

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology on 08/12/17, available online:  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/20539320.2017.1396696>

*The World in Ruins:*  
*Heidegger, Poussin, Kiefer*

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### *1. Opening*

Where does philosophy stand *now*? It is a question that has always been asked. Indeed, it's possible to read the history of philosophy as a series of stands that have already been taken; stands that delimit and are delimited by a sense of the *now*.<sup>1</sup> What of philosophy *now*? The question intends to underscore the presence of a relation between the philosophical and the *now*. What occurs takes place in this *now*, as a *now* demanding to be thought. In broader terms, this is to argue that philosophy is positioned by its own predicament, the predicament in which it finds itself. While the only way of addressing the question necessitates making a claim about the elements within the relation between philosophy and the *now*, a preliminary note needs to be added concerning how this particular instance of relationality is to be understood. It is not as though any understanding of the *now* of writing, the *now* within which philosophy is written, need have an impact on the philosophical. It might be the case that philosophy remain indifferent to the *now* in which it is occurring such that this *now* remains unthought philosophically. Philosophy's indifference would try to construct a philosophical justification, one that might seek to ally the philosophical with the scientific or quantitative method and, as such, remain oblivious to the way the culture that surrounds it was manifest. Indifference to the *now*, a philosophical indifference, yields a conception of the philosophical that in holding itself apart from the *now* fails to think the *now* as a philosophical topos and thus refuses to confront the possibility of thought having its own proper predicament.<sup>2</sup> In other words, one answer to the question noted at the outset—Where does philosophy stand *now*?—would be to refuse the possibility of a relation between philosophy and the *now* (the *now* as a philosopheme). If this possibility—which is real and which has allowed philosophy to become apathetic—was no longer possible and, as a result, philosophy does take a stand, and thus allows the question of its own stand in relation to the *now* to have delimited a specific philosophical project, then what has to be addressed is the

specificity or the particularity of this *now*, this *now* insistent *now* of writing. Insisting on the *now*, and thus allowing it to insist, works to redefine the philosophical, since then *now* would then have been stripped of its self-evidence. This move signals both the departure from empiricism, in which the *now* is taken to be self-evident, and from naturalism, in which the *now* is taken to have a recalcitrant inevitability.

The contention here is that what determines or defines this *now* is the ineliminable presence of catastrophic climate change, a change that is leaving the world in ruins. Part of what allows climate change to be understood as catastrophic has to do with the possible impossibility of what are described in the IPCC's 2014 Synthesis Report as "effective adaptation and mitigation responses" to be effective. The report argues that the responses and thus the eventual or even possible diminution of the results of climate change

would depend on policies and measures across multiple scales: international, regional, national and sub-national. Policies across all scales supporting technological development, diffusion and transfer, as well as finance for responses to climate change, can complement and enhance the effectiveness of policies that directly promote adaptation and mitigation.<sup>3</sup>

Even if this assessment were only partially accurate—and there is no reason to doubt that it is anything other than completely accurate—what it identifies is a set of conditions that the current economic orders and their commitment to continual growth cannot fulfill. The problem is, however, more complex than it first appears. A doubling occurs. Growth sustains the continual recreation of inequality while simultaneously sustaining the exponential increase in the impact of climate change. And the difficulty continues: if unsustainable growth is linked to climate change, then the drivers of growth are no longer under the control of the political in any direct sense. The separation of the political and the economic through the continual deregulation of the banking sector and the use of the three credit ratings agencies (Standard & Poor's, Moody's, and the Fitch Group) to effectively limit the percentage of Social Democratic welfare spending as a percentage of GDP has created a setup in which a political response to the causes of climate change, which involve an uncritical reiteration of models of economic growth that reciprocally sustain inequality both nationally and internationally, appears to have become impossible. As a result,

inequality, in the name of a specific politics, has been naturalized. What this means, of course, is that sustaining inequality cannot be separated from maintaining that interconnection between the economic and the political that is inextricably bound up with climate change.<sup>4</sup> The commitment to inequality cannot be separated from arguments indicating the inevitability of catastrophic climate change. While this reframes arguments for justice, it opens up, at the same time, the need to engage another possibility.

However, prior to that engagement it is essential to be clear concerning the nature of the connection between injustice and climate change. Maintaining a world in which injustice predominates entails opening that world to its own destruction as a result of the link between injustice and climate change. The severance of that link, were it to be possible, would involve a transformation of the world such that it would no longer be a locus of injustice. That transformation would be a *countermeasure* in which the world is both retained and reconfigured. And yet, it is still possible to understand the presence of the countermeasure as a form of catastrophe. In this specific instance, the catastrophe is the undoing of injustice and thus the creation of another world. This would be the catastrophe that is necessary were it possible to forestall catastrophic climate change. The latter is a form of catastrophe in which there is an ending without either transformation or continuity. The advent of the latter—the presence now of catastrophic climate change—is what is new. It is what is occurring *now*. Philosophy, were it to be delimited by this *now*, would be constrained to think this double sense of the catastrophic and thus to think the end of the world. (What emerges is the possibility of the end of the world that is not axiomatically connected to what Heidegger identifies as another beginning.<sup>5</sup> As a result, a different sense of danger would obtain.)

The project of this paper is to begin to respond to the question of the catastrophic via an engagement with the philosophical writings of Heidegger, specifically in terms of the presentation of “world” and “earth” in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” with a painting by Nicholas Poussin—*Landscape with St. John on Patmos* (1640)—as well as a recent multimedia installation by Anselm Kiefer, *Walhalla* (2016).<sup>6</sup> However, as noted above, there is the need to engage the possibility that the first catastrophe, namely, the severance of the link between injustice and climate change, cannot be brought about. In other words, ending injustice and therefore maintaining the world hovers at the edge of the impossible. The link

between injustice and catastrophic climate change is maintained, and thus philosophy has to think the end of the world in which the end is present neither as transformation nor as a discontinuity within continuity. The end to be thought is the end of the world *as such*, that is, a world that is *now* present without always already bearing within it the inscription, image, or possibility of another beginning. While this, as an eventuality, may seem extreme, the contention here is that it is not. Indeed, the contrary is the case. It is the risk that is *now* apparent.<sup>7</sup> It is simply the other genuine possibility, once the link between maintained injustice and climate change can be substantiated.

One approach to thinking the end of the world in which that end is present as a philosophical topos is to think it in terms of death and thus to link the end of the world to a form of death. Philosophy has always maintained an important relation to death. Plato, in the *Phaedo*, connects philosophy to the preparation for death. Hence the important formulation: “The one aim of those who practice philosophy correctly [ὁρθῶς] is to practice for dying and death.” (64a3–4)<sup>8</sup> However, what death means here is not the end of the world, but the end of the world of a particular individual. Importantly, it should be noted that even then it is not the individual as a whole and thus as a totality who dies, since “death is the separation of the soul from the body” (64c5–6). Hence, rather than a preparation for the end of the world, Socrates’ concern is with the death of the individual. The soul’s continuity can be imagined. If Plato provides an opening in which the recognition of the world’s end might be explicated in terms of a preparation for a good death, it still remains a conception of death in which it is only the individual’s body that dies. The soul lives on. Thus death becomes a form of survival. (Even the act of mourning is a possible form of survival: the afterlife as the work of mourning is thus still a life. There is still life.) What has to be taken up is what survival would mean when what is at stake is the end of the world *as such*. Does it make sense to hold on to a form of afterlife?

The challenge, however, is real. Catastrophic climate change demands that which is radically other to any simple evocation of mere survival. It demands both that the end of the world be thought and that the human—whether in terms of the friend or a more generalized sense of alterity—no longer structure thought on its own. Where worldliness is no longer delimited by human being, understood as an end in itself, nor in the simple evocation of the self/other relation, it has to be reconfigured in terms of a more complex modality of relation—the latter involving an always already

present relation to place. As a result, this would be the point at which *being-in-place* would need to be thought as always already—hence anoriginally—interarticulated with *being-in-common*.<sup>9</sup> Place would gain ascendancy over human being if the latter were identified with the purely human. Were Plato adaptable to this project, then human being's predicament, given the *now* in which it occurs and thus takes a stand, is to prepare for death properly. *Now*, however, it is death as the end of the world. This demand is one that stems from the recognition that not only is a philosophical anthropology always delimited by place, but that what is now at issue is both the possibility and the actuality of place as such. The questions are clear: What would a preparation for the end of the world be like? What needs to be taught and understood such that it became possible to argue that human being was prepared for the end of the world?<sup>10</sup>

The question of preparation is itself complex. Preparation is informed by a sense of possibility and thus of a form of openness. And yet, more is involved since understanding what preparation means can be provided by noting its initial link to a form of resignation. To be prepared may mean having become resigned to death and thus by extension resigned to the end of the world. Equally, however, to be prepared may lead in another direction. If there is another path then what has to be thought through is the presence of preparation without mere resignation. At this stage, these differing possibilities can only continue as questions; and as questions the viability of their formulation and thus what they seek to elicit are all far from certain. Rather than respond to questions of preparation and possibility directly, it is essential to continue by allowing them to be located within the way in which fundamental moments within the history of philosophy and the history of art have engaged with what can be more generally described as the complex connection between continuity and discontinuity. If there is a constellation around which this occurs, then it is sustained here by the figure of the ruin.<sup>11</sup> A certain sense of the discontinuous can be understood as exemplifying the structure of the catastrophe in that the possibility of a future is based on the ruining of what preceded it. Continuity and discontinuity as they are thought *now* pertain to the world. Not the world that is set over against the subject, but rather human being as already worldly and thus as already placed—human being as *being-in-place*. This is the opening to Heidegger on the world. What makes Heidegger's engagement with the world important is not just the specific ways in which the

relation between what he designates as “earth” and “world” is to be thought, but the way the argument is advanced in terms of an engagement with works of art.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Heidegger: *Earth, World and “Templework”*

Now, what does thinking the world entail? The answer is thinking the end of the world, which equals the recognition that the work of art, rather than holding open a world, announces the world’s impossibility. If this is right, then what this brings with it is the need to think the end of the world as an ending without a beginning. In section 31 of *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, Heidegger offers a detailed investigation of endings and beginnings. Rather than a concern with philosophy’s history as articulated in terms of simple continuity, Heidegger’s project is not just with beginnings and endings, rather, and more significantly, it is with the structure of the decision that pertains to them. There are two senses of beginning and end in the presentation of Heidegger’s position. The first sense of “end” is articulated in the following terms:

The greatness of the end consists not only in the essentiality of the closure of the great possibilities but also in the power to prepare a transition to something wholly other [*der Kraft zur Vorbereitung des Überganges zu einem ganz Anderen*].<sup>13</sup>

In regard to the second sense of “end,” neither critique nor “destruction” pertains in any direct sense. Moreover, ends and beginning are not identified with the practice of invention. Heidegger’s formulation in this regard is precise.

At the same time [*zugleich*], however, “end” refers to the running out and the dissipation [*das Auslaufen und Sichverlaufen*] of all the effects of the previous history of Western thinking. That is, it refers to a confusion of the traditional basic positions, value concepts and propositions in the usual interpretation of beings [*des Seienden*].<sup>14</sup>

In order to understand this twofold sense of ending, it is essential to note Heidegger’s actual expression. He writes of “running out” and “dissipation.” Both of these formulations can be connected to forms of exhaustion. A logic of exhaustion is

inextricably bound up with the interconnection of closure and preparation. The relation between an “end” and “the other beginning” has, for Heidegger, the form of a decision. Thus, there would be both the end and the overcoming of exhaustion. The decision would have been made. “We” stand before it. And Heidegger’s use of “we” is central. This section of the text begins: “*Unser stand.*” The opening line is emphatic. Heidegger asserts that “we” take a stand before “another beginning” (*dem anderen Anfang*). The “decision” (*Entscheidung*) concerns a relation to the future, a relation that is situated in what is described by Heidegger as “our preparedness and unpreparedness for the future.”<sup>15</sup> Again, Heidegger’s use of “our” (*unserer*) and its link to the future, a link in which one is defined in terms of the other, needs to be noted. It is indeed “our” “future.” In this domain, positioned in relation to this future, “we” find ourselves. This is a finding in which “we” return to “our” proper selves. Both the finding and returning occur in relation to “what happens authentically.” The formulation connects happening to being historical. In this return an important distinction is established. The distinction is between that which is irrelevant to history, irrelevant even though occupying a place in the past, and that which is genuinely historical. In the same section of the text, Heidegger will argue that “historiography is a narcotic averting us from history.”<sup>16</sup> While the question of the genuinely historical should not, however, be generalized too quickly, the nature of the distinction that it establishes still needs to be granted its effective force.

For Heidegger, the setting in which the decision occurs has a particular determination. Elements of the formulation have already been cited above. Nonetheless, the full character of the decision should be identified. Heidegger writes that this

domain is opened up—*if* it does indeed unfurl—according to the originality enabling us to find ourselves again in what genuinely occurs, out of lostness in our contrivances and endeavours, out of entanglement in what is obvious and worn out. But we will find ourselves there only through a conscious awareness of the beginning and of what was given to it.<sup>17</sup>

The response to this formulation in which a certain logic of the gift remains operative, the response to Heidegger that is determined by the sense of the catastrophic that obtains *now*, should be clear. That clarity becomes manifest when given the form of a



question: What if there is no longer, *now*, the possibility of a beginning? In that case, except as an act of self-deception, there could not be “a conscious awareness of the beginning.” The question of the impossibility of a beginning is itself already a reframing of how beginnings are themselves to be understood. Answering such a question would necessitate a radically new conception of a beginning. Beginning *now* with the end and thus having to start with the recognition that the setting within which reflection were to take place would no longer be there *now*. At work here is the inscription of *being-in-place* as that which is threatened. The end of place would be the end of human being as *being-in-place*. To the extent that such a possibility holds, then what counts as an ending will also have been transformed. There is another world: the world at the end of the world. This world, the worlding of this world, needs to be pursued. It is not that the world is in danger; pure danger is there at the end of the world as its end. This is, of course, the sense of danger where that which saves, conserves, and shelters (*das Rettende*) is simply no longer there.<sup>18</sup> *Now* danger has a radically different quality. Hence the philosophical question concerns the extent to which the emergence of pure danger, danger from which shelter is no longer already given, constructs the limit of Heidegger’s philosophical thinking. It would have been delimited by what *now* is the end of the world’s insistence.

To begin, however, with the world is to begin with the project of “The Origin of the Work of Art.” Central to it is Heidegger’s continual thinking and rethinking of the world. The development it contains is the introduction into that thinking of the “earth.” A way needs to be found to Heidegger’s thinking of the world. In *Mindfulness* (*Besinnung*) Heidegger delimits a specific stance made in relation to a certain conception of history. What has to be either recovered or allowed is what he describes as “originary historicity.” It is that “through which all history is overcome.”<sup>19</sup> What is opened up here is, of course, the admission of the possibility of having been freed from a specific determination of the “world.” This amounts to the need to move from the simple evocation of history, in which historical time is equated with chronological time and the place of history, to the simple givenness of the world, to a radical reconsideration of the world as the place of historical determination as such. This is identified in “The Origin of the Work of Art” in terms, again, of the “decision.” In this regard, Heidegger writes that the

world is the self-opening openness of the broad paths of the simple and essential decisions in the destiny of a historical people.<sup>20</sup>

Of the many elements of this passage that are important, special significance, in this context, will be given to the formulation “essential decisions.” Determinations within the world, indeed the possibility of thinking worldliness itself, cannot be separated from the structure of the decision. And it must be immediately added that intrinsic to this structure is the excision of everyday decisions. The decisions in question are the “essential decisions.” There is a fundamental distinction at work here. The place of the decision is far from benign. Danger attends. It intrudes into the relationship between earth and world. There is a “rift.” In the argumentation of “The Origin of the Work of Art,” the “rift” emerges by naming the relation between earth and world. Note the care with which the nature of the rift is presented in the attempt to identify what can best be described as the *Auseinandersetzung* between earth and world.

World demands its decisiveness and its measure and lets beings attain to the open region of their paths. Earth, bearing and jutting, endeavors to keep itself closed and to entrust everything to its law. Strife is not a rift, as a mere cleft is ripped open; rather, it is the intimacy with which those in conflict belong to each other. This rift carries those who turn against each other in the source of their unity by virtue of their common ground.<sup>21</sup>

Before any progress can be made with how the rift is to be understood and thus with what is entailed, *now*, by being in danger, or being pained, precision is necessary in terms of explicating what Heidegger means when he links conflict to a belonging together and then seeks to connect a conception of unity and commonality to what is identified as “those who turn against each other” (*die Gegenwendigen*). In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, as part of the discussion of the first stasimon in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, Heidegger writes of the “*gegenwendigen Bezug*” of *dikē* and *technē*.<sup>22</sup> These two terms are in a “countervalent relation.” What is at stake in both instances is a mode of relationality. What marks it out is a form of coherence. Brought together in their unity is that which is apart. The rift identifies the divide that, in holding apart, brings that which is apart together. It neither unifies nor synthesizes. It becomes a form of appeasement, of a giving oneself over to the essential and thus to

being affected no longer. The demise of the aesthetic becomes another opening to the origin of the work of art. What is distanced, at the same time, is what might be described as the conventional language of philosophy, namely, the language within which truth understood as “the clearing and concealing of beings” is refused. The importance of art’s work lies in the further description of it as the “letting happen of the advent of the truth of beings.”<sup>23</sup>

The radical nature of Heidegger’s thinking of “earth” and “world” lies in its distance from those conventions, that is, in the already present thinking of earth and world, and thus in its proximity to the structure of truth. This accounts for the difficulty of giving a quick summation of what is at stake in the difference between world and earth in Heidegger’s own thinking. How, then, to proceed with Heidegger on “earth” and “world” as they appear in “The Origin of the Work of Art”? Two complex passages provide the way forward. The first announces the presence of the temple, not as a mere literal presence and thus neither as a possible site for the forlorn encounter nor even an embittered longing. The temple is there as a locus of work, “the temple work.” (Note again the refusal of the very possibility of the aesthetic occurring through an insistence on the workful nature of the art.) The second occurs more or less at the end of the text and underscores the emphatic presence of truth within the relation that obtains between earth and world.

Standing there, the temple work opens up a world, while, at the same time [*zugleich*], setting this world back onto the earth which itself first comes forth as the homeland. . . . Standing there, the temple first gives to things their look, and to men their outlook on themselves. This view remains open as long as [*so lange als*] the work is a work, as long as the god has not fled from it.<sup>24</sup>

Truly poetic projection is the opening up of that into which Dasein as historical is already thrown. This is the earth and, for a historical people, its earth, the self-secluding ground on which it rests together with everything that it already is, though still hidden from itself. But this is also its world, which exerting dominion in virtue of the relation of Dasein to the unconcealment of Being.<sup>25</sup>

The temple became the setting in which human being—historical Dasein (though equally “a people”)—find themselves. One is the other. They come to

themselves as they are. Consistent with Heidegger's own language of return, there is an act of recovery. When the temple as a locus of work is set back "on the earth," the process is not a grounding. As Heidegger's argumentation unfolds, the relation between earth and world is renamed as "strife." While the earth is a ground, it is equally "abyssal," which is to say that it is both *Grund* and *Abgrund*. This movement is an opening that is also a concealment—which is, equally, the setting of historical Dasein itself. The earth as an opening and a closing off is described by Andrew Mitchell in his examination of this process as "paradoxical". Mitchell then goes on to provide this setting within an exact formulation: "Paradoxical because this earth reveals itself as the sensuous shine of things, a shine that withdraws from all efforts to contain it."<sup>26</sup> Appearance is not pure presence. Appearance is located, thus, beyond any incorporation into the purely aesthetic. The impossibility of containment and thus the earth as a "self-secluding ground" is the presence of the earth as, to employ Heidegger's formulation, "that which both supports and withdraws from the world."<sup>27</sup>

The standing there of the temple is not a mere singularity. Its presence is doubled. In opening a world, it places it. The act sets the world into place. The temple work opens a place. They occur at the same time. Two acts in the same moment. This earth, the site of placing, has a founding designation. First of all it is designated "as the homeland." This coming forth "as" implicates what is at work here in a process of production. What is produced is the "earth" as "the homeland." It is no longer mere matter. It is now there as "the homeland." Place has become historical and, thus, place is what it is in its differentiation from matter as mere givenness. Place is no longer to be interpreted or understood as that which is given and thus to which the human has a relation. Its presence as "homeland" occurs "first," though it is recovered afterwards. What has been produced is itself productive. What is produced is a complex interplay of the look and the outlook in which a sense of propriety is found—the finding of that which has already been given. Another condition is built into this setting, a condition that sustains this productive quality. The condition is announced in the passage by the expression "as long as": while the direct reference is to the work remaining a work, what it also indicates, if only implicitly, is that the relation between work and world has a circumscribed setting. Hence the question: might it not be possible for a work to have an afterlife and thus a sense of work that is not directly explicable in terms of the way Heidegger understood work and world? In other words, the question that arose in the move from danger to pure danger returns.

What will be pursued at this stage, however, is the other temporal marker, namely, the formulation “at the same time” (*zugleich*). It enables the earth/world relation to be as it is. It is the moment in which the temple work occurs. A world is opened, “at the same time” as “this world” is set “back onto the earth.” While the temple no longer works in this way, that marker, as providing the moment in which earth and world are brought together in and as the work, must continue to delimit the work of the work of art once the latter is taken more generally. This is what it means for a work of art to be a work. This is clear from the second passage cited above. Poetic projection brings Dasein into earth and world. Dasein is given within this setting. Entering it allows Dasein “to stand in relation to what is not man.”<sup>28</sup>

The work of art, then, attests to the earth/world relation and the domain understood as Dasein’s “homeland” as the place in which there is the possibility of the structure of truth becoming apparent. This occurs precisely because the condition of its being—revealing and concealing—is also there in the way the work of art opens that structure to Dasein. Each element is both the opening up *of* the other and the opening up *to* each other. Within the realm of possibilities, there is the interconnection of truth as delimited by the relation of revealing and concealing and the creation of the decision. The decision, here, is linked to the structure of authenticity, since the decision is situated in the midst of truth (the latter as both a structure and a possibility). What has already been identified as the “destiny” of people and, equally, what is also the “destiny” of Dasein, are acted out. This is Heidegger’s thinking of the predicament. If there were a threat to Dasein, were Dasein to be in danger, it would be because what would have become impossible is both this authentic moment and dwelling in the “homeland.” The danger would only pertain to Dasein as a locus of authenticity, hence the importance of the distinction between mere decisions and “essential decisions.” Dasein must be prepared for its authentic encounter with a recast earth/world relation, a relation for which Dasein will have always already been prepared. Preparation is for the future understood as a transition to “something completely other.” Dasein’s preparation is for a future delimited by the structure of authenticity. Dasein has always been prepared for a possibility that is held in place and announced by the simultaneity of what occurs at the same time. The “temple work” has to be understood as resulting from a sense of *at-the-same-timeness*. To be clear, *at-the-same-timeness* in the passage noted above defines the work’s work as that which opens a world and locates it on the earth. They occur at the

same time—*zugleich*. What is produced is the earth and thus the earth/world relation as the “homeland.” This is the act of production that is the condition of possibility for Dasein’s recovery of its own most possibility. Place, for Heidegger, at least in the context of “The Origin of the Work of Art,” is the “homeland.” That place has been produced as such. This is the setting that allows preparedness for the future to occur while providing it with the conditions of its own understandability. *At-the-same-timeness* marks the temporality both of a network of relations as well as a structure in which Dasein comes to be what it is. In the language of “The Origin of the Work of Art,” the “world” exerts “dominion” “in virtue of the relation of Dasein to the unconcealment of Being.” There is, however, an excision. Excised is the possibility that the setting within which this occurs is itself in danger. There is no space, no setting, within this specific conception of *at-the-same-timeness* that would allow this other danger, namely, pure danger, to be thought. It would be the violence that would come from the outside dominating the space of dominion. In other words, it is no longer the “threat that has already afflicted man [*Mensch*] in his essence.”<sup>29</sup> The possibility of a stand necessitates a move from the essential that is without human being to that which is essential for human being. Here, place has to be affirmed. However, preparation in the sense that it occurs in the passages noted above—and it is preparation that forms and informs both the need for as well as the structure of the decision—has become impossible. A fundamental part of the reason why this is the case is that *now*, presently, *at-the-same-timeness* works differently. Nothing has prepared Dasein for the end of the world; another beginning is not the end of the world, moreover, more is at work than the exhaustion of metaphysics.

There is *now* a different sense of danger, a sense whose hold is not diminished by the overcoming of the aesthetic or the affective in the name of another orientation whose purpose is given by a specific structure of truth (truth as the revealing and concealing of being). Equally, the disavowal of truth is not resolved by an understanding of Dasein’s potentiality for being, that is, by the uncovering of that which is there authentically for Dasein within a realm of possibility. Again, this is a certain structure of the decision. Disavowal is linked to a claim about the relation between danger and the future in which the future as a possibility no longer obtains. There is, *now*, the stark presence of what has already been identified as pure danger. Hence the recovering of a possibility, were such a formulation even to make sense, that is no longer bond up with a “reflection on a beginning.” The latter is a form of

thought in which the future is defined in terms of its own affirmation—the occasioned and affirmed transition. Such a reflection now has become pointless. Moreover, its conditions of possibility would no longer obtain. *Now* there is the need for a reflection on the end of the world, not just an ending without a beginning, but as an ending that is not itself a preparation for a beginning—an end that occurs now and which is not there as a beginning. This becomes the affirmation of pure danger. What this means is that *at-the-same-timeness* no longer marks that which allows access to the structure of authenticity and which is occasioned by its unfolding the structure of truth. What pertains *now* at the same time is the end of the world and its refusal, that refusal is the refusal to think the end as the end and thus the refusal to engage in pure danger’s affirmation. There is *now* another space to be thought and therefore another space for thought.

In order to develop what insists within the formulation of thinking the end as the end, a turn will be made to Poussin’s *Landscape with St. John on Patmos* (1640). [Figure 1] Here, what is important is the representation in the painting of the end as a beginning. It is present in and as an image. In Heidegger’s engagement with Van Gogh’s painting, there is the recognition of truth: “In the painting of Van Gogh truth happens.”<sup>30</sup> This occurs because of the way the shoes are presented. What is there in and with the shoes is the revelation of that which is proper to “beings as a whole.” There is a showing. Showing as “unconcealing” which is a process there within the “counterplay” of world and earth. Given this larger context in which a particular work can be positioned in relation to a sense of totality, and given what can be claimed of the work, how is Poussin’s landscape to be understood?

### 3. Poussin’s *Landscape with St. John on Patmos*

According to both the Christian Bible (Rev. 1:9) and a number of ancient sources—principally Eusebius and Orosius—St. John was on Patmos.<sup>31</sup> He was there after having been banished by the Roman Emperor Domitian. His body therefore was the object of a form of persecution. No longer a simple singularity, his body was marked in advance by processes that, while not absolute, are integral to the creation of identities. Equally, they are processes that would be world-forming. Precisely because such a body is marked in advance and thus would be that on which the processes of marking have to incorporate an inevitable partiality, the body then acquires a doubled presence. It is the site of the processes that are there at the same time. Hence there is

another instance of *at-the-same-timeness*. The body is an after-effect. Moreover, as a result of that production, there is a constitutive spacing at the body's center, a spacing that allows the body to act in ways that resist or refuse those marks that create identities. Inevitably, therefore, identities have a necessary partiality and thus an original irreducible plurality. St. John's body is both that which has been banished and a site of resistance; both obtain in a given now in their necessary irreducibility. Not only does this irreducibility define St. John, it also accounts for the saint's capacity to act and thus to decide. St. John's body is doubled at the origin. Ambivalence, therefore, is able to continue. Even though Patmos may have been the world in which the banished lived, it is also possible that Patmos functioned as the place in which those forces were refused or resisted.<sup>32</sup> The significant point is that what allows the body to have this founding ambivalence and, as a result, what allows that presence to be effective, is that both possibilities, banishment and its resistance, pertain at the same time. What this means, of course, is that *at-the-same-timeness* in this context stages a different set of relations than those noted before. Here, it engenders a decision jeopardizing the recovery of any type of unity, let alone that which could have been named by terms such as "we" or "our."

St. John's body is both that which has been banished as well as a site of resistance to that banishment. Here, the banishing carries over into the act of writing. Writing within Poussin's painting is both act and thus also as the creation of text. The act of writing is that which resists. At the outset writing, therefore, takes place in relation to the ruined temple. While they are presented together within the spatiotemporal simultaneity that perspective provides, the order that its provision creates is complicated from within by the irreducibility of one to the other.<sup>33</sup> Their difference and thus the need for thinking their relation is grounded in their presentation at the same time. The unifying force of perspective unifies superficially. Hence what must be recovered are the tensions and loci of irreducibility that perspective allows to be staged. That staging is the occasioning of *at-the-same-timeness*. With Poussin's painting an original irreducibility has precedence over the synthesizing effect of perspective. Here is the setting in which St. John is located and which locates St. John.

In Revelation 1:12, John reports that he heard a voice that commanded him "to write what you see in a book." What did John see? In the foreground of Poussin's painting there is a ruined temple and St. John writing. The interplay of writing as an



opening to the future, when taken in relation to the presence of the ruined temple, means that both occur within the *now* that their co-presence creates. The ruin has an actuality. If its world is over, it is present *now* both as announcing that end and staging the impossibility of effacing the past. There is a possibility and thus the intimation of a progression. The ruin signals the past as that which continues—albeit ruined—in the present. Hence it lives on. There were never just ruins. The ruin introduces a time lag that exerts a defining hold on the structure of the present itself. In turning to the painting proper, the two senses of *at-the-same-timeness* provide the opening to the way St. John, temples, and the landscape are themselves present within the frame.<sup>34</sup> That is, recognizing that an essential part of both is the presence of the already noted time lag. The elements—St John’s body, the temples, and the landscape—are related while each element is itself the site of an original form of relationality. (A relationality that also pertains to the internal relations that comprise each of these “events.”) St. John’s body in Poussin’s painting is engaged in a task. The body’s presentation is coterminous with that task’s performance. The body’s activity occurs in the landscape and yet is apart from it.<sup>35</sup> This doubling undoes the possibility that this is the presentation of the Stoic conception of *apatheia*. Despite the fact that Poussin’s relation to Stoicism is a continual theme within the reception of his work, and while questions of equanimity and the quelling of the passions may have informed Poussin’s own self-conception of his work, here a different path will be followed.

Even though all of *Landscape with St. John on Patmos* continues to warrant a careful and detailed analysis, at this stage emphasis is to be given to the complex set of relations that exist between the figure of St. John, the presence of architecture, and the landscape. The first point that has to be noted concerns the presence of the ruin directly in front of the prone figure of St. John. Prior, however, to taking up his presence, the question to which the ruin gives rise concerns how its relation to the non-ruined temple, located in the middle of the work, is to be understood. Through that temple, differing parts of the ancient city can be discerned. To what extent should the literal ruin be taken to predominate? What, then, of the relation between these two temples? Once these questions are allowed to orientate the ensuing engagement with Poussin’s painting, then the general claim has to be that each singular element is an after effect of that relation. Relationality prevails once *at-the-same-timeness* takes precedence over the simple simultaneity that perspective affords. While perspective

creates a singular time and provides an apparent coherence, that creation and ensuing appearance cannot be allowed to suppress the play of different temporal orders and complex relations of which the work is comprised. A beginning can be made however with the actual ruin.

The ruin has a number of components that are essential. Its presence indicates that a world has been brought to an end. Evidence for that sense of ending is announced by the literal ruin. There has been the ruination of that world. There is a fundamental addition, namely, that what has been ruined exists as a ruin in the present. The present therefore incorporates the ruin. There is a direct interpretation of the ruin that accords both with elements of Christianity and with aspects of Stoic physics. In Matthew 19:28, Jesus signals what will occur when he has attained glory. A new relation between human being and God will have taken place. This occurrence is given a specific designation. It will happen in what is referred to as “in the regeneration” or “at the renewal of all things.” The Greek, however, contains an explicit reference to the problem posed by the ruin. The Greek text is ἐν τῇ παλιγγενεσίᾳ. In other words, the future and thus continuity are generated from stones (that is, it is an instance of *palingenesis*). Hence, the future as locus of profound transformation has its genesis in ruins. This conception of generation and regeneration, of *palingenesis* as a creative force, also plays an important role in Stoic physics.<sup>36</sup> While it is always possible to pursue this aspect of the ruin, here what is central is noting the way the time lag introduces a sense of deferral into the palingenetic. In other words, rather than regeneration and repetition, what counts here is the presence of the active body of St. John and thus the nature of the world in which that body acts. He is present within (and before) the ruin. Hence, emphasis is being given here to the relation between St. John and the ruin, rather than allowing the stones (the literal ruin) to function as an end in itself. Once the time lag is attributed interpretive centrality, and that attribution is necessary precisely because of the nature of the world that the time lag both opens and sustains, then what becomes important is the recognition that the ruin incorporates an essential ambivalence which signals the operative presence of another modality of *at-the-same-timeness*, one that would be precluded were the palingenetic the only avenue of interpretation.

The ambivalence takes the following form. On the one hand, the ruin could be viewed nostalgically and thus as a source of hope to the extent that hope was defined by its connection to the past. In this instance, hope and melancholia would be

interarticulated. On the other hand, the ruin allows for the mark of an end and thus the possibility of a radical beginning. The ruin indicates that a threshold condition *now* pertains. And yet, the threshold, in forming part of the present, means that what informs the present—informs and forms it—is the *now* present necessity to engage with the actuality of the ruin. If St. John were defined by his place in front of the literal ruin without the other temple being brought into consideration, the force of his position would be lost. That force has to be thought within the context created by the ruin's ambivalence. And it is precisely that ambivalence, which is of course a modality of *at-the-same-timeness*, that is reinforced and sustained by the relation to the other temple. Allowing for both reinforces the way the time lag is effect. The *now* within which St. John acts has been effected by it. *At-the-same-timeness* has to prevail because it is the ambivalence that both grounds and allows what here would be the decision.

The other temple is not a literal ruin. It is an actual site. Another question comes to insist. What occurs once the relation between the sites is accorded centrality? One response might be to suggest that whether or not temples or sites are literal ruins or still standing, the presence of St. John and the world to which his writings *now* refer means that the world of the temples, ruined and standing, is over. That world has been ruined. However, such a response is too hasty. Absent from it is what has already been identified as the time lag—that is, the presence of the past in the present as a constitutive element of the present. The ruin is part of the present. It announces the present as that which occurs, in the *now* of its occurring, in its differentiation from the past, the past *now* as the world of the ruin. What this means here is that the ruin as the past forms part of the present. Before turning to the figure of St. John, it is essential to draw a connection between the time lag and the landscape. Landscape is a fundamental element of a number of Poussin's paintings.<sup>37</sup> In this instance, there is an important connection between Poussin's use of landscape and Heidegger's conception of the earth. While both eschew any reduction to either nature or mere material presence, they hold open different possibilities.

For Heidegger, earth is that on which human dwelling comes to be what it is. In its relation to the world there is a spacing, a clearing, in which "beings can be as beings."<sup>38</sup> They take a stand. And yet, as has already been noted, the earth is not the physical ground and thus the literal place on which things—temple, ruins, etc.—are placed. On the contrary, for Heidegger, "earth occurs essentially as the sheltering

agent.”<sup>39</sup> The earth, therefore, has a salvific force, which means that the earth opens towards the best. (The best is that which can be affirmed in its own right.) Landscape as the earth means that it cannot be equated with the ground but must be that which has its own “law.” The importance of art’s work is that it occasions the recovery of the determining aspect of the earth. While, for Heidegger, the law of the earth is bound up with truth as revealing and concealing, again a setting afforded by the work of art in Poussin’s painting, it might be suggested that there is another mode of revealing and concealing in play. The stakes are just as high, given that what remains in play is an account of historical time. Equally, what counts as the interplay of truth, place, and time is also part of the setting. *At-the-same-timeness* opens that set of connections in another way. Just to be clear, *at-the-same-timeness* involves the ambivalence of St. John’s body, thus its presence as a plural event, as well as St. John’s relation to the ruin that constructs a present as defined by the presence of the past within it. This is the effect of the time lag. Hence there is another instance of *at-the-same-timeness*. Events—St. John, the ruins, even the landscape itself—that are given within relations have a founding irreducibility. Within the painting, there is an important shift in the presentation of time. The present becomes, as a result, a site that is in part configured by a relation of negotiation with an ineliminable past. (A past that is now present, continually present in and as the *now*.) The past is there, always there, within and as the present, at the same time. The time lag demands a definition of the present in terms of activities delimited by a complex form of relationality: the relation with the past in the present. The ruin continues.

In the argumentation of “The Origin of the Work of Art,” the role of the structure of truth within Heidegger’s formulation of the earth can be located in the constancy of the demanding term “self-secluding.”<sup>40</sup> Heidegger writes:

To set forth the earth means to bring it into the open region as the self-secluding.<sup>41</sup>

The earth yields an open space that is neither pure givenness, the earth as simply posited, nor is there a sense of an open region as pure neutrality (which would be found, for example, in the use of terms such as “wilderness”). On the contrary, the open region is the locus of the strife of earth and world, while it is, of course, constituted by that strife. In its movement, what is allowed to be is also withdrawn.

For Heidegger, it is in the withdrawal that there is the refusal that marks the history of Dasein's relation to the history of being. That is its history and thus the structure of its historicity. This is the position described in *Mindfulness* in the following way:

As they sway, their struggle light up—clears—and in the end lighted up—clear—is the struggle itself as that which refuses itself: the grounding abyss [*der ab-gründige Grund*].<sup>42</sup>

Refusal becomes the mark of a withdrawal that defines the place of the historical and allows for the progression beyond what is there. Moreover, it is in that progression that the “we” is constructed and place becomes historical.

What is occurring in Poussin's painting, however, cannot be described in the same way, and yet the landscape is the open. It is the place of history. The temples provide a setting for any thinking of an overcoming. The temples' register is a possibility. Ruination becomes the mark of a possibility. They are there, therefore, as a potentiality to be actualized. The ruin indicates that it is possible to move beyond. Moreover, this is what the time lag indicates. The presence of the past as ruin or as a locus for possible ruination creates a complex present in which there is the continual negotiation with the time lag rather than the preparation for a new beginning. The possibility of an overcoming is, in the context of Poussin's painting, the truth of history. It is the truth that takes a stand against historicism. However, what has to be added here is that such a possibility is not part of the past. On the contrary, it is the survival of the past within and as part of the present, hence the figure of St. John.

St. John writes. In writing, he is creating that which cannot be assimilated either to the world that stands or to the world that is there as ruined. As such, St. John writes with (and within) another sense of the open. The painting presents a space, namely, the spacing between St. John and the ruin. While literal, it should not be literalized. It is the space in which in the distancing of the ruin and the writing—a holding together which is also a distancing—is then allowed to emerge as the acting out (the enacting therefore) of another beginning. This other beginning takes place insofar as both elements are copresent in their irreducible difference. *At-the-same-timeness* is both productive and orientated towards the best. The challenge at the present—*now*—is holding to this sense of the productive. What is significant about Poussin's painting is that while it contains a productive sense of *at-the-same-timeness*, it might be that very

aspect that *now* will have become a setting that yields its own sense of nostalgia. Within its actuality, that nostalgia coalesces with a false sense of hope in which what may be longed for now is the sense of a beginning. Though not just a sense of a beginning, but rather a sense that is already implicit in a version of palingenesis, namely, another beginning, a beginning that is wholly other, which means, of course, that what is then passed by is the presence of pure danger. The illusion is that danger has been averted and that the possibility of the best still endures. This, however, is not what pertains *now*. Now pure danger has to be thought. But, were it to be, what then would have to prevail is another sense of *at-the-same-timeness*. What then is pure danger? While it may still be the case that the temporal lag is operative, the ruin—be it literal or otherwise—is *now* no longer a remnant. In Poussin’s painting, the ruin remained a locus of negotiation. It was there marking the continual possibility of a beginning. Hence *at-the same-timeness* delimited a locus whose irreducibility contained an opening. *Now*, however, *at-the same-timeness* has a different quality. The best has ceded its place to the worst. While the *now* both contains and is comprised of a fundamental irreducibility in the precise sense that it remains open, that sense of the open cannot be thought as a future that allowed for its own affirmation. Consequently, preparation has to be understood differently. *Now* it has become impossible to identify a sense of beginning that can be affirmed. The worst no longer simply threatens. It has acquired its own reality. Equally, what is absent from the setting that holds *now* is what Heidegger identified as “the power to prepare a transition.” If there is “power” *now*, it has a different quality. *Now* what insists is a coalescence of futurity and danger that yields an opening without any possible affirmation. Consequently, there is no longer a “we” that comes to be what it is before “another beginning.” This *now* is the predicament. Moreover, this is pure danger. Works of art, art’s work, *now* have to be different. The project, therefore, is to begin to trace the presence of pure danger within the work of art. The argument in the following is that it is precisely this sense of danger that can be found in decisive elements of Anselm Kiefer’s multimedia installation *Walhalla*.

#### 4. Anselm Kiefer’s *Walhalla: The World at the End of the World*

If, as Heidegger argues, “truth happened” within the painting by Van Gogh, then in these works by Kiefer, truth is located in the impossibility of what occurs within them. As works of pure danger, they open at the limit of the image. Nothing happens.

They are the end. That is their opening. More generally, of course, the work of Anselm Kiefer has always involved a continual stand in relation to history and thus by extension both to how historical time is to be thought and the place of history, the land, is to be understood.<sup>43</sup> Kiefer's work has always evinced a keen understanding that history is placed. His work has been informed continually by that project. While there has been an attempt to connect his paintings and installations to Heidegger, a recent set of works—exhibited under the heading of *Walhalla*—allow themselves to be interpreted in an importantly different way. If Poussin's *Landscape with St. John on Patmos* can be understood as inscribed within its own sense of earth and world and thus the possibility of another beginning, Kiefer's work can be understood as presenting the ruin at (and as) the end of the world. While this is true for a number of works within *Walhalla*, emphasis here will be given to two. The first, named *Walhalla*—though this is a name that has extension to other works—comprises a series of steel beds made up with lead sheets and located in a room that is itself lined with oxidized lead. [Figure 2] The second is a spiral staircase, approximately twelve meters in height and on which paint-spattered clothing, clothing that belonged to both adults and children, was hung. The clothing is not simply spattered, more importantly it is ruined. This work carries the name of the prayer *Sursum corda*. [Figure 3] The prayer, which is in dialogue form, is placed at the beginning of the Eucharist. It is also important to note that the line *Sursum corda* (Lift up your hearts), from which the prayer derives its name, is said by the priest, and the response, *Habemus ad Dominum*, is a reiteration of the act of lifting. What both title and prayer suggest, therefore, is an exaltation that while directional leaves the place to which the direction points unstated. The prayer might be understood therefore as opening a world. Were that to be the case, the question of the quality of that world then returns. Prayer, however, invites a return. Prayer, moreover, is always directed. Prayer solicits. If at the moment what attends is the worst, then it may be the case that what remains, perhaps all that remains, is prayer. While prayer may stand at the end, what is prayed for is a beginning. (And that will be the case even if the beginning in question is continuity as another beginning.) The question to be addressed concerns the extent to which these works by Kiefer are positioned in relation either to a determined sense either of an end or to a source of unity.<sup>44</sup>

The specific work named *Walhalla* consists of a series of beds. They are on wheels. They are clearly hospital beds. They are empty. They no longer await. At the

end of the room in which the beds are installed, a room that is also part of the installation, there is a photo of the artist disappearing. In contradistinction to earlier works by Kiefer, in which he has inscribed the productive power of art into the work by positioning a hovering or flying palette within it, here art (in the guise of the artist) is leaving. Hence there is the *now* real question of whether art has abandoned the scene that it has created. What *now* can be said of these beds? Here, the insistence of the *now* has to be paramount. The *now* that works within and sustains Poussin's painting is no longer the *now* addressed in Kiefer. Hence there are two questions: Which *now*? What *now*?

Within the work in question, centrality must be attributed to the impossibility of these beds actually awaiting and thus for there to be an awaiting *now*. Were they to be present in a hospital, or in a tent on a battlefield, not only would they await, that awaiting could not be separated from their presence within a place of refuge, a place providing help and succor and, inevitably, care. However, the bodies have gone, it may even be that the war is over. The beds are empty. All that remains are the beds as a form of ruin. They have a stark, almost timeless, quality. Each bed is covered with sheets. They, too, are made of lead. While as works their reference to death might be taken as an opening towards life—turning from death towards the quick—and, thus, they may be thought to provide an opening that either begins or inaugurates, the contention here is that they do not. This is a position that has to be argued for in terms of what an actual opening within the work of art might in fact be. The sense of *at-the-same-timeness* at work in Poussin's *Landscape with St. John on Patmos* brought the possibility of an opening with it. As St. John wrote, he was creating a future; this takes place in the *now* of writing. The impossibility of reducing his body to the banished allowed that body to be implicated—as an act of refusal or resistance—in an act of writing that was the creation of a beginning. Endings and beginnings were held together in their difference at the same time. Here another question emerges: Is there something about the ruin in Kiefer that has a temporal singularity? If the answer to this question is in the affirmative then it might also be true that what is absent from the ruin is a productive sense of *at-the-same-timeness*. The ruin might be there as what might be described as a pure opening. It is this possibility that needs to be addressed in relation to both these particular works.

*Walhalla* is positioned by a set of empty beds. They have been vacated. Emptiness marks the passage from death. Referring back therefore to those who have



died while no longer awaiting the living, not even the wounded. The artist's own removal from the scene works to compound the overwhelming sense of loss. However, this is no longer the loss that evokes memory. Memory as a project, the need to remember at the present, thus, the insistent force of *present remembrance*, is *now*, while a consideration is no longer the only the only aspect of the work that should be taken into consideration.<sup>45</sup> An earlier work by Kiefer—*Ikarus—märkischer Sand* (1981)—presents the earth as the place of history. [Figure 4] In that painting, the winged palatine flying over the work reinforces the claim that the work itself is art's own engagement with the complex interplay of place and history, an interplay that lifts the ground from a place in which it is equated with mere materiality and thus which allows it to become the place of history and thus the locus of human being as *being-in-place*. The conjecture here is that there is a less positive element in the beds that occupy the lead-lined room. A work such as *Ikarus—märkischer Sand* has an almost necessarily affirmative quality in the precise sense that what is affirmed is “place” as the locus of history. As a consequence, the sense of history that is then in play is linked to contestability and thus to a form of recovery. Recovery is operative in the precise sense that the present is charged with the necessity to remember; moreover, that necessity has a defining role within the present. In the case of *Ikarus—märkischer Sand*, it pertained in the *now* in which the work was undertaken. The need to remember continues. Adorno's identification of a specific task in relation to the past—*Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit* (“working through the past”)—that pertains in the present still has force, and yet that force has to confront the problem of its own relation to thinking the end of the world.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, it might be conjectured that, were these two works by Kiefer juxtaposed, then what comes to the fore is the productive tension between *present remembrance*, which can incorporate “working through the past,” on the one hand, and, on the other, having to work with (and through) the end of the world, a working that cannot be separated from a form of affirmation.

*Sursum corda*, the work, spirals up. It occupies a single room. The clothes that are hung on the spiral staircase are ruined. [Figure 5] And yet, there are questions. What, here, is ruined? What does ruination mean? What remains and, in remaining, what present is there *now*? Unlike the ruins in Poussin's *Landscape with St. John on Patmos*, which allowed the present to be opened as a locus of negotiation, here the ruined clothing eschews any genetic possibility. The clothes are there. They inhabit the present, having become the sign of an end without transition. And, as a result,

sheltering is no longer an option. How, then, is this predicament without options to be understood? To act with options is to act within a structure of the already predicated. Acting in this way is to continue towards the catastrophe. Kiefer's work—the works that have already been identified—still acting's possibility. Or at least they still the possibility of taking a stand that points to a redemptive future. This is not to say, however, that the works are empty. They appear as the end at the end. These works of art clearly stage their affinity with the predicament of philosophy *now*. They call on philosophy, calling for a philosophy of the *now*. These artworks are engaged with what can be presented at the end of the world, namely, pure danger. To begin with a negative description, what has to be presented *now* is the impossibility of any form of future that has its possibility in the ending. (And note that what is at stake here is the possibility of a "form" that the future might take. This is precisely what is not given.) These works—*Sursum corda* and *Walhalla*—are constrained by that presentation. There is neither exhaustion nor the interplay of endings and beginnings. At the end, there is the end. As noted, art's presentation is what demands to be thought. If the demand pertains to an opening that cannot be understood as linked to any form of transition, then might not this be the point? Answering this question yields a partial conclusion.

Implicit in what emerges is what can be described as the problem of form. While the form of the future is given neither in Van Gogh's painting of the shoes, nor in the interplay of body, ruin, and landscape in Poussin's paintings, what both works provide is the possibility—possibility in the sense of furnishing the philosophical or conceptual means—with which to think the future. These possibilities have already been given. The future, therefore, becomes a quality of the work. Hence both works prefigure that in relation to which forms, albeit different forms, of futurity are to be thought. And yet, these works do not prefigure in any straightforward sense. This is the possibility that was alluded to before in terms of their identification with a temporal singularity. The singular was that which stood, at least at the outset, in opposition to *at-the-same-timeness*. Singularity was mooted as a possibility because what *now* has become difficult is the straightforward project of working through the past. The need for memory *now* brings with it a different set up, namely, working *with* the end of the world. What, however, does it mean to work *with* the end of the world? Part of the answer has already been formulated: to affirm the end of the world.

Affirmation here is neither celebration nor the form of resignation that becomes radical nihilism. Rather, affirmation delimits another philosophical task.

The task is linked to understanding in greater detail why, despite the temptation, these works by Kiefer do not announce a temporal singularity. There remains the question of the end. If the singular were just that, namely, the already discernible end point, then thinking the end is to think it in terms of discoverable and identifiable points in time, which would mean, in turn, that the end falls within the purview of calculation. Working *now* accepts the calculations that identify the interarticulation of climate change and an economic order that sustains injustice; however, what remains the locus of activity is what is then opened by that acceptance. Acceptance is the end of the world's affirmation. What is there at the end of the world is its acceptance, the acceptance of *working with* the end of the world. There is a configuration to be accepted; however, accepting it is to work with it. Kiefer's practice as an artist has been, to the extent that the preceding argument has any cogency, to work not just at the end but *with* the end. Work becomes a *working-with*. Furthermore, the inscription of a possible future that is already there in the artwork of Poussin, and a strategy of thinking that involves a preparation for another beginning which continues within and as the philosophical project of Heidegger, have lost their grip on the *now*. *Now*, the *now* exerts its hold in a radically different way.

If there is a conclusion, and the very language of conclusions and summation seems otiose at this precise point, then the concession of what amounts, almost, to the impossibility of thinking it seems an essential part of its nature. The end of the world is the end of its life. There is a philosophical limit. While philosophy may be unable to think that which refuses or is refused survival, what cannot be denied—in the end—is the presence of a call on thought and thus of *working-with*. What is opened by this call is the necessity to respond responsibly to the presence of pure danger. There is a form of insistence, and so the task at hand involves responding to it and thus of *working-with* it. There can only be a question at the end: What remains?

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The use of italics to express the *now* in its differentiation from a simple now is intended to identify a thinking of the present as that which generates the philosophical

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task. A task that occurs now has been delimited by the *now* and allows the *now* both to be a site of contestation and be subject to its own forms of transformation. The *now* delimits a task. Indeed, there is reciprocity between what can be described more generally as “time” and “task.” I have developed the reciprocity between “time” and “task” in “Time and Task: Benjamin and Heidegger Showing the Present,” reprinted in Benjamin, *Present Hope*, 25–53.

<sup>2</sup> I have discussed the concept of the “predicament” in the context of Hannah Arendt’s work and then more generally in Benjamin, “The Problem of Authority in Arendt and Aristotle” and “The Predicament of Life: Dennis Schmidt and the Ethical Subject.”

<sup>3</sup> IPCC, *Climate Change 2014*.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Schor, “Climate, Inequality and the Need for Reframing Climate Policy.”

<sup>5</sup> This aspect of Heidegger’s work will be decisive in the argumentation to come, which will involve a discussion of this formulation as it appears in his *Basic Questions of Philosophy*.

<sup>6</sup> All further reference to “The Origin of the Work of Art” (OWA) will be to the translation by Albert Hofstadter in Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 139–212.

<sup>7</sup> In terms of arguments to do with risk, see Bettis, Dietz, and Silver, “The Risk of Climate Ruin.” See also Pope Francis, “*Laudato Si’*,” in which there is also an attempt to note the interconnection between injustice and climate change.

<sup>8</sup> In the context of the *Phaedo*, Plato’s arguments contain their own inbuilt complexity. For an overall estimation of two threads of argumentation in the texts that pertain to death—one religious and other philosophical—see White, “Socrates, Philosophers and Death.”

<sup>9</sup> I have developed the concepts of *being-in-place* and in *being-in-common* as an original conditions in a number of recent works. See, e.g., Benjamin, *Place, Commonality and Judgment* and *Virtue in Being*.

<sup>10</sup> An entire discussion of the end of world could be focused on Lars van Trier’s film *Melancholia* (2011). The film has already attracted a significant secondary literature. See, in particular, Elsaesser, “Black Suns and a Bright Planet”; O’Brien, “Planetary Provocations”; Apter, “Planetary Dysphoria”; Honig, “Public Things.”

<sup>11</sup> There is an important concern with ruins within art history. That history cannot be neglected. Indeed, it would be essential to connect that work to the project on the ruin

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that is being undertaken here. For an important analysis of ruins within Renaissance painting, see Hui, “The Birth of Ruins in Quattrocento Adoration Paintings.” If Hui were right that the ruin is “metonymically the death of antiquity” and, thus, the use of the ruin in nativity paintings announced “the rebirth of antiquity” (p. 347), then a very different project is taking place in the presence of ruins in Poussin’s *Landscape with St. John on Patmos*.

<sup>12</sup> Michel Haar has identified at least four different senses of earth in Heidegger’s text. His study still remains the definitive work on this topic. See Haar, *The Song of the Earth*.

<sup>13</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 45, 125 (hereafter, GA 45)/*Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 109 (hereafter, BQP).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> GA 45, 124/BQP, 108.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> GA 45, 125/BQP, 108. Translation modified.

<sup>18</sup> The reference here is, of course, to the opening of Hölderlin’s poem “Patmos,” in Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke, Briefe und Dokumente*, vol. 10.

Nah ist  
Und schwer zu fassen der Gott  
Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst  
Das Rettende auch.

Heidegger takes up this poem in his “The Question Concerning Technology.” Charles Scott has drawn attention to the fact that *das Rettende*, in this context, needs to be understood as involving the way that things are returned to “their unuseful being.” See Scott, *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Ethics and Politics*, 76.

<sup>19</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 66, 167 (hereafter, GA 66)/*Mindfulness*, 145 (hereafter, M).

<sup>20</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5, 35 (hereafter, GA 5)/OWA, 174.

<sup>21</sup> GA 5, 51/OWA, 188. Tr. mod.

<sup>22</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 40, 171/*Introduction to Metaphysics*, 176.

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<sup>23</sup> GA 5, 59/OWA, 197.

<sup>24</sup> GA 5, 28/OWA, 168. Tr. mod.

<sup>25</sup> GA 5, 63/OWA, 200. Tr. mod.

<sup>26</sup> Mitchell, *The Fourfold*, 72.

<sup>27</sup> See, in this regard, Davis, “Returning the World to Nature.” Furthermore, Shane Mackinlay, in his paper “Heidegger’s Temple,” is also concerned with the interplay of truth as revealing and concealing. His position is formulated thus (p. 503): “The uncoveredness of truth is always in relation to a still-covered-over.”

<sup>28</sup> Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 15, 390/*Four Seminars*, 75.

<sup>29</sup> Heidegger, “Die Frage nach der Technik,” in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 32/“The Question Concerning Technology,” in *Basic Writings*, 333.

<sup>30</sup> GA 5, 45/OWA, 181. Tr. mod.

<sup>31</sup> Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.18.1; Orosius, *Historiae adversus paganos* 7.10.

<sup>32</sup> For a general account of the incorporation of Patmos into Apocalyptic writing, see Boxall, *Patmos in the Reception History of the Apocalypse*.

<sup>33</sup> While it cannot be pursued in detail here, this point is pitched against both a naturalization of perspective and its equation with the site of what might be described as additive complexity. While his argument is different perspective, it can still be suggested that Emmanuel Alloa is correct when he argues that perspective is a “principle of formation and deformation in one.” (p. 70) See Alloa, “Could Perspective Ever Be a Symbolic Form?”

<sup>34</sup> The connection between Poussin and the engagement of both theoretical and artistic time is not arbitrary. The question of time also plays a role in Erwin Panofsky’s engagement with Poussin. See Panofsky, “Et in Arcadia ego.” In addition, see Charles Dempsey’s discussion of Panofsky in “The Classical Perception of Nature in Poussin’s Early Works,” in particular, pp. 245–48. Clearly, what has been added here under the heading of *at-the-same-timeness* is the introduction of another quality of time as integral to the way the artwork works as the work of art.

<sup>35</sup> It is that complex setting that would check any claim that what “defines landscape painting for Poussin is that the ‘participants’ in the landscape are ‘acted on by nature’ ” as has been argued by David Carrier (see Carrier, “Nicolas Poussin’s ‘Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake,’ ” 35). Indeed, the argument here is that

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nature would be an irrelevancy in terms of its exerting an operative force on the St. John/ruin relation.

<sup>36</sup> Louis Marin also makes reference to the position of palingenetic concerns within this painting; Marin, *Sublime Poussin*, 149.

<sup>37</sup> For a more detailed art historical account of Poussin on landscape, see Carrier, *Poussin's Paints*, 145–74.

<sup>38</sup> GA 5, 40/OWA, 178.

<sup>39</sup> GA 5, 28/OWA, 168.

<sup>40</sup> See, in this regard, Dastur, “Heidegger’s Freiburg Version of the Origin of the Work of Art,” 138.

<sup>41</sup> GA 5, 33/OWA, 173. See Miguel de Beistegui on this topic:

As self-secluding, self-sheltering matter, the earth opens itself only to those for whom reality is composed of more than just presence, and space more than just actual physical space. The earth does not belong to us. We belong to it. As we try to appropriate it, it withdraws.

Beistegui, *The New Heidegger*, 149. See, in addition, Kockelmans, *Heidegger on Art and Art Works*, 150.

<sup>42</sup> GA 66, 84/M, 70.

<sup>43</sup> On the question of history in Kiefer, see Stoker, “Can Heaven Bear the Weight of History?” In addition, Matthew Biro has made an important case for the significance of Kiefer’s engagement with the Holocaust as an event calling on memory. The conclusion to his paper warrants careful consideration. See Biro, “Representation and Event.”

<sup>44</sup> For example, Wayne Stables argues that “Kiefer’s work demonstrates . . . that it remains impossible to think fragmentation without narrative end.” The conjecture here is that while that might have been true, the works under consideration operate in a fundamentally different way. To the extent that such a claim can be substantiated, then, these works by Kiefer are fundamental to any attempt to think an end without a beginning and thus to think the end of the world. See Stables, “Anselm Kiefer and the Sign of the Sublime,” 12.

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<sup>45</sup> I have taken up this aspect of Kiefer’s work in my “Present Remembrance: Anselm Kiefer’s *Iconoclastic Controversy*,” reprinted in Benjamin, *Art, Mimesis and the Avant-Garde*, 75–84.

<sup>46</sup> Theodor Adorno, “What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?”

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