values: “The world is the clearing of the paths of the essential guiding directions with which all decision complies” (53). Our decisions about how to live must comply with, or fit within, the possibilities afforded by the world or, perhaps, worlds we inhabit.

In *Radical Hope*, Jonathan Lear (2006, 2) highlights the importance of such practical contexts with Plenty Coup’s haunting claim that after the buffalo went away and the Crow form of life collapsed—one organized around hunting and the warfare necessary to sustain moving borders—“nothing happened.”[[21]](#footnote-21) If actions are movements (acts) with certain ends, and human ends depend on historical and cultural context, the collapse of a form of life could make certain actions impossible.[[22]](#footnote-22) Previously, when a Crow warrior planted a coup stick, he marked a boundary in battle and committed to either “hold his ground or die losing his coup-stick to the enemy” (Lear 2006, 13). However, with the nomadic life of hunting buffalo and the centrality of war now in the past, the context within which it made sense to mark Crow territory by planting a coup stick has changed, and it is unclear that even placing the same stick in the ground would count as planting a coup stick.

**3. The World(s) We Live in**

Lear’s example highlights the role that practical contexts play in the significance of actions. Even on the individual level, insofar as different practical roles and identities have different referential contexts, it could make sense to talk of distinct (if sometimes somewhat overlapping) worlds. Although one is unlikely to be an early 20th-century English aristocrat and an advertising industry executive, the same person could be a parent, cook, professor, and amateur athlete. When I cook for my family as a parent, the purpose of feeding my family shapes the significance of my actions and the relations among kitchen equipment figures more prominently than my unfinished grant proposal. To the extent that someone has various defining roles, the same person could live within different worlds, subject to the different solicitations of these particular worlds.[[23]](#footnote-23) That person could be drawn to actions assessed by different, sometimes disparate, standards. Framing things in terms of Heidegger’s agential conception of World3 could allow for more nuanced analyses about ways agents can be pulled in different and sometimes conflicting ways, seeming to have reasons for the different actions, and then how they can respond to reasons in these different and potentially conflicting contexts.

To some, however, talking of a plurality of worlds could seem problematic, or not particularly helpful. They might ask about the relationship between different but contemporaneous worlds. Are they really inaccessible to each other? If so, in what sense? If not, why call them different worlds? This could open the door for a problematic proliferation of worlds. If there were a plurality of worlds and reasons for action depend on the world in which they are situated, as Lear’s planting coup example suggests, worlds could proliferate and reasons could become problematically world- and agent-relative, and, potentially, we could be unable to understand one another’s reasons for action. Pushing the other direction, one could think that we live in the same world as the ancient Greeks because our world is causally continuous with the Greek world. Things have changed, of course, but it is the same world, and whatever benefit there is to thinking of agents inhabiting different worlds is outweighed by the conceptual confusion.

In response to the claim that we all live (and have lived) in the same world, Heidegger could agree that a certain kind of continuity or succession explains overlap between different Worlds3. Different Worlds3—whether contemporary or temporally remote—need not be entirely different. Heidegger would agree there is some common World4 (worldhood) and, depending on proximity, even a common World1 (the collection of things around us), while still holding that there is a helpful sense in which there are different Worlds3. On his conception of worldhood (World4), even very different Worlds3 with different available or salient possibilities have certain structures in common. This shared framework helps us grasp and explains how we grasp, to some degree, lives very different from ours. Even with a largely shared framework, however, we can misconstrue actions if we do not carefully attend to the particularities of an agent’s context(s).

Heidegger distinguishes between different worlds, or, sometimes, different dimensions of the world. As mentioned, World3 can “stand for either the ‘public’ we-world or one’s ‘own’ closest (domestic) environment” (Heidegger 2006, 65). He also distinguishes one’s “own particular world” from “a common totality of surroundings” (1992, 188).[[24]](#footnote-24) But “my own environing world” (*eigene Umwelt*) always assumes the public world (*öffentliche Welt*) (192). The public world makes certain actions or options available and shapes their significance; individual characteristics—including my body, interests, capacities, dispositions, and practical identities—constrain and focus those options. For example, as a professor, writing a paper matters more to me than designing a cell phone, even if both activities are equally valuable. Practical identities which shape our worlds are made available and shaped by the public world.

To clarify the sense in which there is a plurality of worlds and minimize the world-proliferation worry, I propose to individuate Worlds3 according to actions possible or intelligible in them. Because actions are more than mere movement—they must be intelligible, fitting in a certain conceptual space—reducing actions to movements, apart from the conceptual spaces within which they are performed, distorts their significance. Without the appropriate space, certain actions are not “doable,” as David Velleman (2013, 10) puts it, because they lack a “shared taxonomy of actions.” Remember Lear’s (2006, 32) claim that certain happenings became impossible for the Crow after moving to the reservation. Without the relevant “shared taxonomy of actions,” one can no longer plant a coup stick:

“An act is not constituted merely by the physical movements of an actor: it gains its identity via its location in a conceptual world. . . . The very physical movements that, at an earlier time, would have constituted a brave act of counting coups [or planting a coup stick] are now a somewhat pathetic expression of nostalgia.” (32)

The same movement can mean something very different if situated in a different world. Moreover, not all actions are available in all worlds. Just as planting a coup stick is not available in the twenty-first century, so was Silicon Valley entrepreneurship not available in the third century BCE.

Building on this, let’s say that World3 A is different from World3 B if some action possible in A is not possible in B. There are at least three, sometimes overlapping, ways actions are impossible in some world. First, an action could be impossible in one world if, due to different conceptual-practical frameworks, a movement that has a place and significance in A lacks them in B. Even though we know the previous meaning of planting a coup stick, the form of life within which the action is significant is no longer viable. Outside the nomadic life of hunting and war, marking territory by planting a coup stick no longer appears as an everyday, intelligible action. Our grasp of the world in which planting a coup stick is viable is not one of direct, practical engagement. Second, actions could be impossible because the stuff of the World1 has changed. I cannot offer a sacrifice to Hera at a Greek temple because I lack the instruments to do it appropriately. The difficulty with planting a coup stick also applies because the sacrifice lacks a place in my form of life. Third, since an action is “an act done for the sake of some end,” actions depend on a community (Korsgaard 2009, 11). I cannot become a chess grandmaster without the chess community and the context it makes available. A World3 has (at least) these three elements—a conceptual-practical framework, stuff of the world, and community—and worlds can differ from each other as these vary.

The vocabulary of a plurality of different worlds can also describe different historical epochs. Iain Thomson (2011, 8) describes “ontological historicity” as the idea “that our basic sense of reality changes over time,” and “ontological epochality” as the further claim that “Western humanity’s changing sense of reality congeals into a series of relatively distinct and unified historical ‘epochs.’” Different epochs have different senses of reality to the extent that their referential contexts differ. In this vein, Young (2001, 23) suggests that different epochs or historical worlds “are defined and distinguished by different horizons of disclosure.” Thinking of people from different cultures and times as inhabiting different spaces than we do could help illuminate others’ reasons for acting and living as they do. But if they did or still do inhabit different spaces, it could lead to the conclusion that their worlds and works from them are inaccessible to us. Or if the works are accessible, it is only as artifacts of a different world. And there seem to be other ways we can experience great art of the past.

**4. Worlds and The Possibility of Great Art**

Because the meanings of our lives and actions depend on the conceptual worlds available to us, something with the capacity to manifest or articulate the contours of a world is powerful. Some actions, for example, can cease to be intelligible when “there are no longer viable ways to do [them]” and this depends on the contours of the world (Lear 2006, 32). Because Heidegger (2001) thinks art is a primary way worlds are disclosed, art and its reception is central to worlds emerging, changing and, sometimes, collapsing. When a work fails to hold sway in the way it once did, society can be significantly impacted. The importance Heidegger grants to art situates him as an inheritor of the German Idealist tradition, described by Robert Pippin (2014, 9) as “a period in German letters when more philosophical and even social and civilizational hope was placed in the achievement of art and in the right appreciation of that achievement than ever before or since in the Western philosophical tradition.” But even with the shared hope in art, many disagreed about whether art could fulfill this hope. Compare Hegel’s (1975, 11) pessimistic claim that “art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past” with his earlier claim that “The highest act of reason, which, in that it comprises all ideas, is an aesthetic act, and . . . truth and goodness are united like sisters only in beauty” (1797). And as Karsten Harries (2009, 1) notes, for both Hegel and Heidegger, these questions “concern much more than just the future of art.” If the truth of art is world disclosure—with art disclosing a normative whole within which we can live—the lack and perhaps impossibility of great art in modernity is no small matter.[[25]](#footnote-25) In addition, the question of what great art of the past can still do is of more than purely aesthetic interest.

Recall the two interpretations of what makes art great for Heidegger: (1) the world-disclosure view and (2) the world-gathering view. In the world-disclosure view, great art discloses practical contexts in which humans can live. Artworks do this differently. Some set forth a paradigm of an epoch’s understanding of being. Dreyfus (2005, 411) describes the way in which the temple illuminated everything for the Greeks. Even though he classifies the national highway system as a debased artwork, Dreyfus (2005, 413) believes it discloses a world in which efficiency is pursued at the expense of much else.[[26]](#footnote-26) Rather than following the contours of the land, the highway system maximizes efficient travel, encouraging and reflecting the view of things as resources to be used flexibly and efficiently. Art can also disclose a world by presenting a paradigm of the good life, by showing the best, highest, or most worthwhile life. For the world-gathering view, great art does more than disclose a world. It must also find preservers, a historical people to live within its normative whole. World disclosure is thus necessary but insufficient for world gathering—not every world-disclosive artwork finds preservers.

A work could fail to find preservers, and thus fail to gather a world, for various reasons. The ideals it embodies could fail to resonate. Or, due to the modern emphasis on aesthetic experience, people could not see art as playing that role. Describing how the aesthetic approach to art blocks the more fundamental knowledge of preserving, Heidegger (2001, 38, 77) writes: “Knowledge in the manner of *preserving* is far removed from that merely aestheticizing connoisseurship of the work’s formal aspects” (66).[[27]](#footnote-27) Different from an aesthetic grasp of art, to know in the “manner of preserving” is to live in the world the artwork discloses: it “brings [the preserver] into affiliation with the truth happening in the work” (66). Individuals come into affiliation with the truth “happening in the work” by adapting themselves to the world the artwork discloses.

Heidegger’s (2001, 41) description of the temple in Paestum supports the world-gathering interpretation, because the world it discloses finds (or found) preservers: [[28]](#footnote-28)

It is the temple-work that first fits together and [. . .] gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people.

The temple helps the Greek world cohesion. By fitting together the referential context, the temple allows the humans, animals, plants, and other things to become what they are. At first, this description of the founding relationship between the temple and the surrounding objects may seem (at best) unintuitive: obviously, there are things (and people) in the area before the temple is built! But with Heidegger’s account of World3 and his holistic conception of meaning (the parts of a whole gain their significance only within a whole), the entities’ significance depends on the context the temple discloses.

In disclosing a world, Heidegger thinks the temple also sets forth earth. He distinguishes earth from world and sets the two in mutually supportive opposition. Although “earth” is important to Heidegger, the notion can be difficult to pin down.[[29]](#footnote-29) However, this interpretive difficulty is appropriate because “earth appears openly cleared as itself only when it is perceived and preserved as that which is by nature undisclosable, that which shrinks from every disclosure and constantly keeps itself closed up” and “shatters every attempt to penetrate into it” (2001, 45, 46). Earth is the concealed counterpart to world in world disclosure. Robert Pippin (2014, 113) describes Heidegger’s point in this way: “in any disclosing . . . , through artworks, of the most fundamental and important human question—the meaning of being: . . . this unconcealing is also and necessarily an obscuring or concealing.” The point could be that any time some particular world is disclosed, other aspects are concealed. For example, when we focus on a chair’s physical composition, we simultaneously conceal its use. Pippin thinks this does not quite match Heidegger’s point, which is that “by revealing anything, an artwork is *just thereby also* concealing *what* it is revealing, not merely concealing some *other* aspect that, in principle, is accessible in some other way” (114, original emphasis).

When world is disclosed (or unconcealed) through an artwork, then, earth supports that particular world but simultaneously conceals itself. The artwork is a paradigm of the struggle between earth and world: “In setting up a world and setting forth the earth, the work is an instigation of this striving . . . The work-being of the work consists in the fighting of the battle between world and earth” (Heidegger 2001, 48). This battle, however, cannot be done away with, because each earth and world needs the other in order to be what it is. Earth provides material and support for a particular world; world gives shape to earth. Wrathall (2006, 82) describes how earth supports and sets constraints on the practices available in a particular world. The rock used in a cathedral, for instance, makes certain heights and architectural qualities possible but also places limits on how these can be brought about. Heidegger is reticent to describe “earth” apart from any particular world, since the way earth shows itself varies from world to world. But in general, earth is what simultaneously supports and resists our practices and ways of living in the world.

Returning to the temple, what exactly is the temple? Is it merely the building? Or if it is something more, what is it? The temple simply being the building may seem the most obvious option. But there are (at least) two better options. According to the first (Temple1) the temple involves the building and the associated rituals and practices. According to the second (Temple2) the temple refers to the building and the surrounding landscape. If we understand temple as the more robust Temple1, including the building and the worship (the rituals and practices) in or around the temple, it could highlight the distance between our (or Heidegger’s) experience of the temple and the original experience of those living in or around Paestum in, say, 430 BCE. For one, at that time, the temple would have housed a cult-statue of the temple’s god.[[30]](#footnote-30) Rituals, such as sacrifices or offerings to the god, would have been performed at nearby altars, typically outside the temple.[[31]](#footnote-31) One obvious difference between the Temple1 then and now (or when Heidegger wrote of it) is that, lacking rituals and key objects, in some sense, it is no longer a Temple1.

On the other hand, if we look at the temple at Paestum in terms of Temple2, the gap between Temple2 then and now does not seem as wide. But can the more minimalist notion of Temple2 explain how the temple did what it once did, to say nothing of what it can do now. Could Temple2 disclose a world? My claim is that it can. The more minimalist Temple2 can explain what the temple did for the original inhabitants of the region and what it can still do for those temporally remote from the ancient temple. The Temple2 involves both the building and the surrounding landscape, and the relationship between the two is central for the temple’s significance. As Vincent Scully (2013, 2) suggests in *The Earth, the People, and the Gods*, “the landscape and the temples together form the architectural whole.”[[32]](#footnote-32) The landscapes were already considered sacred for the way they embodied certain gods and the temples were carefully placed and constructed, sometimes to further embody those gods while set in a reciprocal and contrastive relationship with the natural, sacred landscape (see Scully 2013, 1–8). In this way, the temple embodied the relationship between the “man-made and the natural, nature and the human will” (7). Admittedly, in 430 BCE, the Temple2 would have been quite different than what we find in Paestum today. Because most Greek temples were stuccoed and painted with bright colors, Heidegger would have encountered a pale shadow of the former temple (Zaidman 1992, 19).

Because of these gaps, one could interpret Heidegger’s writings on the temple as an imaginative reconstruction of the way the temple would have worked for someone living in its shadow when it was fully functioning as a cultural and religious center. And, to be sure, something different did happen in the temple complex at that time—worship and all that encompassed. Even without the god’s cult-statue and lacking the worship once found in and around it, however, the temple still can go a long way in disclosing that Greek world. Because the thinner notion of Temple2 can say a lot about how the temple functioned (and still can function), henceforth ‘temple’ will refer to Temple2, the architectural whole of the temple and the surrounding landscape, without necessarily including the practices of worship. My contention is that Temple2 could *still* be world-disclosive and not only in the way it gives us insight into the original world of the temple.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Recall the descriptive passage from *Origin of the Work of Art*, in which Heidegger says that the temple “first gives to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves” (42) and that the linguistic work “puts up for decision what is holy and what unholy, what great and what small, what brave and what cowardly, what lofty and what flighty, what master and what slave.” Young uses this to support his claim (2001, 24) about “the inseparability of ontology and ethics,” which he sees as fundamental to Heidegger’s thought. Young rightly highlights the inseparability of ontology and ethics (broadly construed) for Heidegger and further claims that ethics is grounded in ontology. On my reading, however, this passage suggests a relationship of mutual grounding, in which a people’s highest purposes both determine and are determined by what exists.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Describing the “volatilized” ontology of the later Heidegger, Mark Wrathall (2013, 329) writes, “The relations that are determinative of being are fluid and subject to change, potentially shifting along with the entities that relate to one another. And if constitutive relations are changeable, then the entities which are constituted by the relations they hold are also volatilized, changing with every alteration in the network of relations.” A world’s relations and entities are mutually constituting: things and actions become what they are only as part of a whole. Just as planting a coup stick is more than placing a stick in the ground (because it depends on practices, beliefs, and forms of life), so are people, animals, and things more than their physical constitution. They depend for their nature on the referential contexts that art can disclose and articulate: “The temple, in its standing there, first gives to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves” (Heidegger 2001, 42). The people’s conceptions of the good life and their obligations to others, for example, are shaped by the temple and depend on it keeping that world “abidingly in force” (42).

A work holds the disclosed world together as long as “the work is a work, as long as the god has not fled from it” (Heidegger 2001, 42). With the temple, this happens (or happened) in two ways. Within the temple building, the god is (or was) symbolized by a physical object—a cult-statue. That statue embodies the ideals of the people, both descriptively and normatively: it reflects what they *do* value and shows what they *should* value. But the temple itself—the sacred landscape, the buildings, and the relation between them—also embodies the god (Scully 1-2).[[35]](#footnote-35) As Dreyfus (2005, 414) puts it, as a paradigm, the temple both fixes a culture’s style and holds it up to the people. For the inhabitants of Paestum in 430 BCE, the god and its temple would have been intertwined with a conception of the highest good and an accompanying referential context. The god and temple stand in a relationship of mutual determination with the surrounding community. The temple shapes the significance of everyday activities, and the temple and the god dwelling therein are influenced by the lives of the nearby community. If we lose sight of this mutual determination, the temple’s centrality seems incongruous with Heidegger’s usual focus on everyday activities.

Gregory Retallack’s (2008) study suggests that the deities of Greek temples correspond to the terrain on which they are built (and, consequently, to the forms of life available in the area).[[36]](#footnote-36) On his model, a temple of Hera, probably the temple Heidegger has in mind, would have been constructed in an area with soil better suited to pastoral farming than cultivation.[[37]](#footnote-37) Since Paestum was a Greek colony with potentially “strong indigenous influence,” Retallack (2008, 644 and personal correspondence) excluded the temple from his study. But his work suggests temples were often dedicated to deities whose beneficence would have been valuable in the area. Put differently, the god inhabiting the temple influenced but was also determined by the lives of those in its shadow.

Or, as we have discussed, to gather a world, an artwork depends on people (“preservers”) to take up its world: “As a world opens itself, it submits to the decision of an historical humanity the question of victory and defeat, blessing and curse, mastery and slavery. The dawning world brings out what is as yet undecided and measureless, and thus discloses the hidden necessity of measure and decisiveness” (Heidegger 2001, 61). The artwork helps stabilize the referential context in which beliefs, traditions, and the stuff of the world are in flux, “undecided and measureless.” In this volatilized ontology, the work brings to the fore these not-yet-worked-out ideals. Preservers then determine whether and how to live in the truth—the disclosed world—of the work: “In the work, truth is thrown toward the coming preservers . . . toward an historical group of men . . . [but] what is thus cast forth is, however, never an arbitrary demand. Genuinely poetic projection is the opening up or disclosure of that into which historical being as historical is already cast” (73). Great art, the “genuinely poetic projection,” opens and articulates a practical context already (perhaps tacitly) developed or developing for a people of its or a coming epoch.[[38]](#footnote-38) In this vein, Heidegger (2001, 73) says of the process of (artistic) creation:

“All creation, because it is such a drawing-up, is a drawing, as of water from a spring. Modern subjectivism, to be sure, immediately misrepresents creation taking it as the self-sovereign subject’s performance of genius. The founding of truth is a founding not only in the sense of free bestowal, but at the same time foundation in the sense of this ground-laying grounding. Poetic projection comes from Nothing in this respect, that it never takes its gift from the ordinary and traditional. But it never comes from Nothing in that what is projected by it is only the withheld vocation of the historical being of man itself.”

But there are reasons great art may not be possible as it once was. One could doubt whether art in what Heidegger calls the “technological age” can gather worlds as it could in ancient Greece or medieval Christendom. The technological age could seem to lack the unified understanding of being of previous epochs. But this is not right. Instead, in its unified understanding, stuff shows up primarily as resources to be used with maximal efficiency. Remember Dreyfus’s (2005) characterization of the interstate highway system as emphasizing efficiency and seeing terrain as something to be modified for effective travel. Even if the highway discloses a world, that world is problematically connected to the earth, because it is not sensitive to the way the earth’s resistance. Our pursuit of efficient and flexible resources diminishes our sensitivity to the (in this case, literal) contours of the earth. For these reasons, Heidegger, like Hegel, worries that as aesthetic theory dominates art theory and creation, art creators and potential preservers will see art primarily as equipment for aesthetic experience and not as world-disclosive or world-gathering. And if that understanding guides its creation and reception, art will not find preservers.

In what remains, instead of examining whether world-gathering art is possible or will be in the future, we will focus on our experience of great art of the past. Does our experience with world-gathering artworks of the past parallel the way we now grasp the action of planting a coup stick? If so, past art could illuminate past worlds and ways of living but fail to illuminate our world. Heidegger (2001) does claim that great art of the past is relegated to the sphere of aesthetic enjoyment or, alternatively, to the realm of conservation and tradition, but his description of the Greek temple cuts against this claim in ways his conception of art as world-disclosive can explain.

Admittedly, we cannot live unreflectively in the world of the Greek temple, if the temple includes the practices and activities of worship (Temple1), because we lack key practices, beliefs, and equipment the temple stabilized. But Heidegger’s conception of world illuminates how we may still experience the temple, even Temple2, in more than merely aesthetic ways. Temple2 can illuminate how the Greek world fit together—including how they understood the balance between nature, on the one hand, and human will and order, on the other—but it also illuminates how worlds are organized, including ours. In fact, what Heidegger calls the “withdrawal” or “decay” of the world of the temple may enhance the temple’s ability to show how worlds work. When we are immersed in a world that is actively disclosed and gathered by some artwork—when it shapes our most basic understanding of what exists, what matters, and how to live—it can be hard to see how it holds things together because it is often difficult to grasp things closest to us.[[39]](#footnote-39) Similar to Heidegger’s (2006) claim in *Sein und Zeit* that aspects of our world become salient to us when they stop working, the Greek temple can give us a sense for how the Greek world held together—what they considered good, beautiful, or sacred—perhaps especially when it no longer gathers a world. But more than this, such artworks can help us develop a practical sense for the good, beautiful, or sacred in our world.

Great art of the past can draw us to engage with their worlds, even if many of the actions they originally solicited are no longer available.[[40]](#footnote-40) This experience can yield a unique theoretical-practical grasp of a world, different from what one gets from studying the history and culture of a people. The temple not only helps us grasp how one lived in its world. It can also draw us to live according to the ideals it embodies, even if we cannot fully live as an ancient Greek. Moreover, such experiences can sensitize us to our world and to artworks articulating and disclosing our historical situation as well as those disclosing worlds in the wings, practical contexts beginning to cohere but waiting for something to articulate their structure.

On my interpretation, Han-Pile’s (2011, 140) claim that art can make palpable worldhood provides the resources both to explain this experience of great art of the past and to unify the seemingly dissimilar artworks in *Origin of the Work of Art*.[[41]](#footnote-41) The latter is something both Young (2001) and Dreyfus (2005) fail to successfully address. Young’s (2001) emphasis of the Greek paradigm—great art as world-gathering—leads him to explain artworks discussed in the essay that do not clearly fit the Greek paradigm by claiming that Heidegger later revised his views on art to account for such instances.[[42]](#footnote-42) Dreyfus (2005, 407) claims that since, for Heidegger, great art manifests, articulates, or reconfigures the style of a culture, “most of what hangs in museums, what are admired as great works of architecture, and what are published by poets were never works of art, a few were once artworks but are no longer working, and none is working now.” Despite their considerable virtues, then, these accounts are unable to explain Heidegger’s (2001, 39) claim that only great art is under consideration in the essay. Dreyfus’s claim that only a few things ever were artworks either makes Heidegger’s claim false or suggests that Dreyfus thinks Heidegger’s inclusion of Meyer’s “Fountain” and Van Gogh’s *Shoes*, for example, was a mistake, which is similar to Young’s characterization of Heidegger’s discussions of Meyer and Van Gogh as either anomalous or mistaken, in light of his emphasis of the Greek paradigm. Han-Pile’s account, however, has the resources to address these shortcomings. Han-Pile comes to the Heideggerian view that art can make palpable worldhood through an attempt to make sense of her experiences with Vermeer’s *The Milkmaid*, *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter*, and *The Geographer*.[[43]](#footnote-43) She (2011, 139) notes that although the two primary interpretive approaches to seventeenth-century Dutch paintings—realist and contextualist—“highlight important aspects of the works” and have their place, they fail to capture her experience of these paintings: “Neither gives us a sense of how we relate to the paintings as artworks: in each case [the paintings] are taken as artefacts and decrypted according to external principles” (139). If we follow these approaches, in other words, it is unclear why Vermeer’s paintings would elicit a different reaction than another artifact from the Dutch golden age, such as the Plantin press or Jacques de Gheyn’s botanical or zoological drawings. Instead, the Heideggerian view of art as disclosing worldhood better captures her engagement with the paintings *as* artworks (Han-Pile 2011, 138-140).

But while Han-Pile (2011, 140) thinks seeing Vermeer’s art as disclosing worldhood distances her from Heidegger’s view that artworks disclose worlds, my suggestion is that her insight is already implicit in Heidegger’s framework, even if his explicit pronouncements suggest otherwise, and, in addition to the benefits already mentioned, it helps explain Heidegger’s own descriptions of great artworks of the past. First, however, let us get clear about the relationship between art as disclosing worldhood and world disclosure. A world (World3) is “a horizon which is contextually dependent on historical practices,” while worldhood (World4) is the structure “involved by all historical worlds or sub-worlds” (149). Worldhood is always disclosed in a particular world and all worlds exhibit the structure of worldhood.[[44]](#footnote-44) But the unique things and practices of particular worlds cause the structure of worldhood to be individuated differently (Heidegger 1992, 186–188).[[45]](#footnote-45) When world is disclosed through an artwork—such as the Greek temple—worldhood is also disclosed.

The Greek temple, then, can show how that world fit together—what mattered, how people saw fit to pursue their interests, and the significance of activities. For the ancient shepherd near the Greek temple, herding was more than the mere physical act of gathering animals; it was done with reference to the forbearance and the bounty of the gods in allowing the herd to thrive. Similarly, the significance of farming was shaped by the interactions of “birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline” (Heidegger 2001, 41). Plowing, planting, and harvesting crops were ways communities lived or died, their livelihood depending largely on the fertility of the ground and the favor of the gods. Just as placing a stick in the ground is not planting a coup stick, growing the same plants as the Greeks will (probably) have a different significance for us, because we are couched in different contexts.

But even if the significance of actions depends on their context or world, Heidegger thinks we cannot but find worlds significant, even when they are very different from our own. Even if we cannot live in the Greek world or the unfamiliar workshop—lacking the ability to fully grasp and unreflectively engage with them—we still experience them as significant wholes. We encounter them as meaningful, if foreign and closed, “referential totalit[ies]” (*Verweisungsganzheit*) (Heidegger 1992, 188). Even if we do not know exactly how the tools work or to what purpose, we see them as tools with purposes. Because the disclosure of a particular world involves disclosure of worldhood, we experience foreign, spatially and temporally remote worlds *as* worlds. The Greek temple can thus give us a (limited) grasp of the world it discloses and how one would live in it, partly because of the shared structure of worldhood.

But since our experience of the Greek temple (or any artwork) depends on the understanding we bring to it, what happens when we experience great art of the past? Specifically, what world arises as we engage with it? Is it the world of the Greeks? Or is it our own world with some Greek things and practices sprinkled in? Han-Pile (2011) thinks it is a hybrid of our world and something like the original historical world of the artwork:

It is our projective understanding of what the world of [the artwork] might have been. Because of the way worldhood transcends particular sub-worlds and is thus common to all, we are still able to grasp the structure of intelligibility underlying the depicted practices and to project ourselves in the way analysed above. Yet at the same time almost every detail in the paintings makes us aware, often painfully, of the inadequacy of our projection: the characters’ clothes, the objects that surround them, all these point directly to another epoch in a manner which we cannot ignore. (151–152)

Drawing on our grasp of worldhood and practices shared with the world of the artwork, we fill in gaps to create a hybrid world. The resulting world is not one we can live in—it is beyond our everyday practical grasp—but it is not entirely beyond our grasp.

Although it uncovers a Heideggerian theme, Han-Pile (2011, 153) thinks her analysis of Vermeer’s paintings reveals a problem with Heidegger’s description of art: “Yet whereas Heidegger thinks that this disclosure consists in the opening up of a world, what emerges from our encounter with the Vermeer paintings is that they *fail* to do so.” There are two reasons Han-Pile thinks the Vermeer paintings fail to disclose a World3 for us. First, we cannot live in the world of seventeenth-century Holland because the practices of the paintings are no longer available. Even if we tried to reenact them, their significance has changed because the context has changed. As Lear (2006) argues, it is not that we cannot move our bodies in the same way Plenty Coups did, but that even if we could, it would not be the same since our world is different.[[46]](#footnote-46) Second, whatever world the artwork discloses is not strictly speaking a world. It is a hybrid between our world and the world (originally) disclosed by the artwork: “a hybrid imaginary world born from our attempts to fill in the formal structure of worldhood, which the paintings make us aware of through our grasp of the practices depicted, with elements of the world we live in. Strictly speaking, it is not a world at all as it is not shared by other Dasein” (Han-Pile 2011, 151). The past world is lost, and the resulting hybrid world is one that is not (perhaps cannot be) shared with others. One reason for the sense of loss we can experience with past great works of art (including ruins) is that we sense and perhaps are drawn to a lost and inaccessible world.

After claiming the Vermeer paintings fail to disclose a world, Han-Pile (2011, 153) writes:

“However, this does not mean, *pace* Heidegger, that they have become inoperative . . . [T]he paintings make us sensitive both to the ontological structure that goes beyond the depicted objects (worldhood) and to the fact that we cannot reach its former instantiation (the lost world). To understand this proximity to and distance from Heidegger, we must remember that *The Origin of the Work of Art* is concerned with the relation of a whole people to the artworks *of its own time*. Thus most of the artworks evoked (the Greek temple, the cathedral) are massive in scale and were meant for permanent collective display: this heroic and public dimension is what allowed them to perform the sort of world articulation that Heidegger deems characteristic of great artworks: they presented a people with the major ontological and ethical lineaments of its own understanding of the world (or in the case of re-configuration, brought forward a new paradigm from existing marginal practices).”

Han-Pile’s emphasis of the way these paintings (and, I argue, great artworks of the past in general) make us sensitive to worldhood while simultaneously disclosing a world beyond our practical grasp has the potential to address shortcomings in Young’s (2001) and Dreyfus’s (2005) accounts. After doing so, however, she seems to follow Young and Dreyfus in reducing Heidegger’s view to great art as world gathering. This is why she thinks her view differs from Heidegger’s and why, on her interpretation, the presence of artworks such as van Gogh’s painting or Meyer’s poem in *Origin of the Work of Art* remains a problem, because they are not massive in scale or for collective display. Admittedly, Heidegger (2001) seems to be of two minds. He does emphasize the world-gathering aspect of the temple and cathedral. But he also describes works as great that clearly lack the preservers required for world gathering. My claim is that, instead of distancing herself from Heidegger, Han-Pile elucidates the theory Heidegger should have articulated, given, first, his conception of World3 and worldhood (World4) and, second, his description of his own experience with the temple at Paestum and the inclusion of apparently non-world-gathering artworks in a discussion explicitly of great art.

Han-Pile’s analysis of the double-disclosure of world and worldhood provides the resources to unify the apparently dissimilar artworks in *Origin of the Work of Art*, thereby allowing for a more nuanced Heideggerian theory of great art than those offered by Dreyfus (2005) and Young (2001) in their emphasis of world-gathering great art. The view could explain how Van Gogh’s *Shoes* can be great even if it does not gather a community as the temple did. Something different happens when artworks find preservers and become world-gathering, but placing the difference on the level of world gathering, not world disclosure, better explains our experience of great artworks of the past that no longer gather our world, such as the temple and cathedral. We cannot live in ancient Greece or medieval Christendom, but the temple and cathedral can still reveal important things about our world. We may have different conceptions of the good and what we owe to each other than the Greek shepherd, and we may see the animals and the landscape differently. But the simultaneous familiarity and foreignness of such great art can highlight what matters (or should matter) in our own worlds and help articulate how people, projects, and things can (or already do) fit together. Heidegger thinks we are always caught up in the world’s possibilities—finding things meaningful and pursuing projects—and great art can help us more clearly see and engage with those possibilities.

Because artworks that gather worlds in the Greek paradigm sense are so deeply embedded and influential in shaping the world, it can be difficult for people at home in the worlds they disclose to articulate what the artwork is doing. That difficulty is due to, not in spite of, familiarity with the rhythms and contours of daily life. When great art of the past speaks to us, it may be uniquely able to highlight our current situation. For one, such art has often shaped and continues to shape our world in ways both subtle and obvious, so the world it discloses can often be familiar.[[47]](#footnote-47) Or, in the terms we have been using, great artworks of the past can disclose worlds we can almost live in, ones which overlap with ours in significant ways, even if they no longer gather societies as they once did. The worlds they open up are largely those into which we are still cast. But, and this is crucial, the worlds they disclose are ones we can *almost* live in, but not quite. The worlds can thus be familiar yet out of reach. We can sense the ideals they embody but not quite engage with them as they solicit. In disclosing semi-familiar yet practically inaccessible worlds, great artworks of the past can highlight the structures of worldhood while also making salient the contours of our own world.

This sort of experience is clearly different from that which we have with an object of aesthetic enjoyment or an artifact from the realm of tradition and conservation. We can thus experience an artwork of the past as no longer world-gathering while still not a mere artifact of the world it once gathered. We see the world it opens up—or the hybrid resulting from our encounter with it—as not quite inhabitable. Yet even without the skills, practices, or things that would allow us to live in that world, the work shows a world of practical engagement which can draw us to engage with our world differently.

On this interpretation of *The Origin of the Work of Art* we can see the inclusion of Van Gogh’s *Shoes* “as an apparent paradigm of great art” not as “an anomaly,” as Young’s (2001, 65) emphasis on the Greek paradigm leads him to do. Even if it is true, as Young (2001, 65–68) suggests, that Heidegger wanted to expand the essayto accommodate the art of Klee, Cezanne, and Hölderlin as great, there is one significant problem with this interpretive line: the essay already discusses works in depth that never fit the Greek paradigm. And at the time of Heidegger’s writing, even the Greek temple—perhaps the paradigmatic instance of world-gathering great art—is no longer great in this sense. Of course, Heidegger could have added to or revised the essay to reflect a different understanding of art. But on my interpretation, Heidegger’s framework already allows for the works of Klee, Cezanne, Hölderlin, and others (such as Meyer and Van Gogh) to be considered great. These works are anomalous only if we assume certain criteria (in this case, those of the Greek paradigm) and then highlight certain artworks as paradigmatic, instead of trying to explain what already unites the artworks in the essay.

But even the temple, the straightforwardly world-gathering example, is not so straightforward. Heidegger’s description of what the temple does (as a great work of art) arises from his experience of the temple. If the temple is no longer world-gathering, however, how should we understand Heidegger’s experience with and description of the temple? And, more broadly, how can one experience art of the past that no longer gathers a world? For Heidegger (2001, 40), because artworks are tied to their worlds, when a painting is hung in a museum, *Antigone* is preserved in a critical edition, or the historical world of the Greek temple fades, “the works are no longer the same as they were.” When the art industry absorbs them or the world of the Greek temple decays, they are relegated to the realm of tradition and conservation (40). Even if the Greek temple were physically the same as it was in 450 BCE, it no longer works as a temple. These artworks no longer gather worlds; their worlds have withdrawn (40).

However, it would be a mistake (and for Heideggerian reasons already discussed), to conclude, as Heidegger does, that these artworks are confined to the realm of tradition and conservation. Even without receivers or preservers to gather a world, these artworks can be more than mere aesthetic objects or artifacts of the past. Heidegger’s own descriptions of specific past great artworks (the temple and cathedral) and other artworks without preservers (van Gogh’s *Shoes* and Meyer’s “Fountain”) suggest that great art can be world-disclosive even when not world-gathering. Heidegger worries that aesthetic “experience is the element in which art dies,” but my interpretation explains how art that no longer gathers a world can be more (or different) than an object of aesthetic experience or a historical artifact (2001, 77).

To be sure, these artworks can yield aesthetic pleasure and can offer insight into different historical worlds. But the world emerging in our encounter with the artwork, fleshed out with our background assumptions, can also offer insight into our own world, inviting us to see afresh the possibilities available and to engage with the things around us in new ways. When we see, as Heidegger did, the temple in the surrounding landscape (Temple2), we can perhaps see something of the Greek world of Paestum. But we can also see something about our world. As it did for the ancient Greeks, the relationship between the rugged landscape and the order of the temple building can parallel the way we seek to find or create order in human life, both individually and collectively, and the way in which our conscious wills and desires in some sense depend on but can conflict with the desires, dispositions, and preferences we have that are not entirely of our making. As we get a sense of what mattered for the Greeks, we can also get a sense for the way things matter for us, for the often tacit and unarticulated values that guide our everyday lives. Although this experience with art of the past is not fully worked out in *Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger’s notion of worldhood offers the philosophical resources to explain it and, moreover, can make sense of the inclusion and analysis of certain artworks in the essay.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger (2006, 158) distinguishes between an interpretation “wholly wrapped up in concernful [or circumspective] understanding” and the “opposite case of a theoretical assertion about something present-at-hand.” Between these poles of interpretation—with “circumspective understanding” referring to action within a referential context, and “theoretical assertion” referring to indicating something present-at-hand or saying something “about” things—there are “many intermediate gradations,” with different degrees of the theoretical and the practical (158). These intermediate stages suggest how great art of the past, or other world-disclosive but not world-gathering works, can be more than mere artifacts of different worlds. Dante’s Tuscany and his religious context are different from ours, but the *Divine* *Comedy* offers more than aesthetic pleasure or a glimpse into medieval Christendom. It can illuminate the process of receiving and building on inherited tradition, not just in poetic composition, but in taking received cultural practices and beliefs and making them our own. In addition, even if the *Comedy’s* portrayal of Paolo and Francesca’s affair differs from Flaubert’s more modern *Madame Bovary*—with the *Comedy* seeming to highlight a “right path” and emphasizing the dangers of succumbing to “temptation” in contrast to Flaubert’s more ambiguous assessment of the wrongness of Emma’s actions, the flightiness of their lust can illuminate how we act on more tempestuous, temporary desires instead of our more stable core values and the potential consequences for doing so (Dreyfus and Kelly 2011, 15–16). Even though the world of Dante’s *Comedy* is different from ours, the work can still illuminate our own.[[48]](#footnote-48) One can disagree with Dante’s assessment of Paolo and Francesca’s affair and doubt their actions have the eternal implications Dante describes, while agreeing it is problematic to subordinate things of greater worth to others of lesser value.

Great art of the past, then, can do more than show how a world fit together. Even after its world is no longer practically accessible, it can attune us to the significance of our world, helping us better respond to our world by being more sensitive to the things around us and the reasons we have for certain actions. Works of past worlds, Han-Pile (2011, 155–156) writes, can “shed a new light on our own everyday life and practices, and thus afford us an opportunity to understand and possibly change them,” thereby keeping open Heidegger’s question regarding the truth of Hegel’s pronouncement of the end of art. By helping us grasp our world—even indirectly—art can still or yet again be “an essential or necessary way in which that truth happens which is decisive for our historical existence” (Heidegger 2001, 78).

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1. I typically use Albert Hofstadter’s (2001) translation of Heidegger’s *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* published in *Holzwege* (GA 5, 1935­–1936/2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Although there are important differences between their views, broadly speaking, both Julian Young (2001) and Hubert Dreyfus (2005) take this approach in their influential interpretations of Heidegger’s views on art. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This question has been explored by, among others, Young (2001), Dreyfus (2005), and Thomson (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In 1935, one hundred years after Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1975) were published, Heidegger delivered the second version of his lectures that later became *The Origin of the Work of Art*. In that version, he ends with Hegel’s pessimistic pronouncement about great art being a thing of the past (See Karsten Harries (2009, 4–5). In the final version, however, Heidegger (2001, 78) shifts, claiming that the “truth of Hegel’s judgment has not yet been decided” and the question remains if art is or can become again an “essential and necessary way in which that truth happens which is decisive for our historical existence.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Much work on Heidegger’s philosophy of art justifiably focuses on his later writings in which art figures even more prominently. In “The Question Concerning Technology,” for example, he discusses the importance of the non-aesthetic experience with art in overcoming the pitfalls of the technological age. My claim here is that even in *Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger has the resources to make sense of the sort of the non-aesthetic experience he later emphasizes. Speaking of Heidegger’s approach modern art, Robert Pippin (2014, 112) argues that we do not need to posit “a more modern-friendly acceptance of modernist work after the thirties.” Similarly, even in *Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger is developing the resources to explain how art “can help block the forgetting of being or the totalization of the technological worldview or ‘en-framing’ [Ge-stell]” (112). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. When referring to world disclosure, I have in mind Heidegger’s notion of truth as *alêtheia*. Heidegger typically translates *alêtheia* as *Unverborgenheit*, which Wrathall (2011, 13) translates as unconcealment. Heidegger (2001, 40–42; 2003, 27–29) discusses the happening of truth (*Wahrheit)* as *alêtheia* in terms of unconcealment or world disclosure. See Wrathall (2011, 11-38) for further discussion of Heidegger’s conception of truth as unconcealment (*alêtheia*). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Iain Thomson (2011, 66–67), for example, highlights the aspect of gathering in his argument that Heidegger uses the temple to motivate a non-aesthetic encounter with art. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. As Young (2001, 7) puts it: “Art is only great if, like the Greek temple or medieval cathedral, it possesses ­world-historical significance.” On this basis, Young (2001, 65) argues that Heidegger’s views in the essay reflect what he calls the Greek paradigm of great art. Great art, on this view, “gathers together an entire culture,” and is why Young thinks “citing [van Gogh’s *Shoes*] in ‘The Origin’ as an apparent paradigm of great art is such an anomaly” (65). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. I typically use Macquarrie and Robinson’s translation (Heidegger 1962), but unless otherwise noted, the citations refer to the original pagination of *Sein und Zeit* (Heidegger 2006 [1927]). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. “Realm” (Macquarrie and Robinson [Heidegger 1962]) and “region” (Haugeland [2013], Stambaugh [Heidegger 2010]) are two translations of *Region* in *Sein und Zeit*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Haugeland (2013, 101). Even my characterization here, however, focuses too much on discrete entities and less on the entire context. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Jonathan Lear’s (2006, 32) talk of a conceptual world in *Radical Hope* and Hubert Dreyfus’s (1991, 92–96) discussion of skilled bodily coping in *Being-in-the-World* bring out important dimensions of World3. Dreyfus emphasizes the lived-in dimension of world3 and the way we respond to the affordances of a situation. Lear describes how actions are more than just bodily movements because their significance depends on a conceptual framework. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Macquarrie and Robinson (Heidegger 1962) use “worldhood,” Haugeland (2013) prefers “worldishness,” and Mark Wrathall suggests “worldliness” to translate *Weltlichkeit*. “Worldliness” here, of course, is without religious connotation. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See, for example, Heidegger (1992, 182). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See Dreyfus (1991, 89–90). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Umsicht* captures two aspects of the sight of practical behavior. *Sicht* is “sight,” but the prefix *um*– can be both “around” and “in-order-to.” In circumspection, we see the entities *around* us as connected in ways that allow us to pursue various *ends*, various *in-order-tos*. When baking bread, I see the counter, flour, water, and salt as part of the environment which allows me to bake bread. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Beatrice Han-Pile (2011, 140) describes worldhood as “an existential structure which transcends the particularities of the various historical worlds.” William Blattner (2006, 61–62) understands “it as a relational scaffolding that is filled, in each case, with the stuff of this world, this context.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Heidegger’s (1927/2006) discussion of existential spatiality is, unfortunately, somewhat messy. He clearly thinks there is a more fundamental spatiality than that of a Cartesian grid. But when he elaborates the nature of that spatiality in *Being and Time*, it is often unclear which of the different senses of existential spatiality has priority. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. As noted, Heidegger (1927/2006) discusses existential spatiality in different ways. One is based on what is within range of action. On that view, the empty room could be nearer than the library. Existential spatiality would thus be closely connected with physical proximity; existential spatiality might supervene on physical proximity. However, his discussion of optical glasses suggests another way to understand spatiality. When the glasses sit on the person’s nose, the picture or the trees they bring into focus are nearer than the glasses. The glasses fade into the background. They allow the person to see the tree more clearly, but the tree is importantly nearer to the person than the glasses (see ¶23 in *Being and Time* [1962]). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Charles Taylor’s (1989) discussion of frameworks in part 1 of *Sources of the Self* also illuminates Heidegger’s conception of world. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Lear is quoting Frank B. Linderman (1962, 311). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See Christine Korsgaard (2009, 8–14). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Taylor Carman (2003, 132) suggests that in modernity, we always live in at least two worlds—the public sphere and the world of our own private lives. Because this claim comes in his discussion of the four senses of “world,” Carman is likely referring to Heidegger’s double sense of World3: ‘“world” world may stand for the ‘public’ we-world, or one’s ‘own’ closest (domestic) environment” (Heidegger 2006, 65). But if this is right, then even if Carman is right that we typically live in at least two worlds, that double sense of World3 is not unique to modernity. To be uniquely true of modernity, Heidegger cannot simply be referring to the public/private aspects of World3. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Heidegger (1992, 194) further distinguishes between three different components of the environment as a whole: “my own environment, public environment, and world as nature.” [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Heidegger (2001, 60) also mentions “the act that founds a political state” and “the thinker’s thinking” as world disclosive. “Normative whole” is my way to capture two elements of a world: The whole (*Ganzheit*, sometimes *Verweisungsganzheit*) is normative because it involves differentiations of great and small, brave and cowardly, lofty and flighty, and the like (Heidegger 2001, 42). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Dreyfus (2005, 413) sees the highway system as a debased artwork for the way it fails to embody the struggle between earth and world. Specifically, it fails to respond to the earth’s resistance. However, if art, as Dreyfus suggests, is a paradigm of an epoch’s understanding, the highway very effectively reflects the technological age precisely in the way it fails to respond to the lay of the land. But depending on the timing of the construction of the highway, the national highway system could not only reflect but could help effect the technological age. There is not space for an adequate discussion of the complex issues surrounding the questions of whether and why the highway system and potentially all art in the technological age fall short of true art. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. In the aesthetic understanding, the artwork becomes equipment with an attached aesthetic value. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The temple was probably the second temple of Hera. See Malpas (2012, 242). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Earth does not factor into his discussion of world in *Sein und Zeit*, whereas it is a crucial counterpart to world in *Origin of the Work of Art*. For discussions of Heidegger’s treatment of the earth and world dynamic as well as the interpretive difficulty of these passages, see Young (2001), Dreyfus (2005), and Pippin (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Lousie Zaidman (1992, 60) suggests that although every sanctuary “had its cult-image of the relevant god or goddess, around which his or her temple was built . . . and the cult-statue was in most cases the ultimate focus of rituals, it was usually kept shut up within the temple, and only taken out and handled during the great festivals.” [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Because rituals were mostly performed outside the temple and the main function was to house the god’s cult-statue, Zaidman (1992, 58–59) claims that the temple building was not an indispensable element of Greek religion. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. For more on the relationship between landscape and sanctuary, see Scully (2013, 1-24) and for more on the second temple of Hera at Paestum, in particular, see 59-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. One could think that only a Temple1 could gather a world, Scully’s discussion cited above, however, suggests that perhaps even Temple2 could have been world-gathering. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. To be fair, in his discussion of the relationship between ontology and ethics, Young (2001) focuses on the individual question—what kind of life should I live?—and he is right that “knowing . . . the structure that is one’s world is knowing, in general, the kind of life that is appropriate to one’s station in it” (28). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See Scully (2013) for further discussion on the way in which the landscape and structure of the temple itself embodied the temple’s deity. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See also Mikalson (2010, 4–5). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Retallack (2008) and personal correspondence. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Paul Ricoeur (1998, xvi–xvii) describes this process as “mutual election.” Admittedly, Temple1 could do this more fully than Temple2. But the architectural whole of Temple2—the solidity of the structure, the verticality of the columns, the way in which the many parts of the temple form a single being, the way it rises out of the rugged ground, and so forth—already embodies the god’s character and helps articulate the human condition (see Scully 2013, 1-3, 59-64). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. As Thomson (2011, 43) puts it: “Great art works in the background of our historical worlds, in other words, by partially embodying and so selectively reinforcing an historical community’s sense of what is and what matters.” For more on the way great art discloses what is and what matters, see Thomson (2011, 9, 28–29, 43). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. If engagement with art always involves a fusion of our world and the world disclosed by the artwork, perhaps we should think of preservers more broadly than Heidegger seems to do. We will discuss in more detail below Han-Pile’s (2011, 151–152) suggestion that the world resulting from engagement with a Vermeer painting is a hybrid between our world and something like the historical world of the painting. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Thomson (2011, 66) draws attention to Young’s and Dreyfus’s struggles to account for Van Gogh’s inclusion in the essay, in addition to the fact that they (and most Heidegger scholars) fail to mention the inclusion of Meyer’s poem in the essay. I will not treat Meyer’s poem in detail, but my framework can explain how the poem could be great in terms of world disclosure even if it fails to gather a world, making the inclusion of the poem less anomalous. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Two brief points. First, Young distinguishes his Greek paradigm from what he calls Dreyfus’s Promethean reading, in which the great artwork creates a world. See Young (2001, 29-34) for his criticisms of Dreyfus’s view. Second, my point is not that Heidegger’s views on art did not change, but that even in *Origin of the Work of Art*, he has the resources to account for the greatness of artists such as Van Gogh and Hölderlin. Thomson (2011, 44–45) takes a somewhat different approach to a similar problem when he describes the three different orders of magnitude on which “art can accomplish its world-disclosing work.” Drawing on Dreyfus’s use of paradigm, Thomson distinguishes between micro-paradigms, paradigmatic artworks (such as Van Gogh’s painting and Hölderlin’s poetry), and macro-paradigmatic great artworks (such as the Greek temple). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. To be clear, Han-Pile (2011) does not make claims about art in general. She specifically restricts their scope to the Vermeer paintings discussed. Some art could work in this way—disclosing worldhood but failing to disclose worlds—even if not all does (personal correspondence). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. See Han Pile (2011, 159–160, 159–160n30). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. This does not mean there is some universal, underlying structure, with each particular world merely a unique way of developing that structure. “Worldhood” need not be an ur-world for every world to have some structures in common. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. If we take Plenty Coups at his word, even he was not able to plant a coup stick after the Crow were confined to reservations. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Thanks to Jim Faulconer for bringing out this point. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. This is, again, minimizing the extent to which works like the *Comedy* have shaped and continue to shape the world in which we live in both subtle and not-so-subtle ways. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)