

# **The Haberdashers' Aske's School**

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### **Heidegger on Art and Society**

**Alexander Cohen**

**OH and Graduate of the University of Durham**

**[alexandercohen1983@gmail.com](mailto:alexandercohen1983@gmail.com)**

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## Heidegger on Art and Society

Alexander Cohen



*“Art does not reproduce the visible, it renders visible” – Paul Klee*

*“I tried to express a sentiment specific to the Korean culture, all the responses from different audiences were pretty much the same. Essentially, we all live in the same country called Capitalism.” - Bong Joon Ho on the popularity of his film *Parasite**

*“Everything popular is wrong.” – Oscar Wilde*

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## 0.0 Introduction

Despite his reputation as a philosopher being tarred with the toxic brush of Nazism, Martin Heidegger provided us with great insight into the relationship between art and society. In this dissertation I will investigate Heidegger's aesthetics by considering the problem of aesthetic exclusivity as well as examining how Heidegger's philosophy works in the age of mass culture and mass art. Section 1 begins by examining Heidegger's theory and contextualising it in his phenomenology presented in *Being and Time*. It will explore the ready-to-hand and present-at-hand distinction and how this relates to a "world". The discussion acts as a backdrop to Heidegger's notion that artwork illuminates a "world" as displayed in Heidegger's own examples of Van Gogh's *Peasant Shoes* and a Greek Temple. The concept of collective Dasein will then be explored to frame Heidegger's ideas about the relationship between art and society. The essay will demonstrate how Heidegger implicitly uses Dasein in a collective sense in his later works, rather than simply referring to individuals, as is the case in *Being and Time*. This approach helps to map how art can contribute to a sense of cultural identity, strengthening the identity of the group of people that engage in the "world" that the artwork reveals.

The essay goes on to consider cross-cultural engagement in contemporary society. Heidegger's theory seems to preclude the possibility of a member of one culture fully engaging in artwork that illuminates the world of a different culture. He suggests that total engagement in art can only occur if the artwork illuminates the culture of the specific audience. Whilst this aptly captures the way societal groupings fully engage in their own artwork, it runs the risk of leading to a form of nationalism and exclusivity: "German art for the Germans" and so on. Heidegger did not explore the question of what constitutes a culture, but his Nazi leanings suggest that he would have understood "culture" through ancestry. This raises the question how someone who is non-German can engage in German art (Goethe for example) given that they lack the specific ancestry needed for full engagement. This is problematic because it seems that anyone can fully engage in any artwork without belonging to the culture that the artwork is tied to.

The response aims to reconsider Heidegger's conception of "culture" through a Wittgensteinian lens. This emphasises a "culture" more as a "form of life" with non-exclusive shared practices and rituals, rather than something based on ancestry. There are parallels between Heidegger's object-orientated ontology that allows for the understanding of objects through use/practice (the example of the hammer as "ready-to-hand") and the later Wittgenstein's idea that the meaning of a word is its use in a context. Both philosophers draw attention to how activity, be it linguistic or physical, can provide meaning for human beings. This would mean that Heidegger's "world", the culture illuminated by an artwork, is one that can be understood through a shared practice. Hence anyone can fully engage in an artwork as long as they are integrated within the "form of life" displayed. This means Heidegger's aesthetic theory can exist without the risk of descending into nationalistic views about society and cultural identity.

Section 2 focuses on how Heidegger's theory navigates the relationship between mass art and society where everyone consumes the same art objects. After exploring Carroll's distinction between "mass art" and "popular art", the essay explores Adorno and Horkheimer's culture industry. This is used as a framework to understand how mass art operates in contemporary society. I then draw a parallel between the domination present in the culture industry and Heidegger's concern about Dasein's authenticity in relation to "Das Man" (the "they"). This is the idea that inauthentic being is one that surrenders its own individuality to group think instead of acting on one's own "thrownness" – one's own unique state of being-in-the-world. The result is that the philosophers' ideas represent two sides of the same coin: for Adorno and Horkheimer, the homogenisation of art through the culture industry brings a loss of individual cultural identity and therefore constitutes inauthentic being-in-the-world.

The essay concludes with an antidote to combat the inauthenticity of the culture industry by considering folk art. To resist homogenisation of art and cultural identity, we can create and engage in folk art. Folk art is inherently culturally bound, therefore resisting universal appeal through the culture industry. The "worlds" illuminated by folk art will illuminate individual cultures' forms of life understood in the Wittgensteinian sense. The illuminated "worlds" will then strengthen the communities that form around those cultures. This will reinforce the identities of individual communities and encourage Dasein's authentic being-in-the-world.

## Section 1: Heidegger's Philosophy of Art

### 1.1: Heidegger's Aesthetics

#### 1.11 Section Introduction

This section explores Heidegger's aesthetic theory as outlined primarily in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. His aesthetic theory is motivated by his phenomenology outlined in his 1927 work *Being and Time*. In this latter text, Heidegger describes "phenomenology" as the "science" of phenomena (Heidegger 1978:35). He explains that this is the "way of access to, and the demonstrative manner of determination of, what is to become the theme of ontology. Ontology is possible only as phenomenology" (ibid). In other words, phenomenology is the study of the experience of beings "in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer" (Moran 2000:4). Heidegger is claiming that in order to understand things in the world, we must do so using our experience of them as a basis. His project in *Being and Time* is exactly this, utilising phenomenology as a method to investigate the question of Being because "we must first of all bring beings themselves forward in the right way if we are to have any prospect of exposing Being" (Heidegger 1978:37).

Heidegger first addresses aesthetics in 1935 when he lectured on the subject at Freiburg University alongside his lectures on Hölderlin and Nietzsche (Hammermeister 2002:173). In *The Origin of the Work of Art* – Heidegger's main essay on aesthetics, Heidegger is concerned with the question of what is art. He uses phenomenology as a method to investigate this question, prioritising our experience of art objects. He is understanding art "from a new perspective" (Hammermeister 2002:175), one which prioritises the experience of the viewer. He does this by claiming that an artwork is "truth" and that this reveals itself as the "unconcealment of its Being" (Heidegger 1950:102). The "truth" in question here is not a formal truth but rather a truth about the "world" (ibid). Heidegger's theory uniquely captures how art is able to have a relationship with society by positing a two-way relationship between the audience and the artwork; when the audience experiences an artwork, the artwork's "world" is illuminated. "World", the phenomenal experience of Dasein, effects the audience in that it can strengthen their sense of cultural identity. Using Heidegger's terminology, the phenomenal experience of the "world" promotes Dasein's authentic being-in-the-world. Heidegger's aesthetics is therefore an offshoot of his phenomenology in *Being and Time*.

#### 1.12 Groundwork for Heidegger's Aesthetics

How does Heidegger understand "truth" in art as the "unconcealment of Being" (Heidegger 1950:102)? To illustrate what he means by "truth" in art, Heidegger uses *Peasant Shoes*, a painting by Van Gogh, by way of example (see Fig.1). I quote his description of the painting:

From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far spreading ever uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles stretches the loneliness of the field path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field ... *This equipment belongs to the*

*earth, and it is protected in the world of the peasant woman* (Heidegger 1950:101 my emphasis).

Van Gogh's artwork presents the "equipment" that furnishes the "world" of the peasant worker. This world is revealed as "*Aletheia*", a Greek term that Heidegger uses in reference to truth that was concealed but is now revealed by the art. These terms are introduced by Heidegger in *Being and Time* and form the basis of his phenomenology.

### 1.13 Dasein and "World"

Heidegger's project in *Being and Time* is to give a phenomenological analysis of the question of Being, something that he claims has "been forgotten" (Heidegger 1978:7) by philosophers. For Heidegger, the essence of Being is "undefinable". It "cannot be derived from higher concepts by way of definition and cannot be represented by lower ones" (Heidegger 1978:9). Rather it is "self-evident". This is why he uses the term "Dasein" (its literal translation "being there") as a way of describing Being for human beings. The term points to the way human beings find themselves "being there" in the "world" ("being-in-the-world"). This is a phenomenon that ultimately escapes theory or conceptual analysis. Writing in the phenomenological tradition established by Husserl, Heidegger is concerned with human experience. Heidegger defines phenomenology as "primarily a concept of method" that is "rooted in confrontation with the things themselves" (Heidegger, 1978:29). He is only concerned with how things appear (the word phenomenon deriving from the Greek *phainesthai*, meaning "to show itself" (Heidegger, 1978:30)). When he applies this to the human experience, he observes how it (Dasein) exists untarnished by theoretical concepts. Dasein represents merely "being there" within an environment. We are born already situated within a context, a "world".

Heidegger clarifies this with his distinction between "present-at-hand" and "ready-to-hand". Trying to understand a thing/object's being by viewing it "present-at-hand" detaches it from its quotidian context so that it can be analysed with a critical gaze. In everyday life this means thinking about things/objects through concepts and theories, for instance, by asking questions about the nature of its substance and qualities as one would study an organism in a biology textbook. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger aligns this detachment from the quotidian context with the subject/object distinction that originated in Ancient Greek philosophy. Magda King writes that the detachment from quotidian context can only reveal the nature of "beings as beings, and not into being as such" (King, 1964:14). When things are understood as "ready-to-hand" they are not consciously present as independent entities that lie outside the everydayness of their existence. Heidegger famously illustrates this with the example of a hammer. He reports how "the hammering itself uncovers the specific "manipulability" of the hammer" showing it to be "at our disposal" (Heidegger 1962:98). The thingness of the hammer, its being as a hammer, is illuminated through its use in a context. The limit of "present-at-hand" analysis is therefore its failure to understand things in their context. It can only reveal the thingness of a thing when it is removed from its everyday use. We understand the hammer's being as a hammer by using it to hammer in nails, not as a substance that bears certain properties such as being made of certain materials. It is the "ready-to-hand" that furnishes the basic "world" in which Dasein finds itself. "Ready-to-hand" can therefore be understood as primordial, a more basic understanding of being-in-the-world.



Hence in responding to the question “what is an x thing” we would be inclined to focus our analysis towards the theoretical. We disengage from pragmatic concerns “in favour of disinterested observation and spectating” (Cooper 1996:22). But this approach is “restricted” and unable “to explain all the ways and senses in which we understand being” (King 1964:16). Heidegger claims that detachment from the quotidian context presents the object “with its skin off” (Heidegger 1962:132) and is philosophically limited. The detached analysis fails to give a full account of Being as it inherently precludes viewing the object as understood for the purpose for which it is used, within the project in which the thing exists. In contrast, “ready-to-hand” grasps the type of truth that Heidegger is interested in when it comes to art.

“World” for Heidegger is therefore “the structural whole of significant relationships that Dasein experiences – with tools, things of nature, and other human beings – as being-in-the-world” (Mulhall 1990:167). Everything that we encounter as “ready-to-hand” acts as “equipment” within the context of “human purposes and the means-end structure which it implies” (Mulhall 1990:170). Mulhall is saying that we as humans exist in the world with various projects, goals, desires and so on. These draw the boundaries of our world by showing us what is “ready-to-hand”, and in turn, define our being-in-the-world. For example, the hammer’s “ready-to-handness” derives from its purpose to hammer nails into a wall. This project is tied to a plethora of other projects, activities, and desires such as building houses or living. This context is what furnishes the “world” that Dasein finds itself in and acts as the “backdrop” to our lives (Hammermeister 2002:179).

Retuning to aesthetics, it is this kind of “world” that is illuminated by art. This is something that cannot be directly perceived. Heidegger writes “world is never an object that stands before us” but is rather “non-objective” (Mulhall 1990:167). The “world” of art is experienced as it is in reality for the Dasein. The Dasein’s being-in-the-world is illuminated by the art. Van Gogh could not explicitly tell us what background values furnish the world of the peasant woman’s Dasein. He can only show these values through his art which unconceals, “discloses” or reveals a truth (“*Alethia*”) of her “world”.

Hubert Dreyfus understands Heidegger’s “world” revealed in art as a “cultural paradigm” (Dreyfus 1993:354). It reflects “the scattered practices of a group” and “coherent possibilities for action” (ibid). Heidegger’s “world” is a collective cultural framework that guides a society’s everyday Being. In other words, the “world” presented by the artwork reflects a culture. Returning to the example of Van Gogh’s painting, Young writes “The intelligibility of shoes, for example, depends on that complexly interconnected totality of human practices which provides shoes with the function which makes them shoes” (Young 2001:32). The *Peasant Shoes* are to be viewed as “ready-at-hand”, allowing its viewers to peek through a window into the “world of the peasant woman” (Heidegger 1950:101). This is a world that is furnished by the experience of physical labour, poverty, rural life and so on. Compare this to a mere textbook that describes what life was for agricultural workers. The textbook only illuminates the “present-at-hand” rather than the primordial truth that is grounded in unconceptualized everyday Being. It can tell us about what life was like for farm labourers but only the art object can show us. Yet just as in Thomas Kuhn’s *Structures of Scientific Revolutions*, from which Dreyfus adapts the term “paradigm”, the boundaries of the paradigm “cannot be stated as a criterion or rule” (Dreyfus 1993:355). This parallels how Heidegger explores the boundaries of the worlds illuminated in artwork.



This forms Heidegger's discussion of "earth" which manifests the concreteness of the art object. "Earth" is what "resists being rationalised and totalised" in the artwork (Dreyfus 1993:356). It is the physical immediacy of the art object which itself does the revealing. Within every artwork there is a conflict between "earth and world" with the former "sheltering and concealing" the world (Heidegger in Mulhall, 1990:170) in its concrete thingness, whilst the latter's non-physicality is revealed through our engagement with it. The latter cannot exist without the former. Heidegger sheds light on the conflict between earth and world in his discussion of an Ancient Greek temple. He asserts that "by means of the temple, the god is present". The "earth", in this case, stones and columns, reveals a "ready-to-handness" that allows for the illumination of the historical "world" of Ancient Greece. This is how the temple discloses "victory and defeat, blessing and curse, mastery and slavery" (Heidegger 1950:121) not actualised within the statue *per se*, but rather revealed by it. These are concepts that furnish the "world" of the Ancient Greek cultural paradigm. Young compares "Earth" to "the hidden part of an iceberg" that allows for the "ice floe" to be "apprehended as an iceberg" (Young 2001:45). In order for the "world" to be illuminated "Earth" needs to be present but hidden.

Hence there is always something hidden in the artwork that precludes a total picture of the culture illuminated. It is not possible for an interpretation to completely capture "what the work means" (Dreyfus 2011:356). The fact that there is always something concealed in art means that the boundaries of the "world" cannot be wholly revealed just as rules and beliefs in the scientific paradigm cannot be stated completely. This reflects the undefinable nature of Heidegger's conception of Being. It simply is. We simply are. Like the "world" in the artwork Being can never be fully explicated, only gestured towards. Art, like life, simply is.

#### 1.14 Critical Reflection

As noted, Heidegger's theory marks a move away from emphasising the ontology of art to an analysis of the experience of it. We are now in a better position to understand why this is so. Paul Guyer thinks that Heidegger is taking aim at Kant's aesthetics, writing that "Heidegger attacked traditional aesthetics thinking of it as a paradigmatic example of the subjectivist tradition in Western thought that he detested" (Guyer 2003:735). *Being and Time* is highly critical of western metaphysics. Heidegger claimed that Descartes' emphasis on the subject/object divide (the disembodied ego, separate from the word of object) provided a framework that encourages a "present-at-hand" view of objects in the world. Hence it is intuitive for Heidegger to abandon traditional approaches to aesthetics that revolve around analysing art at the level of the object from the perspective of a separate subject. Instead, he pinpoints an art object's "world endowing ability" as that which makes it an art object: if it tells us the truth of its "world", it is an art object. It is for this reason that Heidegger's theory can be labelled "post-aesthetic" (Bernstein 1992:3) given the "denial of the rigid distinctions separating the claims of taste from the claims of knowing" (ibid) that arise from considering objects as wholly separate from subjects. However, ontology is not totally eliminated from Heidegger's theory of art. Rather its importance is relegated such that it follows Heidegger's aesthetic analysis of phenomenal experience.

## 1.2: Art and Society

### 1.21 Great Art as Communal Art

I have explored the mechanics of Heidegger's aesthetics in terms of the audience's experience of the art object. I will now explore how art reciprocates. This will allow me to explore the relationship between art and society. For Heidegger, a great artwork is one that is preserved by a culture whilst also allowing that culture to achieve its own authentic being.

Heidegger explores in *Poetry, Language, Thought* the two-way relationship between art and society by considering how art gives to society. Here he writes that "a great artwork" must be "preserved" (Heidegger 1971:66-67) by those who "stand within the openness of beings that happen in the work" (Heidegger 1971:67). The "preservers" of the great art refer to the people who engage in the artwork. The "world" illuminated by the artwork is preserved by the viewers through their engagement. Because of this the phenomenal world will persist even when the culture in which the art originated is no longer active (for example, that of the peasant woman). Great artwork then preserves the "world" it illuminates. Heidegger's reference to the Ancient Greek temple in *The Origin of the Work of Art* is a fitting example. Therefore, there is a two-way relationship between great art and cultural identity, as the people who preserve the art, the preservers, will be "affected as a result" (Young, 2001:51). The great art gives them a cultural identity and this realises their "living community" (Young 2001:53) as a result. Heidegger reinforces this, writing that: "poetry (and art) founds the ground of the possibility that man...can become historical, in other words can *become a people*" (Heidegger in Young 2001:53, my emphasis).

I will explore this two-way relationship by firstly considering Dasein in terms of community. This will help illuminate the relationship between art and society. I will then explore Heidegger's conception of authenticity to show how it relates to art and a collective Dasein.

### 1.22 Collective Dasein

Heidegger's later writings (particularly *The Origin of the Work of Art*) shift away "from the authenticity of the individual to that of collective Dasein" (Young 2001:54), although he does not explicitly flag this subtle change in reference. In order to better map the relationship between art and Dasein as a plurality, I will analyse Dasein in terms of a collective rather than as referring to an individual.

The early Heidegger, writing in *Being and Time*, provides two characteristics of Dasein that John Haugeland argues are not exclusive to an individual. The first is the idea of Dasein "being there" (its literal translation). The second is as a thing that "understands itself in terms of its existence" (Heidegger 1962:33), that it seeks to question the nature of its being. The first notion can be understood as applicable to anything which exists. What is specific to Dasein is how it questions the nature of its being. Haugeland suggests this can go "beyond the traditional view of it as having a one-to-one correlation with an individual" (Stroh 2015:246) instead framing Dasein as a community. The idea is that whilst each person who has experience of being-in-the-world is a singular thing which questions its own being-in-the-world, a group Dasein can emerge when each individual takes part in a shared 'way of life' (Haugeland 2013:82). The community, with its practices, background beliefs and concepts, provides each Dasein with the same being-in-the-world experience allowing for a community Dasein with its own unique being-in-the-world. Hence it is through understanding Dasein as a collective, and

not as an individual, that Heidegger claims that art can mould the identity of a “living community” (see above).

A good example (adapted from Stroh) is a car shared by a family. The family as a whole have collective ownership of the car yet when asked individually if they have a car each member would say yes. Hence “the first-person plural possessive “ours” includes for each member of the “we” a corresponding individual claim to each thing that is collectively possessed” (Stroh 2015:247). The same occurs for a collective Dasein, with each individual claiming ownership of particular practices.

### 1.23 “Das Man” and Authenticity

I will now explore the notion of authenticity so that I can apply it to collective Dasein. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger’s Dasein finds itself present in its “world”. It is already immersed in a vast network of background concepts, historical practices and possible courses of action to pursue. This aspect is crucial for Heidegger as the inauthentic Dasein is one that disavows decision-making by resigning itself to “the they” (Das Man). Das Man is the invisible mass that “absorbs” (Heidegger 1962:229) Dasein within it, engulfing everyday being-in-the-world in a “consensual hallucination” (Mulhall, 1996:68). This is not a herd mentality comprised of a mass of individuals with a dictator at the helm. Rather Das Man is invisible and nebulous. Heidegger writes “It ‘was’ always the ‘they’ who did it, and yet it can be said that it has been ‘no one’” (Heidegger 1962:165). Dasein is subordinated by the ebb and flow of common place activity, public forms of life that deprive it of its individual capacity to take responsibility for decision-making. The early Heidegger, writing in *Being and Time*, focused on Dasein as an individual. I will explore collective Dasein and authenticity further below.

The inauthentic Dasein flees “in the face of itself” (Heidegger 1962:229). When Dasein finds itself in the world, it is confronted by a myriad of possible choices: what to wear, what to eat and so on. In surrendering the option of making a decision on one’s own volition, and instead resigning oneself to “Das Man” in order to determine its future as a concrete manifestation of the plethora of possibility it is presented with, Heidegger refers to this movement as “falling”. “Falling” is how Dasein enters into a state of inauthentic being which guides the majority of its everyday being-in-the-world. In being confronted by possible actions, Dasein falls by relying on “routines and passing interests to avoid committing ourselves to clear choices about who we are and what we are doing” (Polt 1999:76). “Falling” stands contrary to forging Dasein’s own possibilities based on its own being-for-itself, its own volition. But it is possible to overcome the “falling” from “everyday superficiality and ambiguity” (ibid). Hence “falling” is a ubiquitous feature of Dasein’s being-in-the-world, essential to discovering authentic being-in-the-world which itself must derive, in some sense, from overcoming falling.

Authenticity is achieved when Dasein “achieves self-determination” (Young 2001:53). Dasein can do this by choosing its own path to navigate the plethora of possibilities, distancing itself from ‘the “they”’ (*Das Man*) in the process. David Cooper provides the following analogy to illuminate authenticity. He describes authenticity as a “freedom from the world that has hitherto dictated the limits of...understanding”: “Like the youthful hero of some 19th century Bildungsroman who awakes one morning to realise that the boundaries of his parent’s parish are not those of the whole universe” (Cooper 1996:44). Cooper is telling us that authenticity is not a total renunciation of common place public activity, but rather an acceptance of and critical distancing from it, a choosing to accept one’s thrownness in the world (the possibilities

that we are confronted with) head on with all its “baggage of the past” (Polt 1999:76). Authenticity is not just about resisting social conformity, rather it is about coming to terms with the nature of our own being-in-the-world, our thrownness, our being caught under the net of the complexities of life. Heidegger develops this idea in his later writings on “thinking” (see his 1954 essay *What Calls for Thinking*). He draws on the “etymological affinity” (Wenning 2008:157) between “Denken” (German for “to think”) and “Andenken” (“to remember”), to show that thinking and remembrance are intertwined; the process of remembrance is itself manifested in the act of thinking. Hence in the crisis of inauthentic being, the process of thinking is remembrance of ourselves, our thrownness, and can allow for a grasping of “historical meaning” (Wenning 2008:158).

The historical understanding of Dasein and its relationship to authenticity are present in the latter sections of *Being and Time*. Heidegger describes how “Dasein factually has its “history”” because “the Being of this entity [Dasein] is constituted by historicity” (Heidegger 1962:434). Heidegger develops this by understanding the historical Being as “the handing down of a heritage” which “constitutes itself in resoluteness” (ibid). Heritage, one’s cultural and social origin, is partly that which determines Dasein’s thrownness in the world by furnishing the “world” with a particular “ready-to-hand” framework that determines the boundaries of Dasein’s possibility. Hence, coming to terms with “heritage” is a part of realising Dasein’s “own most distinctive possibility” (Heidegger 1962:435) such that Dasein can live authentically. Authentic living for Dasein therefore consists of an ownership, not only of the maze of possibilities that one finds oneself thrown into, but also the framework that dictates those possibilities, the heritage which Dasein “hands down to itself...in a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen” (Heidegger 1962:435).

The temptation of “falling” to Das Man not only presents Dasein with an inauthentic life, but also represents a move away from Dasein’s own heritage. Polt claims that “If we are authentically historical, we will not settle dully into the comfort of our world” (Polt 1999:78) as is the case with surrendering to Das Man. Rather we will welcome the opportunity to navigate our thrownness as “an opportunity to reconfigure and reclaim our home” (ibid). This can be understood in terms of our heritage. The notions of “home” and “heritage” are interlinked. For Heidegger, Polt is using “home” in a poetic sense rather than a literal sense as Heidegger does in his later writings. In *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, Heidegger illustrates how the function of buildings as homes organises our existence within the world, and consequently grounds our being-in-the-world.

#### 1.24 Collective Dasein’s Authenticity

Having outlined the account of authenticity in *Being and Time*, I will now apply it to Dasein as a community. An authentic society is one that has come to terms with its cultural heritage, taking ownership of it by identifying with the “people’s destiny” (Cooper 1996:50). The idea of “heritage” is inherently a public concept that applies to a multitude of individuals. A society can choose to embody its heritage, uniting its members to a common set of ideals, goals and ways of living that regulate its future, or its “destiny” as Heidegger puts it. Through such commitments “a society becomes a living ‘people’” (Young 2001:55) distinct from other societies with other heritages, other practices and other background “ready-to-hand” concepts that furnish their culture and their “world”.

A great work of art for Heidegger is one that realises a “living community” (see above) by illuminating its heritage in terms of the authentic Being which Dasein can realise in its

being-in-the-world. Hammermeister comments that for Heidegger, great art “grants man the experience of society” which is an aspect of his being-in-the-world (Hammermeister 2002:184). A great artwork not only moulds cultural identity by illuminating the “world” of a society’s heritage, but allows the people to become an authentic collective Dasein by coming to terms with and accepting their heritage. Heidegger’s philosophy of art therefore captures an important aspect of the relationship between art and society: how great art can mould cultural identity, or in Heideggerian terms, authentic being-in-the-world. Great art therefore plays an important role in our lives in that it is able to show us how to become authentic beings with our own unique sense of cultural values, and to remind us of who we are.

### 1.25 The Contemporary Relevance of Authenticity in Art

The next two sections assess whether Heidegger’s aesthetic theory is relevant in today’s cultural climate. In brief, I aim to show that Heidegger’s theory is valuable in illuminating our understanding of different societies and those societies’ relationship to art and cultural values.

The first, and somewhat unconventional, embodiment of this is that of Nazism. Hitler encouraged German artistic engagement to foster a sense of German heritage and thus, in Heideggerian terms, the authentic being of the German Dasein. In 1935, the year Heidegger began drafting *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Hitler called for the “revival and resurrection of German art” (Hitler 1942:569) with the aim of expressing “the renewed German Geist” (Zimmerman 1990:99). Nazi authorities organised performances of German composers like Beethoven and Wagner. They promoted art that embodied traditional German values. It is no surprise that, as Cooper rightly points out, Nazism in Germany was an apt embodiment of Heidegger’s ideas about “the collective destiny of a Volk or nation” (Cooper 1996:51). There is much discussion on how deep the parallels run between Nazi nationalism and Heideggerian philosophy, with one side claiming that there is “no logical connection at all” and the other claiming that “Nazism is latent in” Heidegger’s work (ibid). What is clear is that Heidegger believed that 1930s Europe was in “spiritual decline” (ibid) and that Hitler represented a return to authenticity for the German people by resurrecting German values and traditions. These served as a background network for the renewed German Dasein to live authentically, navigating the plethora of its possibilities, both on the level of the individual and of society. I will return to the relevance of this idea later when I consider the question of aesthetic exclusivity. Before doing so I will consider whether Heidegger’s aesthetics has a relevance in the context of a second contemporary debate: the status of the British Empire and its cultural values.

The art on display in the British Museum is another example of great art (in this case the classical sculptures) buttressing a people’s (the Victorians’) sense of cultural identity, and so instilling in its people a sense of cultural superiority. There are many contemporary debates surrounding artwork and UK academic and other institutions that celebrate the lives of, and have benefited from, benefactors who amassed wealth on the back of the slave trade. Whilst I only wish to touch briefly on this issue, I argue that Heidegger’s aesthetics is very relevant to the debate that art determines cultural consciousness.

Take the *Westmacott Athlete* statue at the British Museum by Polykleitos (See Fig.2). According to Heidegger, Victorians who engaged in the artwork would have preserved the classical Greek world revealed by the statue. The cultural values brought to light were of civilisation, rationality and cultural superiority embodied in the supposed perfection of form, strong physique and pale colour of the statue. Even today, many people regard Ancient Greece



as the home of Western civilisation and the birthplace of rational thought. But in their preservation of the artwork, these background values come to be adopted by the preservers, the viewers, who can fully engage in the “world” of the artwork. The viewers come to see themselves as civilised, rational and superior as a result. It is these values that laid the groundwork for British Imperialism that justified colonialization. The attitude is demonstrated in the cartoon from 1899 in Fig.3 below which shows the British people (literally personified) as the cultural inheritors and defenders of civilisation. Art therefore can play a central role in determining cultural consciousness. If we want to investigate the values behind phenomena like the British Empire, then we can map the relationship between British Imperialist art and society, using Heidegger’s aesthetics.

### 1.26 The Problem of Aesthetic Exclusivity

This section addresses what I call the problem of aesthetic exclusivity, a potential weakness of Heidegger’s theory. We live in an age in which we can easily access and engage in cultural artefacts from around the world be that virtually or in person. Technological advancements and globalisation mean I can easily access translated books from almost anywhere, watch international films from the comfort of my bedroom or fly to art galleries across the globe. This has led to a pluralism of tastes and a fraternisation of artistic cultures. It is not the case that just the English read Jane Austen or just Germans read Goethe; we live in an artistic *free for all* where the boundaries of cultural engagement have dissipated. Just as I can fully engage in art from my culture, I can also engage in art from any culture. A good aesthetic theory will be able to accommodate cross-cultural engagement within its framework.

Heidegger’s ideas about great art illuminating a peoples’ cultural heritage and allowing for collective Dasein to achieve authenticity can be read to suggest that only those belonging to a particular cultural heritage can fully engage in the artwork (as Heidegger puts it “stand in the openness of beings” (see above)). This is the type of engagement that is primordial, non-intellectual, speaking to us on an emotional level. It is not the kind of engagement that is intellectual. For example, I could study Goethe and engage in his poetry in an intellectual sense, learning about context, literary form, and so on. Or I could simply read it and be captivated by the aesthetic experience.

Heidegger’s theory seems problematic given this consideration. It precludes the possibility of *genuine engagement* in art that illuminates a world that is not one’s own. This suggests someone engaging in another society’s art could recognise that the art is great for those who are able to fully engage in the art, but not for them. To recall Heidegger’s terminology, they can see what is “ready-to-hand” and what primordially furnishes the worlds of others from afar (that is revealed in their aesthetic experience) but cannot engage in it for themselves. They can see the hammer being used by someone else as something “ready-to-hand” but cannot use it themselves. As a result, an aspect of its being will always remain concealed. Consequently, the artwork cannot foster within them the sense of authenticity that allows someone who is part of the heritage to realise their collective Dasein.

The implication is that the realisation of a “living community” can only occur if the audience is already within the world illuminated by the artwork. Only a particular social group will be able to fully identify with the cultural paradigm illuminated by the work, and therefore only they will be able to authentically come to terms with their being-in-the-world through experiencing the art. I call this the problem of aesthetic exclusivity because of the problematic notion that art that is culturally tied is exclusive to that culture. Nazi art and its emphasis on

fostering a sense of nationhood is a fitting example: German people in the 1930s watch and listen to Wagner, read Goethe and forge a more determined sense of collective being as a result. How do I, someone who is not German nor has any relation to German “heritage”, engage in Wagner? Before I develop this, it is worth noting that Heidegger would likely not have identified this as a problem given his political leanings. Even after the Second World War he supported Nazism. The extremity of his political beliefs has only recently come to light in his posthumously published Black Notebooks. Here he inculcates Jews for polluting Germany’s cultural landscape thereby obstructing the collective Dasein of the German people. Guyer even goes so far as to claim that the entirety of *The Origin of the Work of Art* is “a veiled glorification” of Nazi ideology (Guyer 2003:736). Consider the following:

the world is a self-opening of the broad paths of the simple and essential decisions in *the destiny of a historical people* (Heidegger 1950:111, my emphasis).

If we understand “historical people” in terms of ancestry, understood as one’s ethnic origin, then I will be unable to fully engage in foreign artwork that illuminates a foreign “world.”

The crux of the problem centres around the question how we are to understand “heritage”. Heidegger’s own understanding is not explicit but again, if fuelled by racist ideas about genetics and race, would likely lean towards a strong emphasis on ancestry and ethnicity. Aryans, for example, would be said by Heidegger to have a shared ancestry. Culture would therefore be, at least in some part, defined by ancestry; Heidegger makes this clear in his Black Notebooks where he comments: “Race—which makes up one necessary condition of historical Dasein (thrownness), not only attains the fake status of being the one and only sufficient pre-requisite—but rather, at the same time, as that which gets talked about” (Heidegger in Gumbrecht 2017:133). In his view, if I am an Aryan then I will have certain ancestry (originating from Scandinavia perhaps) which will partially determine my “thrownness” in the “world”. Even if ancestry is not individually sufficient in determining my being-in-the-world, for there will be other factors, it is still a necessary condition. This means “heritage” already precludes those who do not share a certain ancestry from fully engaging in the kind of “world” specific to that heritage illuminated in the art.

This aesthetic exclusivity is clearly not how artistic engagement works today. Anyone can be “spoken to” by any artwork and fully engage with it, notwithstanding their ancestral makeup or ethnic background. Take the global popularity of South Korean filmmaker Bong Joon Ho’s film *Parasite* as an example. Not being able to convincingly accommodate cross-cultural engagement is a significant flaw in Heidegger’s philosophy of art if it cannot be rectified. To resolve this, I propose a different understanding of “heritage” that grounds collective Dasein as a shared “form of life” in the Wittgensteinian sense. This allows for a total disavowal of any ancestry-based theory of Dasein and an understanding of how “worlds” can be engaged in cross-culturally whilst retaining the idea that a “living community” can be forged by the artwork.

### 1.27 A Solution to the Problem of Aesthetic Exclusivity

If Heidegger’s understanding of culture can be understood as a “form of life”, an activity that anyone can theoretically take part in, then the worlds illuminated by artworks can be engaged in by anyone who is within the “form of life”. To do this I draw on the parallels between Heideggerian phenomenology and the later Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language.

Stephen Mulhall draws parallels between Wittgenstein and Heidegger. He writes that the “structures which it is the goal of philosophy to illuminate are to be found in Dasein’s



everyday experience – [and that this] has a certain affinity with Wittgenstein in the emphasis on the grammatical structures manifest in ordinary language” (Mulhall, 1990:120). His basic idea is that Heidegger’s “specialised contexts” (the “ready-to-hand” framework) provides a structure that “informs all our relations” (Mulhall 1990:121) and determines our being-in-the-world. For Wittgenstein, this “multiplicity of interrelated issues concerning human relationships to language, other people and the world...can only be grasped via the essential structures of language” (Mulhall 1990:121). In other words, Heidegger’s notion of “ready-to-hand” as a primordial way of grasping the meaning of things-in-the-world parallels Wittgenstein’s emphasis on the meaning of language, rooted in its use within a Language Game. Mulhall notes that he does not want to “make the naïve claim that Heidegger and Wittgenstein are ‘saying the same thing’” (Mulhall 1990:122). Rather he says they can be understood to complement each other’s philosophical aims; roughly speaking, what Heidegger does for objects, Wittgenstein does for language. This is reinforced by Nicholas Gier who writes: “for both Wittgenstein and Heidegger traditional predicates and properties give way to a system of relations, in which, for example, the meaning of a hammer is not given in terms of its necessary qualities but strictly in terms of its use in the world” (Gier 1981:125).

For Wittgenstein, words do not derive their meaning from being directly tied to a referent object (or as Wittgenstein puts it “attaching a name to a thing” (Wittgenstein 2009:16e)) that the word points to. Rather he says words are formed as “part of an activity, or of a form of life” (Wittgenstein 2009:15e). This is what Wittgenstein calls “Language Games” (Wittgenstein 2009:14e), the public contextual background in which the utterance is made. Wittgenstein is proposing what Hamilton calls an “activity-based” account of meaning (Hamilton 2014:27), stressing the “social and institutional practices surrounding linguistic meaning” (ibid). Wittgenstein provides the example of two builders who communicate “pass me the slab” by just shouting “slab” (Wittgenstein 2009:12e). The word’s meaning can only be understood in terms of its context, which in this case is a shared project involving tools and building utensils, and the physical environment. This context denotes the form of life engaged in by a community of language users, both of whom are united by a public and shared practice. Like Heidegger, Wittgenstein is emphasising the importance of activity. For Heidegger, using the hammer as a tool reveals another aspect of its being, previously concealed by conceptualisation. For Wittgenstein, a word’s use within a context (the Language Game), the activity for which it is used, determines its meaning. Meaning itself, like the nature of the hammer, is “revealed only *in situ* when we see it embedded in the active lives of those who speak it” (McGinn 1997:63).

How does this allow us to amend Heidegger’s understanding of culture? In *Culture and Value* Wittgenstein defines a culture through the notion of “observance” of certain activities. Culture is defined by specific activities. Commenting on Wittgenstein, Yuval Lurie develops this, writing that “a culture consists in the observance of shared ways of behaviour regarding just about anything” (Lurie 1989:379). This “observance” can refer to any kind of practice: greeting each other, dressing, cooking and so on; for example, eating with a fork in the UK and eating with chopsticks in Japan. It is these shared forms of life, undertaken by a community, that define that community’s culture. Given that anyone can hypothetically engage in these activities, they are necessarily non-exclusive. Unlike Heidegger’s ancestry-based understanding, culture itself becomes non-exclusive and does not prevent anyone from engaging in it. That said, one can still be excluded, or stand outside a culture, if one does not take part in enough of the forms of life specific to that culture. For example, merely using

chopsticks to eat dinner is not enough to warrant genuine engagement in Japanese culture. Only one form of life is being engaged in.

Although he does write on aesthetics, Wittgenstein's understanding of culture is primarily anthropological. Roger Scruton distinguishes between an aesthetic and an anthropological conception of culture; the former relates to "sexual morality, religious practices, and social organization" (Hamilton 2009:390), in other words, the activities or "forms of life" specific to a community. The latter on the other hand can be summarised using English poet Mathew Arnold's quote, "the best that has been thought and said" (ibid). This aesthetic sense of culture refers to the arts, painting, music, and literature. For Heidegger, however, this distinction is hard to draw, because an art object for Heidegger can be anything that gives truth to its "world" or insight into a "cultural paradigm", which can be understood as anthropological. The aesthetic culture and anthropological culture are tangled; both are part of the truth illuminated by the art object. As a result, we can comfortably apply Wittgenstein's understanding of culture to Heidegger's philosophy.

Heidegger's ideas about collective Dasein can be grounded in this open understanding of culture. Retuning to *Being and Time*, it is the *shared* "forms of life" that have been historically substantiated as heritage or tradition, that can determine Dasein's "thrownness" in the world. Forms of life as culture can therefore determine an aspect of Dasein's being-in-the-world rather than ancestry. But because these "forms of life" are non-exclusive, anyone can theoretically take part in them; there is no inherent preclusion of anyone based on their ethnic origin. For example, a Christian's authentic being is partially determined by their heritage. But this heritage is understood as one of the "forms of life" specific to Christianity. If someone were to convert and take part in this "form of life" for long enough, they would be able to experience being "thrown" into the world of Christianity. These background beliefs would then exist as the framework that forms their "world". The "form of life" can extend to just about any cultural practice and determine any heritage for a Dasein, be that individual or collective. Just as Heidegger's hammer's "ready-to-handness" can be discovered by way of its use within a wider project, so cultures can reveal the "forms of life" that are unique to them to a wider audience. Anyone can use the hammer and discover its being. Anyone can take on a culture and discover its values for themselves. This reconfigures the problem of aesthetic exclusivity for Heidegger because the "form of life" becomes non-exclusively activity-based. There is no requirement to have a certain ancestry in order to take part. Hence for a collective Dasein to become authentic on a societal level, it must only come to terms with the "forms of life" that are essential to the culture, its shared projects and values, irrelevant of ancestry.

Retuning to aesthetic engagement, if culture is now open to anyone (provided they take part in the correct "forms of life") then the "world" illuminated by an artwork can also be fully engaged in by anyone. Developing the previous example, whilst as a non-Christian, my aesthetic experience of The Sistine Chapel is curtailed because I am not integrated within the forms of life or the world that the art illuminates, if I were to convert and take part in the forms of life that are specific to Christianity (Catholicism to be specific), then I would become thrown into the "world" of Christianity and better able to engage in Christian art, and the "world" it illuminates. Given that ancestry has no place in determining "form of life", something inherently public and activity-based, the issues that stem from the original Heideggerian reading of "heritage" disappear.

Cross-cultural engagement therefore occurs by identifying shared "forms of life" across cultures. This is demonstrated by the real-world example of the popularity of *Fiddler on the*

*Roof*. Ostensibly a musical about Ashkenazi Jews in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the musical is highly popular in Japan despite the two cultures being, on the surface, very different. The reason for this is that there are certain “forms of life” present in both cultures that result in shared values and shared “worlds” for Japanese and Jewish Dasein. Wayne Hoffman identifies these as “generational conflict, the tensions between holding fast and letting go, the demands of the past” (Hoffman 2018). Hence a Japanese person can fully engage in the shared world illuminated by *Fiddler on the Roof* despite the lack of Heideggerian “heritage”, understood in the ancestral sense.

### 1.3 Section Conclusion

Heidegger’s aesthetics, understood with an ancestry-based reading of “heritage”, encounters what I have called the problem of aesthetic exclusivity. Given Heidegger’s political affiliations, I have shown that he would likely have held that ancestry was an essential aspect of Dasein’s being-in-the-world. This would then preclude those outside certain cultures from engaging in the art of that culture given their lack of “heritage” in relation to the “world.” Whilst Heidegger might not have thought this was a problem, in an age where cross-cultural engagement is increasingly popular, largely because of cultural accessibility, it seems problematic for an aesthetic theory to preclude full engagement in another culture’s art. Hence, I have proposed a Wittgensteinian reading of “heritage” that emphasizes activity rather than ancestry to overcome the problem. As the “forms of life” that define a culture can theoretically be accessed by anyone, this activity-based reading of Heidegger’s theory can overcome the problem of aesthetic exclusivity. We can therefore allow for cross-cultural artistic plurality whilst at the same time being able to capture the way in which art can bolster or even help to constitute cultural identity.

## Section 2: Heidegger and Mass Culture

### 2.1 Introduction

Section 2 seeks to reconsider Heidegger’s philosophy concerning the relationship between art and society in the age of mass culture and mass art. After defining mass art, this section uses Adorno and Horkheimer’s culture industry as a framework to explore the negative impacts of mass art on society. Juxtaposing this with Heidegger’s aesthetics will show how the three philosophers, despite being critical of each other and working within different schools of thought, are each, in many ways, concerned with the impact that mass art has on society. Each fear a loss of individuality, in Adorno and Horkheimer’s terms through the culture industry, and in Heidegger’s terms through falling to “Das Man”. I conclude by reflecting on a possible antidote to the homogenisation of cultural identity in the form of folk art which inherently resists absorption into the culture industry as it is always tied to a specific society.

### 2.2 Defining Mass Art in Relation to Popular Art

Carroll identifies three individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for something to count as mass art (Carroll 1998:224):

1. x is a type artwork.
2. produced and distributed by a mass delivery technology.

3. which is intentionally designed to gravitate towards those choices which promise accessibility for the largest number of untutored (or relatively untutored) audiences.

The first condition builds on a distinction between types and tokens. Bachrach distinguishes the token artworks as “an individual occurrence or object in the spatio-temporal world” whereas a type artwork “is an abstraction inasmuch as it has tokens as instances” (Bachrach 1971:415). For example, a particular performance of Arthur Miller’s *All My Sons* would be considered a token of the type artwork *All My Sons*. What literary critics refer to when discussing plot or character is the type artwork, the abstract thing that each performance instantiates. A painting on the other hand can only exist in one place and time. Hence fine art like the Mona Lisa would be considered a token artwork.

Goodman’s distinction between autographic and allographic art parallels this. For Goodman, art is autographic “if and only if the distinction between original and forgery of it is significant; or better, if and only if even the most exact duplication of it does not thereby count as genuine” (Levinson 1980:368). In other words, if the artwork is copied, the copy is not a genuine version of the artwork. The Mona Lisa in the Louvre is both a token (it exists as an individual object in space-time) and autographic, given that copies, like a poster, are not genuine versions of the artwork. Copies of allographic art on the other hand always remain genuine artworks. This roughly equates to type artworks. Films for example do not have an original version that exists in space-time. They can be copied (digitally or with film) and still be genuine. Mass art would then have to be allographic in order for there to be mass consumption; only so many people can see the Mona Lisa at one time whereas millions of people can watch a film simultaneously. For an artwork to be mass artwork there must be a type version of it, an abstract version that is instantiated in each token, which must be allographic.

Carroll uses the term “mass art” as opposed to “popular art”. He argues that “mass art” only exists in the modern industrial society and is designed to appeal to the masses. “Popular art” on the other hand only refers to art that is well loved by a significant number of people irrelevant of societal or technological conditions: the Mona Lisa has drawn thousands of visitors to the Louvre since it was first displayed in 1804 and can be said to be popular. (There are many ways in which art can be “popular” as demonstrated by Hamilton in *Aesthetics and Music*, however I do not have room to delve into them here). This was before the dawn of modern technological society. Carroll highlights this distinction by postulating that mass art is characterised by the use of “mass delivery systems” (Carroll 1998:199). Mass art can be popular art where technologies of production and distribution are utilised to allow for mass consumption in the form of photography, radio, television, and motion pictures. Hence the second condition listed above. But this adheres to the first condition given that only type artwork can be accessed through mass media technologies in a way that not all popular art can be.

The first two of Carroll’s conditions focuses on distribution. The third revolves around consumption. Carroll writes that mass art has to be “legible to the average untutored audience member” (Carroll 194:1998). In other words, for an artwork to be mass artwork it has to have universal appeal, such that a high proportion of people in society can engage with it. This means mass art will appeal to the audience representing the lowest common denominator. For example, not everyone has the patience to watch a four-hour long *Tarkovsky* film. Hence mass artwork will be designed to appeal to those with shorter attention spans and simpler story lines. Carroll uses Salman Rushdie’s bestseller *The Satanic Verses* as an example of an artwork

that only fulfils the first two conditions and so does not qualify as mass artwork. *The Satanic Verses* is an allographic type artwork, existing as multiple token copies. It is distributed through mass technology, the printing press. It is also a popular book selling thousands of copies worldwide, but it is not mass art. This is because, as Carroll claims, its use of complex language and difficult subject matter means it cannot be said to be designed for universal appeal or accessibility - and therefore for a mass audience. Nazi art, like Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, would also not be considered as mass art because of its limited appeal, despite fulfilling the first two conditions.

### 2.3 Adorno and Horkheimer's Culture Industry

Despite being on opposite sides of the political spectrum to Heidegger and being a critic of existentialist thought and language (see *Jargon of Authenticity*, Adorno's critique of Heideggerian phenomenology), Adorno does exhibit "significant parallels to Heidegger's writing" (Stahl 1975:492). These parallels are relevant when documenting the relationship between art and society. For Adorno and Horkheimer, this theme manifests in the culture industry, a term coined by Adorno and Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in reference to mass art and culture.

Adorno and Horkheimer aim to critique society by illuminating "false consciousness", a term borrowed from Marx to refer to the proletariat being unknowingly misled by ideological and material values. Only when people are made aware of "the fact and nature of their oppression" (Young 2019:196) can they begin to resist their domination. As critical theorists writing in the Marxist tradition, the aim of Adorno and Horkheimer was to pave a way for liberation. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, they describe the culture industry as the system that "standardises public tastes according to demands of the capitalist market" (Hamilton 2007:171). The result is homogeneity of cultural products or as Adorno and Horkheimer put it, a "ruthless unity" (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997:123) where all objects are fundamentally the same. The consumption of culture industry products is a form of secret domination.

The critique of the culture industry is first situated within Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and is expanded further in multiple essays by Adorno. The text criticises the Enlightenment project's emphasis on "Instrumental Reason" which, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, comes to nullify individual liberty. For Adorno and Horkheimer "Instrumental Reason" is specifically "devoted to deliberation" – in the sense that it brings about certain ends (Carroll 1998:71). For example, if someone wants to build a house, it is rational for them to cut down a tree and build the house from the wood. They have used "Instrumental Reason", applying their rationality to achieve the end they desire. But by adhering to Enlightenment values, they are also autonomous, free not only to choose their own ends but also in how to go about achieving them. Adorno and Horkheimer claim that all autonomy will eventually disseminate in the name of "Instrumental Reason" which subjugates everything to a mere means to achieve any goal. The logical conclusion is what Raymond Geuss calls "a society of universal fungibility" (Geuss 1998:299) where everything and everyone can be subjugated to a means to some end. In other words, where a person can themselves be used as a tool for an end goal, their liberty is restricted. This is exemplified in Adorno and Horkheimer's culture industry which Carroll rightly comments is "itself an exercise in instrumental reason because it treats the audience as a target – as a subject of calculation to be manipulated in certain specific ways" (Carroll 1998:71).



Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the products of the culture industry are carefully designed to achieve the goal of maximising profit by subjugating as many people as possible to the role of consumers. To achieve universal appeal, art under the culture industry will be designed to appeal to as many consumers as possible by being purposefully, easily accessible and unchallenging in terms of engagement, whether that be by way of form or content. Carroll highlights one example of the aim for universal appeal: the reliance on “pictorial symbols” (Carroll 1998:192) within visual media. He writes that the recognition of certain concepts “does not involve a process of learning over and above object recognition” (ibid) and can thereby be accessible to all. An example of this may be the association of facial scars or facial disfigurement with evil or villainous characters, which acts as a signpost for audiences; in lieu of having to work out who is good and who is bad, the audience can easily rely on symbols which act as shorthand for information. The symbolic parallel (that is likely Platonic in origin with beauty being equated to goodness and vice versa) appears across the culture industry: *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Nosferatu*, and *Star Wars* are all examples of mass art that are easily accessible through the symbolic use of facial scars or disfigurement. The villain in *The Lion King* is even called “Scar” with, unsurprisingly, a large scar across his face. The symbol means that audiences do not have to employ any moral effort into categorising who is good and who is bad, whose side to take, and who to rail against.

Returning to Adorno and Horkheimer, the culture industry, in aiming for universal appeal, will produce uniform art objects. No product will want to risk not appealing to the masses, and hence all art objects will adopt the same fundamental features. Consequently, anything challenging or difficult to access will not have universal appeal and will not maximise profit. Hence it will not be produced given that the only way for producers to compete within the industry is to homogenise the product, adhering to the concrete standards of form and content so that the product can appeal to the masses. Mass art objects become “commodities calculated to fulfil the present needs of the masses” (Hammermeister 2000:200), created with the intent to be marketed to and consumed by the masses.

The “wholesale deception of the masses” (Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 1997:42) occurs when consumers believe that what they are consuming is new. The culture industry “piously claims to be guided by its customers and to supply them with what they ask for” when in reality “it drills them in their attitudes” (Adorno in Hamilton 2007:171). They are secretly duped into continuously consuming seemingly new films, shows, and music despite the fact that all “products prove to be all alike in the end” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997:123). Adorno and Horkheimer support this claiming that “the difference between the Chrysler range and General Motors products is basically illusory....the same applies to Warner Brothers and Metro Goldwyn Mayer productions” (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997:123). Mass art objects are fundamentally the same, same structures, tropes and patterns, parallel to the way that all cars have an engine, seats and so on. Any difference is superficial, a mere façade disguising the sameness beneath. Hence why Hamilton writes that the culture industry is “administered from above” rather than something that “arises spontaneously from the masses” (Hamilton 2007:171). It is domination that negates autonomy.

The culture industry’s subjugation of peoples’ autonomy by duping them into consumption has a knock-on effect for the cultural values of a society. This is because the culture industry will perpetuate the idea that societal values are concrete whilst distracting people with a constant stream of harmless entertainment. Adorno writes that the culture industry “impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and

decide consciously for themselves (Adorno 1991:106). The reason for this relates back to the need for highly commodified mass art to be universally consumable. Firstly, if culture industry art has to be easily accessible to maximise profit, then producers will favour the production of mere entertainment. This does not require intellectual or cognitive effort in terms of engagement, as opposed to more high-brow art forms (compare the highly popular Netflix show *Emily in Paris* with something difficult to access like Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev*, which is inevitably less popular).

Secondly in aiming for the largest audience, producers will want their art objects to reflect the status quo. This will mean producing works that largely support the current political system, government, or authority. As a result, consumers will only be exposed to products that express the same moral, political, and social sentiment. The consumers of mass art will therefore be politically and socially anaesthetized, their capacity for enacting social change deadened by the constant stream of non-provocational entertainment. Hammermeister synthesises these two features writing that “the culture industry’s ‘products’ fulfil the public’s need for entertainment without any danger of arousing ideas or desires that challenge the present conformity” (Hammermeister 2000:197).

#### 2.4 A Heideggerian Critique of the Culture Industry

I will now analyse the culture industry through the lens of Heidegger’s aesthetics. Heidegger’s philosophy can buttress Adorno’s analysis through the notion of authentic being-in-the-world and its relationship to art. The culture industry can be said to instantiate what Heidegger calls “falling” to “Das Man” (the surrendering to “group think” – instead of acting on one’s own “thrownness”) and therefore warrant Dasein’s inauthentic being-in-the-world. In *Being and Time*, authenticity is not a state that persists when achieved. Rather “falling remains a constant threat” (Young 2001:59). Just as an individual Dasein can become inauthentic by surrendering to “Das Man”, a collective Dasein can also become inauthentic for the same reason. Heidegger hints at the role of entertainment in acting as an obstacle to authentic being in his later work *Poetically Man Dwells*. He writes that “our dwelling today is harassed by work, made insecure by the hunt for gain and success, bewitched by the entertainment and recreation industry” (Heidegger 1971:211). Heidegger explores the concept of “dwelling”, a form of authentic being-in-the-world, which the culture industry uproots by preventing us from engaging in our own kind of art. Instead, we are compelled to consume whatever is consumed by “the they”, whatever is popular.

Borrowing Adorno and Horkheimer’s claim that in the homogenised culture industry, art objects nullify cultural and political consciousness, the culture industry presents a threat to an individual’s and a society’s collective authentic being-in-the-world. If a societal group engages with art belonging to the homogeneous highly commodified culture industry instead of art specific to that grouping, then the societal group will lose its sense of identity. It will become inauthentic, failing to act on its own “thrownness” through its lack of autonomy. In Adorno and Horkheimer’s terms, a society caught under the net of the culture industry will not be able to “decide consciously for themselves” (1991:106). This means that, despite being hostile towards Heidegger’s terminology, Adorno and Horkheimer’s concerns sit remarkably close to Heidegger’s that Dasein man will surrender itself to “Das Man” in losing its ability to consciously choose to enact its own being-in-the-world (its own authentic existence).



## 2.5 An Antidote to Commodified Art

The antidote to inauthentic homogeneity, following Wittgenstein's claim that "form of life" is central to determining culture, is to encourage a return to creating and consuming art within the confines of a community. This will mean that the art produced is not mass art. It would fail to meet Carroll's three conditions by only being a token artwork, not relying on a mass delivery system for distribution, and not being designed for universal appeal. As a consequence, the artwork will appeal specifically to the artist's community and will reflect that community's values, ideas, and "forms of life". This means the artwork itself will be culturally specific; when engaged in, it will preserve and illuminate the "world" of the community in which it was made, and will, following Heidegger, allow its audience to become authentic.

Folk art does exactly this. Folk art is a nebulous term, usually understood as "based on nothing more than custom and prejudice" (Graham 1997:20) because it is usually defined in contrast to so-called high art. But there are some common features of folk art. Firstly, folk art is made by anonymous craftsmen, for example *Khokhloma* patterns in Russia. Secondly, it is usually handcrafted. Traditional Persian rugs are a pertinent example of this (See Fig 4). Thirdly, it is usually vernacular, specific to a function within cultural practice. Examples of this could be pub sign designs in England. These originate from an Act of 1393 which made it compulsory for pubs to have their own signage for identification given that the majority of the population were illiterate. This means, importantly, that folk art distinctly arises from a "form of life" and therefore usually reflects that culture (in the anthropological sense) in its aesthetic qualities. Music is a common example of folk art. Consider the status of folk music in England:

Folksong was held up as a cultural artifact common to the experience of all English men and women; its dissemination throughout society as a whole would thus serve as a reminder of a shared cultural heritage and help forge connections between social classes. (Onderdonk 2013:139)

The idea here is that English folk music, originating from particular "forms of life", sea shanties or music to accompany Morris dancing, can, when engaged in, illuminate the culture of all English people. Following Heidegger's theory of art, this can allow English people to come to terms with their heritage, illuminating authentic being for them – and indeed, for anyone who chooses to share the "forms of life" that represent English culture, as I have argued in Section 1.

Whilst I have given only a brief overview of the aesthetics of folk art, there is one important feature that I wish to highlight: its inherent resistance to universal appeal. Folk art cannot be mass art because it is always tied to a specific culture and is therefore not designed for mass appeal. (As I have already demonstrated, folk art resists all three of Carroll's conditions for an artwork to be mass artwork). It can be said therefore to resist being engulfed by the homogeneity of the culture industry. This means that engaging in the folk art of one's own society will, following Heidegger, preserve the "world" of the artwork whilst also strengthening a sense of cultural identity in its audience, allowing them to become authentic beings-in-the-world. So long as we keep engaging in this kind of culture-bound art, we can resist falling to "Das Man" and to becoming inauthentic beings.

## 2.6 Section Conclusion

Adorno and Horkheimer and Heidegger's work on the relationship between art and society complement each other. They are critical of highly commodified mass art and its potentially negative impacts on society. Heidegger situates this within his phenomenological framework in terms of authentic being-in-the-world. Adorno and Horkheimer understand this in terms of critical theory, domination and liberation under capitalist market mechanisms. As a result, they are two sides of the same coin. In order to combat the homogenisation of cultural identity, I have proposed a return to societal groups' engagement with folk art. This inherently resists commoditisation and engulfment by the culture industry. It combats a Heideggerian falling to "Das Man" and the proliferation of inauthentic being by consuming art that illuminates the "world" of one's own culture.

## 3.0 Overall Conclusion

I have explored Heidegger's philosophy of art and its two-way relationship with society. I have analysed the problems with Heidegger's ideas by considering the problem of aesthetic exclusivity which I argue can be overcome. I have also considered how Heidegger's philosophy operates in the age of mass art and culture. Section 1 began by outlining Heidegger's theory of art and its relationship to society. It then grappled with the question whether Heidegger's work can account for cross-cultural engagement, engaging in art from other cultures despite not being *within* that culture. I argued that an ancestry-based reading of "heritage" problematically makes the "worlds" illuminated by artworks exclusively accessible by those belonging to the culture which those "worlds" illuminate. This would preclude cross-cultural engagement. Instead, I proposed a understanding of "heritage" grounded in non-exclusive "forms of life" making cultural engagement open to anyone irrelevant of ancestry. This would allow for cross-cultural engagement, including in art from overseas. Section 2 considers Heidegger's ideas of authentic being-in-the-world in the context of mass culture. Using the culture industry as a framework, I have argued that Heidegger and Adorno and Horkheimer are two sides of the same coin as each can be said to be concerned with the loss of cultural identity in an age of homogenous highly commodified art. I have argued that creating and engaging in folk art can serve as an antidote to this given its inherent cultural specificity and resistance to commodification. In a future essay I would like to expand further on the philosophical implications of folk art as an antidote to the culture industry.



Fig.1 Peasant Shoes, Vincent Van Gogh, 1886



Fig.2 Westmacott Athlete, Polykleitos, 441 BC–402 BC



Fig.3 The White Man's Burden - Victor Gillam, Judge Magazine, 1899



Fig.4 Carpet production outside Shiraz,  
Newsha Tavakolian, 2016

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