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Wonder, Aesthetics, and Ethics: A Meditation on Technological Thinking, Psychical Distance, and the Moral Imagination

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Wonder, Aesthetics, and Ethics: A Meditation on Technological Thinking,

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by

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To my dad. To the joy of seeing more and more of one another in ourselves as time goes on.

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~ Introduction ~

In reflection on why this project came to be, I find that it is situated amidst my

nostalgia for the past - for what *once was* - and the equally uncomfortable yet exciting

point of being that I now feel myself moving closer to. Throughout my life, I have

learned many lessons. But the past four years specifically, spent in the landscape of

upstate New York, have brought about a peculiar and intense sort of growth and

enlightenment that I believe I have tried to better understand throughout this project as

a whole. I am growing. I am, at last, what the world considers to be an "adult". I plan my

days, I make my meals, I decide my bedtime, I determine both the smallest and largest

of decisions within my everyday life. With this, I have increasingly been faced with an

immense knowing of myself - and I have learned how the ways in which this precise

realization of myself is ever-changing as time so quickly passes. And *that* is confusing

for me.

It has been hard for me to grow up. As cliche as it sounds, I simultaneously love

and fear how genuinely and wholeheartedly I want to be a child, forever.

And *this* is confusing for me. One of the most notable lessons I have learned is

how illusory the idea of adulthood is. It took me reaching the very point to realize that it

might just be the most bizarre and consequential sham of all. The sureness and direction and overall control that I once thought came along with reaching this certain age somehow, exist and *do not* exist all at once. I find it difficult to discern between the ways in which I surely do feel "adult" - that is, in control of the way in which I navigate through my daily life, in touch with the direction I see myself moving in, understanding of the more fundamental, or perhaps, *practical*, aspects of the world around me - and the ways in which I so often feel that it is all an utter illusion, one that I too buy into simply because of the solace that it provides. Though age truly may be nothing but a number, the passing of time that is responsible for the progression of age seems to be moving faster and faster as of lately - and with this, it is becoming all the more palpable to me.

Much of my childhood was spent with the fairies. I spent years of my life writing letters to them, building miniature houses for them, looking for signs of their presence on the playground or in my room. And they wrote back to me, day after day after day. They left iridescent "dragon tears" near my favorite swing, fairy dust all throughout the houses I so carefully crafted, and only crumbs on the plates that I, just the night before, had left their fairy treats on. My (what then felt like, eternal) dedication to the fairies is my first real memory of wonder. Though now, it is clear to me that it is so much more than just a memory - it was a sustained *experience* of wonder; one that I excitedly and

gratefully navigated myself through for years. I relished in getting to know the fairies and was eager to share my whole, true, self with them. They let me into their world (one that was so different from the one that I had come to know) and I let them into mine. I wrote to them about troubles with friends at school, my excitement to have a baby sister, my deep-seated confusion about the whereabouts of and my relation to my father. I look back on this time and feel nostalgic for the profound sense of magic and beauty that came along with it. There was a refreshing sense of mystery - of *not* knowing the world in its entirety, of being open to and appreciative of the other realities (ones that were not my own, ones that I could not always so easily perceive) that existed in my everyday life back then.

I suppose what I am trying to make clear here is how close I keep this wonder to my heart. I know with certainty that it has not left me - I feel it in the way I carry myself, in the way I look at the world, and in my relationships to the people and things around me. But the pushes and pulls of the "real" world, of "adulthood", of obligations and productivity and goals, have led me to fear that the world, at some point, may rob me of this feeling. Could it be that a gap may form between the ways in which I now must think and plan and advance and provide as an older, aging being and the more magical, free, and open - much younger - self that I once was? Will this wonder soon become a

distant childhood memory? Luckily, having finished this project, I now realize that these external pressures that I have been so fearful of - pressures that, of course, have compelled me to change *internally* - have only inspired me to hold onto this wonder with an even tighter grasp. Perhaps what I have written is a testament to both the fears I have of becoming disenchanted by the world (of becoming out of touch with magic and mystery, of losing my sense of wonder) *and* the sureness I feel of not only its importance, but also, my ability to keep it alive and with me at all times. Perhaps the journey that these ideas have led me on act as the mental, emotional, logical, physical bridge between the past and the future that I needed to traverse to realize what my fear of growing up was born of, and why actually, I do *not* in fact need to be so scared at all. This was a way for me to make sense of myself - to make the *most* of myself. I hope you, as the reader, are familiar with this sense of wonder. And perhaps, you too have felt the demands of the world attempt to rob you of it. Hopefully what I have written here can relieve you of the fears you may feel in the way that it has for me. For my sake, for *our* sake, I hope what I have written here allows you to strive just as much as I do to keep your wonder alive, allowing it to flourish throughout and color your everyday life with the profound delight that both you and the world so rightfully deserve.

Though this project may be about wonder, it is necessary for me to make clear, in its beginning, that I by no means feel that I can *or* should provide a definition of it. For if I tried, which I dare not, I believe I'd be doing it an injustice. Instead, what I have intended to provide an account of is what comes *before* wonder, what comes *after it* - what the consequences of its loss and the great value of its presence are. It seems to me that it is exactly wonder's ineffable, ephemeral nature that makes it as special and curious of a part of our conscious experience as it is. While we may be able to relate to one another's sense and experience of wonder through some of the more evident experiences of it - the dazzling display of a meteor shower, the nearly intoxicating sound of the instrumental climax within a piece of music, or perhaps, the mesmeric sensation that comes along with looking deeply into a lover's irises - when it comes down to it, wonder comes in an infinite array of forms, making it sublimely impossible to know in its entirety. It is exactly this great variation in its manifestation that stands to be a fundamental part of my project. In my account of how we can (and why we should) reinvigorate our sense of wonder, I make clear that this is not so much about the content of our experience (for example, one's stumbling upon something super spectacular and therefore, feeling wonder). Instead, wonder as I have come to understand it is wholly reliant upon the *attitude* that we have towards the things (both

the spectacular and the mundane alike) that we come across in our everyday lives. I feel

strongly that even the most commonplace of objects and experiences can elicit some

sense of wonder - it is just a matter of us being receptive enough, in our everyday lives,

to their potential to do so.

For a moment, reflect back upon some moment of wonder that you have had in

your lifetime. It could be recent, distant, brought about by something undoubtedly

striking, or perhaps, surprisingly, it came of something quite small or ordinary.

Hopefully you can agree with me that such moments make us feel *really* good; they allow

for a momentary shift in one's usual perspective, they make you feel big and small all at

once, and most importantly, they seem to provide a temporary escape and relief from

ourselves - a recess from the self that we did not even know we needed or wanted.

I feel that in today's world especially, these moments are of utmost importance, and it is

my intention to figure out how to make both our sense and experience of wonder more

recurrent in our everyday lives. With this, I begin with an account of our loss of wonder,

then move onto the *poietic*, aesthetic means by which we can revive it, and lastly, make

clear the moral value that I feel we can attribute to such wonder.

I must admit that the writing in my first chapter begins on a rather bleak note.

Perhaps that only makes sense though, as my reasoning for this investigation of wonder

was born of the fears that I have of losing it as I grow older. With that, my writing

commences in account of Martin Heidegger's *The Question Concerning Technology*, a text

that, once I read for the first time, immediately spoke to the faults within our society

that I believe exist. His notion of Enframement, and humanity's technological thinking

in particular, reflect the ways in which modern-day society inflicts upon us a sort of

utilitarian perception and use of the world around us. This tendency to view facets of

the world as mere means to our own ends, what Heidegger calls "*challenging-forth*", is

something that I feel I have become increasingly exposed to as I grow older - it is here

that my concerns about my (and *our*) sense of wonder lie. Heidegger makes clear that

within this particular state of mind - within this drive to rule over the world, to leave

our mark on all that we come in contact with - a questioning of why it is that we are this

way, why it is that we think and feel and do the things we do, becomes of great

importance. Similar to Heidegger, I sense the danger that comes along with a mindless

acceptance of our technological thinking - for what is left unquestioned is then

effortlessly perpetuated. By the end of this chapter, I will have hopefully made clear how

reflective the relationship we have to the world around is of the relationship that we

have to ourselves. In our going about the world with such a fervent sense of control,

calculability, productivity, and disposability, we arrive at a strangely subtle yet pervasive

internalized sense of alienation and disenchantment - what I argue reflects some loss of our sense of wonder.

But despite this, I (as was Heidegger) am hopeful. In coming to better know how exactly it is that we go about our place in this world, how it is that we choose to make our mark, or perhaps, on the contrary, recognize and savor what is left *unmarked* by us, we then can decide for ourselves what sort of correspondence to the world is most right. With this, Heidegger's proposed solution to the problem of our technological thinking becomes of great importance to my writing as a whole. *Poiesis* - a recognition and appreciation of the world that is inspired by a "letting-be" of what is - stands to challenge the very ways in which we so often come to see, understand, and go about the world through ourselves; through how *we* can benefit from or take control over a given object, process, or experience. It is within my second chapter that I provide an evolved conception of *poiesis* as a sort of psychological practice in which one takes an aesthetic perspective on the world. Much of my writing in this chapter aims to dissect the often mechanical and easily overlooked manner in which we carry through our everyday lives. How is it that we exercise our will upon the world in even just the ways that we *see* it and *think* of it? What do the things that we recognize, change, assert our power over, or perhaps, not recognize at all, say about who we are as people? I argue that *poiesis*, a

particularly non-exploitative, objective, and selfless perception and appreciation of the

world, in which one opens themselves up to both the most ordinary *and* remarkable of

wonders that exist within the fine lines of everyday life is the way in which our sense of

wonder can be reinvigorated. To get to the root of the deep ties that exist between our

perception of the world and who we are as people, I introduce the aesthetic concepts of

psychical distance and *disinterestedness*, formulated many years ago by Edward Bullough

and Jerome Stolnitz. I ultimately posit that my conception of *poiesis* is a near perfect

reflection of what it looks like to facilitate these two aesthetic practices, in which the

potent awareness that we have of ourselves within a given experience, and in turn, our

tendency to encounter that experience *through* our own subjectivities (e.g., particular

opinions, desires, fears, etc.) is handed entirely over to a complete and objective

awareness of the elements of the experience at hand. This momentary detachment from

the self, where the objective qualities of what lies outside of us - qualities entirely

independent of the self - are recognized and relished within, inspires in us a shift away

from our usual self-oriented perspective of the world, ultimately allowing for a

recognition of the wondrous realities that are far too often left unnoticed otherwise.

    With both the reasoning behind our loss of wonder and the *poietic* approach to

life that can allow for its revival made clear, my final chapter is based upon my notion

that such wonder has immense moral implications - it quite literally makes us better

people. I argue that this more objective, aesthetic perception and appreciation of the

world, contrary to our technological thinking, lends to a growth in our moral

imaginations - that is, our ability to creatively conceive of moral standpoints,

possibilities, explanations, and relations that extend outside of our usual, *particular*,

point of view. Using Michael McGhee's *Moral Sentiments, Social Exclusion, Aesthetic*

Education as the foundation of my exploration of the ties between wonder and morality,

I adopt two dimensions of his argument that stand to be crucial to my own: 1) that a

universalization of our moral sentiments (what I argue, is the heart of the moral

imagination) involves a balance between reason, emotion, and our sensuous experience

and 2) that identification of the sources of morality within everyday experience is of

great importance. I begin in reflection of the importance of our *aesthetic* perception - in

particular, its potential to direct our attention away from the self. Beyond this shift in

our attention and the experience of wonder that comes along with it, what I hope to get

at is the impact that such a process can have on our sense of morality as a whole.

Ultimately, I argue that it is this *poietic* perception of and relation to the world - the

disinterested shift away from subjectivity - that necessarily then informs and inspires an

opening up of our *moral* perception of the world as well. Despite our hesitation to use

the attitudes, attention, and relations that we use to navigate through our daily lives as a genuine, accurate, reflection of who we are as people, perhaps what is truly at the heart of this final chapter is my strong feeling that there is in fact a strong tie between how we are in our everyday lives (what catches our eye, what we appreciate, what we allow to amaze us for a moment or two, what we reflect upon) and what we then deem worthy of contemplation, recognition, and/or acceptance within a morally relevant situation. Seeing as emotion often leads our moral compass to stay closely tied to our own subjectivities - what McGhee calls "the bias to the near", I argue that it is the conscious, reasoned, *disinterested* shift away from oneself that then allows for the moral sentiment's move from the particular (that is, a subjective self-orientation) to the universal (an objective, selfless orientation and understanding).

DEAR
FAIRIES
ARE YOU
COMING TO
THE PARK TO
PLAY WITH
SOME DAY
THINGS
I LOVE YOU
CHILE N

~ Chapter 1 ~

Technological Thinking and the Modern Lapse in Wonder

Although my exploration of our sense of wonder in everyday life is very much

rooted in the contemporary world, my aim in this first chapter is to locate exactly how

and why we have lost sight of this wonder. In doing so, it is necessary to go back in time

to some degree, which will subsequently allow for a rigorous reexamination of many of

our present-day conceptions. These conceptions, regarding nature, production, control,

efficiency, technology, and of course - most importantly - what it means to be human,

all make up the heart of an essay written just over sixty years ago by Martin Heidegger,

The Question Concerning Technology. Heidegger's essay is inspired by a discomfort he

holds regarding humanity's understanding and use of technology - what I will refer to

quite generally as our "technological thinking". For it this particularly pervasive

mentality - one that shapes the relationship we have with the world around us - that I

ultimately argue reflects our losing sight of our sense of wonder in everyday life.

Considering the time that has passed since this essay was written, the situation that

Heidegger begins by pointing to has undoubtedly only increased in relevance.

Applicable now more than ever, Heidegger began by stating that "Everywhere we

remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But

we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something

neutral...this [neutrality] makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology" (*QCT*, 4).

With this, the importance - and now, what I call for as *necessity* - of reexamining our

increasingly close tie to technology (and most importantly, the *thinking* that underlies it)

is made clear. Though much of this chapter is spent unpacking Heidegger's notions of

humanity's "challenging-forth", the "standing-reserve", and our technological thinking,

my ultimate intention is to arrive at a contemporary re-articulation of these terms that

portrays the misunderstood and uncontrolled dynamic between us and the world around

us. Heidegger begins his essay by putting forth his method of questioning; "in what

follows, we shall be *questioning*...questioning builds a way. The way is a way of thinking.

We shall be questioning concerning *technology*..." (*QCT*, 3). Both Heidegger and myself

are carrying out very similar tasks, it seems, both fueled by an intense questioning of a

given issue (his, technology; mine, wonder). Interestingly enough, the path of

questioning that Heidegger goes down - and the conclusions that he eventually arrives

at - stand as the foundation, or starting point, for the path of questioning that I then

embark on. In his questioning of the essence of technology (or technological thinking)

and the relationship that humanity has with it, Heidegger reaches his conviction of

humanity's state of Enframement. It is this very state of Enframement - this state in

which technological thinking comes to *dominate* human consciousness and subsequently shape our relation to the world outside of us - that I then argue reflects some deprivation of our experience of wonder in daily life.

Part I: Challenging-Forth and the Standing Reserve

Seeing as the core of my argument about our absence of wonder rests on Heidegger's notion of technological thinking, I will begin by unpacking a few terms that are central to an understanding of it. The challenging-forth that Heidegger speaks of can be understood as a sort of mentality or method of revealing that has become increasingly prevalent in the contemporary world. "The revealing that rules throughout modern technology [and, for the sake of my argument, *contemporary society*] has the character of setting-upon, in the sense of a challenging-forth. That challenging happens in that the energy concealed in nature is unlocked, what is unlocked is transformed, what is transformed is stored up, what is stored up is, in turn, distributed, and what is distributed is switched about ever anew" (Heidegger, *QCT*, 16). Here, Heidegger is depicting the ultra-directed, utilitarian mentality that influences our regard for and use of the natural world - that is, how exactly we reveal facets of the world around is reflective of how we think of it. In simpler terms, one might say that such a challenging-

forth is the ultimate portrayal of the way in which we often times only perceive,

understand, and ultimately use the the world an extension of ourselves - with this, much

of world around us comes to be considered as a mere means to a specific end. With our

viewing of the world in such a way comes a sense of interchangeability and disposability

- we overlook the uniqueness and true essence of things in exchange for a more

straightforward, human-centered, directly beneficial understanding and use of them.

With this in mind, one must question *where* such a regard for the world came from -

here, I will build upon David Waddington's idea that the root of this challenging-forth

lies in humanity's great desire for efficiency (*A Field Guide to Understanding Heidegger,*

569). While this penchant, even *need*, for efficiency is not intrinsically good nor bad

(perhaps it is safe to say that it is really only natural), we must further dissect what such

a mindset is made up of. Efficiency might be characterized by a sort of maximum

effectiveness with a minimum effort and/or expense - it requires a sense of calculability,

controllability, rigorous productivity, and therefore, some degree of disposability.

Inherent in such a process is a reduction - a narrowing in on what exactly is needed

and/or wanted out of a given thing, and the way in which we can *most efficiently* attain it.

     It may come as no surprise that such a mentality, rooted deeply in rigorous,

widespread efficiency does not naturally coincide with experiences of wonder. Such

efficiency lends to a "challenging" or demanding of the most controllable, beneficial use

of a given thing - it quite literally reduces the potentials of the natural world to only the

ones which we can have the most control over and benefit from. In Michael

Zimmerman's *Beyond Humanism: Heidegger's Understanding of Technology*, he quite

beautifully states that, "To be capable of transforming a forest into packaging for

cheeseburgers, man must see the forest not as a display of the miracle of life, but as raw

material, pure and simple" (79). The forest is no longer understood, viewed, and

appreciated as a place of incredible, natural growth and life - we choose destruction,

productivity, and efficiency over admiration and discovery. In looking at the world

around us through the sorely black-and-white lens of efficiency, we have begun to

neglect all aspects of the natural world that reside outside of our immediate control -

 potentials of the natural world that may not be so obviously or materialistically

beneficial to us, features of the natural world that I argue are actually the most

extraordinary, the *most* wondrous. With this, we have reduced the world around us into

merely controllable objects of use - simple resources - that of which Heidegger names

the "standing-reserve".

　　　While our "challenging-forth" is best understood as a mindset that inspires the

particular way in which we use the world around us, the "standing-reserve" can be seen

as the product of such a process. Heidegger states, "When [humanity] investigating, observing, ensnares nature as an area of his own conceiving…" (*QCT*,17), "everywhere, everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for further ordering" (*QCT*, 19). This notion of the "standing-reserve" sheds light on the way in which we view the natural world as mere stuff, further understand this stuff as inventory, use this inventory as a specific means to a specific ends, all of it enduringly on standby to be used in whatever way we wish. Referencing back to Michael Zimmerman's example, a forest is turned into "standing-reserve" as soon as our conception (and therefore, use) of it is reduced to something as inglorious and synthetic as "packaging for cheeseburgers". When something (like a forest) gains the status of "standing-reserve", it marks the loss of our ability to perceive its intrinsic nature and identity - our ability to come to it, and feel wonder. The incredibility of its existence is overlooked, its beauty is overlooked, its purpose beyond just human use is overlooked - and in turn, only its most efficient, obvious, calculable, controllable use is recognized and utilized. While some may argue that humanity's esteem for the world in which they inhabit is not revealed through their use of it, I beg to differ. It seems only right that our use of the world around us - the way in which we understand it and go about it on a daily basis - is perhaps the *truest* reflection of the way we feel about it - for

both our use and understanding of a given thing (including ourselves) is to me, two

mirrors, reflecting right back at one another. With such an understanding and use of the

world in place (our *challenging-forth* into the *standing reserve*), we have risked being

unable to regard and utilize it all in any other way than just this one. Here, we forfeit

our sense of wonder.

Part II: Humanity as Standing-Reserve within Technological Thinking

  At this point, the two central elements of technological thinking (our

challenging-forth and the standing-reserve) have been made clear. Therefore, we now

must delve into *why* exactly we have come to think and act in such ways. Heidegger's

answer to this question points to our state of Enframement - what he believes to be a

phenomenon of sorts - one that has happened "neither exclusively in man, nor

decisively through man" (*QCT*, 18). It is not our own doing, per se, but instead, a

condition that we are trapped within and ordered by. In his speaking to how exactly this

state of Enframement came to be, Heidegger's answers are not actually all that different

than my own. Considering Heidegger began his questioning of technology in 1954, he

points to physics (but most importantly, the type of *thinking* that lies as the foundation

for it) as the predecessor of our technological thinking. "[Humanity's] ordering attitude

and behavior display themselves first in the rise of modern physics as an exact science. Modern science's way of representing pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces" (*QCT*, 21). Heidegger argues that it is the manageability, calculability, and utility at the heart of scientific thinking that "is the herald of Enframing…" (*QCT*, 22) - it is this very specific way of thinking (a way that has increasing importance in contemporary society) that inspires us to view and treat the world in the ways that we do. While he surely recognizes the consequences of this scientific rationality taking hold within us, I feel that in my current analysis of our technological thinking, more than just the "modern physics" that Heidegger points to must be considered.

This is especially true in meditation on Heidegger's statement that "Only to the extent that man for his part is already challenged to exploit the energies of nature can this ordering revealing happen. If man is challenged, ordered, to do this, then does not man himself belong even more originally than nature within the standing-reserve?" (*QCT*, 18). While, again, I very much agree with Heidegger that scientific rationality plays a large part in our technological thinking, for humanity to be at the heart of the standing-reserve, compelled by technological thinking to carry out in their relation to the world in such ways, I argue that there *must* be more to it. With this, I now seek to fill

in these gaps, beginning with my own argument on the origins of technological

thinking and later arriving at how humans function as a central part of the standing-

reserve. In my attempt to answer where technological thinking (or perhaps more

specifically, the true root of it all - our sense of *challenging-forth*) comes from (and

subsequently, what our loss of wonder was born of), I argue that it is helpful to consider

it as an emergent phenomenon of sorts. Beyond Heidegger's proposal of modern physics

(or the scientific rationality that underlies it) as the single cause of technological

thinking, I call for a consideration of a few other systems - all in reaction with one

another - that have come to produce the dominance that technological thinking has

over us. These increasingly complex systems include capitalism, religion, large-scale

industry, technology, and of course, scientific rationality; it is these systems, in

operation with one another, inspiring one another, growing alongside one another, that

I argue, are responsible for the mentality that makes up our technological thinking.

Though I think that such widely disputed systems are often times too quickly thrown

around as both the problems *and* the solutions of contemporary society, I believe that

perhaps it is this way because (as Heidegger argues about technology), we do not *really*

examine the deeply contagious thinking that is at the heart of them.

"God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply it, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the Earth."
- *Genesis 1:28*

With this in mind, I feel that it is best to step away from Heidegger for just a moment, and instead, consider two intellectuals, Karl Marx and Max Weber, who both came to similar (and conveniently, well-known) conclusions about the state of humanity that undoubtedly point to 1) humanity not only perpetuating the issue at hand, but also (unconsciously) placing themselves at the core of it (e.g., humans not only making everything around them into standing-reserve, *but also* turning themselves into standing-reserve) and 2) what I interpret as, the subsequent loss of wonder that comes along with this. Beginning with Marx's theory of alienation, in his *Estranged Labor* (written in 1844), he too began with a questioning… "For what is life except activity?" (6). To be human is to pursue action of some kind on a daily basis, and similar to Heidegger, Marx esteemed the human capacity for creative productivity. But quite similar to the sort of dissociation that comes of challenging-forth the world into standing-reserve, alienation from our work, our products, and most importantly, *ourselves* and *each other*, lends to far less meaning found in our day to day life. Everything, including ourselves, is reduced to a mere "practical" *thing* - a *thing* used to get yet another thing done.

Much of Marx's writing was rooted in his feeling that the social structures that were beginning to pervade the workforce during his time lended to the work itself alienating humans from their very own human identity - an identity that is very much about one's work and production (or as Heidegger would put it, *revealing*) amounting to meaningful activity, and in turn, a meaningful life. In his examination of alienation, he made clear how both the divisions of labor *and* private ownership led to a tragic divergence between the workers, their products, and the meaning they found in their working activity. Spending such time doing work that we are so vastly and personally estranged from, Marx argued we begin to cling desperately to this work - this work that we have been told (and subsequently, lead ourselves to believe) proves our worth and dedication - this work that allows us to look out into the world and see only the products of our very own creation. But little do we seem to know that "the more the workers appropriate the exterior world of sensuous nature by [their] labour, the more [they] doubly deprive [themselves] of [not only] the means of subsistence" but also, [their] human essence (Marx, 5;7). Here, Marx seems to have possibly rooted an idea that inspired Heidegger's inquiry years and years later - that is, that the social structures of a given time inspire all aspects of the work and general activity we carry out. And most importantly, the fact that much of this work and activity functions to seize the world as

our very own, straying us far away from ever being able to recognize and appreciate the true essence of the world around us - that is, both the small and large wonders, beyond ourselves, that exist, often overlooked, in our everyday lives. Both Marx and Heidegger make clear that the very work and activity that we carry out, day in and day out, is actually not inherently wrong. Instead, it is the external social structures - and more specifically, the dominant, internalized *mentalities* that come *of* these structures - that end up shaping the way in which we go about the world that stands to be the problem.

Max Weber's theory of disenchantment, a theory that he spent time writing about right after Marx (between the late 1800's and early 1900's), seems to point to the very same problem within modernity that both Marx and Heidegger (and now, myself) feel troubled by. In Richard Jenkins' *Disenchantment, Enchantment, and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium*, he defines Weberian disenchantment as "the historical process by which the natural world and all areas of human experience become experienced and understood as less mysterious; defined, at least in principle, as knowable, predictable, and manipulable by humans; conquered by and incorporated into the interpretive schema of science and rational government. In a disenchanted world everything becomes understandable and tameable...Increasingly the world becomes more human-centred and the universe more impersonal" (12). Weber's theory points to the ways in

which we have cast aside all mystery, magic, meaning, and of course, *wonder*, for what

we believe is a complete, holistic, knowledge of the world and how it works - one that

we are in control of. This, he named, rationalization. Since Weber, many years ago,

proposed this theory of disenchantment, I argue that this sense of rationalization has

only increased. A near perfect paradigm of rationalization in the contemporary society

would be fast-food restaurants, built upon utmost efficiency and profit (assembly line-

esque production, replacement of humans with machines that can do certain jobs more

quickly and consistently, uniforms, drive-through window option to maximize speed

and profit). Other examples might be the ways in which we shift and/or replace given

traditions or values in a society unlike our own with more "rational" or "productive"

methods in the name of benefitting and/or helping them, our very own use of steroids,

plastic surgery, and study drugs, the importance we place upon standardized tests, high

scores, and textbook knowledge, and our prolonged use of fossil fuels. Our jobs, our

education, our outreach, our everyday activity, our bodies, our minds - *everything* is

permeated by rationalization. And in taking a closer look at it, it becomes clear that at

the heart of it all is a morbid and narcissistic tie to *ourselves*. This deep-seated penchant

we have for finding ways in which *we* become more in control and *we* become "better"

leads us to a point in which the world is nothing but a mirror of our own subjectivities. I

argue that it is this, this omnipresent rationalization and disenchantment, that allows no space nor time for this certain sense and experience of wonder in our everyday lives.

Although capitalist modes of production, various forms of rationalization, and technological thinking are all obviously responsible for various kinds of social, scientific, intellectual, political, and economic advances, what Marx, Weber, Heidegger, and now myself, all have pointed out are the (much more difficult to recognize) ways in which these things have actually trapped us within ourselves. Marx points to the alienation that comes of capitalist modes of production, Weber sheds light on the disenchantment that is born of widespread rationalization, and Heidegger portrays the technological thinking that ultimately comes of challenging-forth. Though I agree wholeheartedly with the conclusions that these great thinkers came to, I wish to go beyond these supposed states that we are trapped within, for pointing them out does not have seemed to cease our perpetuation of them. With this, I question what these states (alienation, disenchantment, and Enframement) have *robbed us of*, and to this I answer… wonder.

In further deconstruction of Heidegger's argument (though it can also be applied to Marx's alienation and Weber's disenchantment), David Waddington claims that such a wide-spread, somewhat "naturally-occurring" mentality like technological thinking

can be considered a part of what he calls the dominant consciousness of society.

"Simply by virtue of being in society, human beings are *always already* lost in this [dominant consciousness]...no one is to blame; it is simply an inevitable element of the structure of human existence" (576). This pre-conceived state that we are born into at this point, marked by a sense of knowing, predicting, manipulating, and using, has turned into a mainstream ideology of sorts, one that provides direction, comfort, and control over how and why we spend our time in the ways that we do. Inspired by Tina Chanter's writing on Marx's alienation, I argue that technological thinking is not only a dominant consciousness, but a *false* dominant consciousness (that is, a way of thinking that justifies a certain way of acting/being, but in turn, prevents one from being in touch with how and why they *truly* are this way). I borrow this sociological term in hopes of better explaining how exactly we as humans not only perpetuate going about the world as standing-reserve, but alas, treats *ourselves* as such. Considering the prevalence of false consciousnesses (such as technological thinking), it may come as a surprise that they are so often overlooked; but it is actually for this reason exactly - their pervasiveness - that they are so difficult to recognize, and ultimately, see past. For it is nearly impossible to question something that has come to be all that we really know. In the *Encyclopedia of Social Psychology*, a false consciousness is defined as an ideology that inadvertently

"functions to both obscure *and* justify oppression and dominance...through institutional control over religion, education, culture, the media, and political and economic institutions..." (Baumeister, 342). The importance of the term "false" is made clear in Baumeister's statement that such a consciousness "reflects biased interests [of a higher power] rather than one's own interests" (*ESP*, 342). Throughout Chanter's *The Problematic Normative Assumptions of Heidegger's Ontology,* she spends some time exploring the relation between capitalism and false consciousness - a comparison that I find useful in my examination of humanity's standing at the heart of their very own technological thinking. She states, "The genius of capitalism rests in its ability to elicit the support of the worker, so that the worker participates in ensuring the continuation of his or her own oppression, by reproducing the conditions of oppression that reduce him to a mere thing. The worker's false consciousness facilitates his or her own collusion with the aims of capitalism" (84). Here, Chanter points to the "genius" of states, systems, and ways of thinking such as capitalism and technological thinking; it is the false consciousness that is the foundation of them - a consciousness that we begin to adopt as our very own - that puts us at the forefront of the perpetuation of these systems. With this, hopefully I have made clear how little separation there is between us and these economic, political, social, and psychological states and systems - it is almost

as if we have become hijacked by the principles and goals of the systems themselves, subsequently designating us as the conductors of their continuation.

While at this point I believe I have made the ways in which we preserve our technological thinking clear (by means of challenging-forth the external world into standing-reserve), what I now feel is most important is the way in which we challenge-forth *ourselves* into standing-reserve - for it is this that would truly put us at the heart of our technological thinking. In reference to the way in which false consciousnesses function, Chanter makes clear how it is higher systems and/or powers with biased interests (e.g., rationalization, capitalism, technological thinking, etc.) that "determines the worker's thought patterns, behaviors, gestures, self-image, and so on. The false consciousness of capitalist ideology infects the worker, [and] the worker succumbs to false consciousness because he or she is captivated by the system that he or she, as a functioning member of the working class, continues to reproduce" (85). Let us now think about this in terms of our technological thinking; it is exactly these thoughts, behaviors, impressions of ourselves, of others, and of the (natural) world that are shaped by our challenging-forth. Similarly to Chanter, Heidegger also sheds light on the way in which we seem to be "captivated by" (and therefore, responsible for the preservation of) technological thinking. "Meanwhile man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts

himself to the posture of lord of the earth. In this way the impression comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself. In truth, however, precisely nowhere does man today any longer encounter himself, i.e., his essence" (*QCT*, Heidegger, 27). It is this invigorating illusion of dominance that we are overcome by, that just as Chanter pointed out, not only perpetuates, but also (I would argue) *strengthens* the false consciousness of technological thinking. For it leads to our mistaken belief that in claiming more of the world as our own, by producing more of this and that, by looking *this* way and buying *these* things, or ultimately, by creating things (intelligences, perhaps) that far surpass our own abilities, maybe, - *just maybe* - we can get back what we have lost. Just as I argued previously in my mention of Weberian disenchantment, we endlessly attempt to fill this misunderstood hole in our hearts with a sort of God-complex that we hold onto for dear life. But it is within this illusion of power, control, and knowing that we end up losing ourselves even more. It is our own disenchantment with ourselves that is the pivotal aftermath of our unrecognized, unexamined false consciousness that then inspires the way in which we live our everyday lives.

"This future man, whom the scientists tell us they will produce in no more than a hundred years, seems to be possessed by a rebellion against human existence as it has been given, a free gift from nowhere (secularly speaking), which he wishes to exchange, as it were, for something he has made himself… The question is only whether we wish to use our new scientific and technical knowledge in this direction, and this question cannot be decided by scientific means; it is a political question of the first order and therefore can hardly be left to the decision of professional scientists or professional politicians."

-Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*

Part III: Technological Thinking and Modern Technology

With a thorough understanding of challenging-forth, the standing reserve, and

technological thinking in place, it hopefully is clear that actually nothing about

Heidegger's argument is intrinsically tied to technology. While this is of great

importance for my own argument - seeing as I insist that our technological thinking has

imbued aspects of our lives far beyond technology (and ultimately is to blame for our

loss of wonder) - it is necessary to now look closely at the importance behind

Heidegger's connection of these concepts to modern technology. In reference back to

my earlier argument that challenging-forth is rooted in our hunger for efficiency, I now

maintain that while this desire for efficiency has most certainly always existed (we

wouldn't be here today without it), it is the rise of modern technology that has allowed

us to attain an incredibly, perhaps unexpectedly, high degree of efficiency - one that has

allowed us to feel in utter-control of it all - one that has led to a lapse in appreciation for the world as it is *without* our mark being made on it.

   Although the dominance of our technological thinking came to be far before modern technology, I believe that Heidegger asserts the strong connection between them as so significant because they allow one another to flourish in ways that they otherwise could not. Before I delve into the strong ties between technological thinking and modern technology, I feel it is important to re-establish my view that neither technological thinking *nor* modern technology are necessarily all bad or inherently harmful - for the world that we now live in demands such efficiency in many ways...but seeing as the heart of Heidegger's argument calls for a re-thinking of why *and* how we think and act in such ways - and what our relationship to the objects of this cruel affection is built upon - the necessity of our questioning remains strong. As stated by Tim Rayner in his writing *Heidegger in Silicon Valley*, Heidegger "simply indicates that we need to be mindful of the way that we engage with the world, assuming that we want to avoid treating people, living beings, and other natural phenomena as mere resources. This is precisely what [he] finds objectionable about Enframing: it diminishes the ontological standing of things". Here, Rayner makes clear how (as I have previously stated) our utilitarian understanding and use of a given thing functions to rob us of our

potential to perceive, use, and appreciate its essence and potential *beyond* just human use and benefit.

I will begin at the very start of the ever-growing relationship between modern technology and technological thinking; this stands to be the way in which modern technology has turned the natural world into a mere means to an end. In Heidegger's essay, he points to modern technology such as hydroelectric power plants - a sort of technology transferred onto nature (similar to fracking or even our production of weapons of mass destruction). Such technology clearly demonstrates not only our eagerness for - but also the illusion that we have attained - a sort of mastery over the natural world. Beyond just this, Heidegger notes how the hydroelectric power plant ultimately robs the river of its true essence; with such a technology in place, "even the Rhine (river) itself appears as something at our command. The river is dammed up into the power plant. What the river is now, namely, a water power supplier, derives from out of the essence of the power station" (Heidegger, 16). Instead of being a location of leisure, a place to explore and admire, a method of travel, a means of migration for fish, a place where amphibians, insects, and crustaceans eat, live, and reproduce (note: none of these "uses" attempt to regulate or control the river in any way, and subsequently, they all may be liable to facilitate a sense of wonder), in time, the Rhine becomes

nothing other than a power source for us. Though it may seem like quite a bold statement for Heidegger to make, I believe its truth is made clear in modern technology's move beyond just nature - a move that marks how modern technology turns into a means to an end *in and of itself.*

Let us now look at how our more recent technological advancements have acted to perpetuate our technological thinking - how technology *itself* (not only what it is used upon) is now intended to be a means to an end. One of the most prevalent technologies of this day and age very well may be the iPhone. Sure...it is a phone - we *need* phones to communicate! We use phones to take pictures, to store thoughts and grocery lists, to map us from point A to point B, to read our daily horoscopes. While this all may seem wondrous to some degree, what is at the heart of these actions is due for further examination. The majority of the time spent on our phones is in use of various apps - these include Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Tinder, etc. According to Tristan Harris, a former Google Design Ethicist, each and every single one of these apps is a part of the "arms race for attention". What he means by this is that their true function is in their competition with one another to see which one can get the most "screen time" - in other words, their goal is to make sure the iPhone user spends as much time as possible on *their* app to generate money. Here we see how not only the most common form of

modern technology in this day and age - but also, most importantly, its *users* (humanity!!!) - are a disguised means to the unfortunately unsurprising end-goal of money. While there is obvious manipulation of people involved in this process, contemplation on future technological "advancements" (transhumanism, for example) only points to an escalation in humans (not just technology) becoming the main means to an end in our challenging-forth.

This evolution from modern technology turning the natural world into a means to an end, to modern technology functioning as a means to an end in and of itself, to, lastly, modern technology turning *humans* into a mere means to an end shows a clearly intensifying issue at hand. But what I argue to be the most problematic of it all is our internalization of this "mere means to an end" mentality - our technological thinking. Far beyond the realm of modern technology, I argue that this rigorously efficient, all-knowing, in control mind-set has permeated aspects of our lives that we are hardly aware of, so much so that *we* have begun to challenge-forth *ourselves*. The ways in which we do this to ourselves can be seen in the ultra-rationalized jobs we work, our drive for maximized profit at minimum expense, the stark way in which we control and calculate every aspect of our lives (from our bodies to our daily schedules), and the increased importance of textbook knowledge and test scores. In thinking - in *being* - such a way,

we act as predictably and productively as society wants us to. We pride ourselves on the money we make, what we choose to buy with it, how we look, our unsurpassable efficiency, our great knowledge of the world! Amidst such "*advances*", we neglect what we have left behind. That, I argue, is our very own essence (as I elaborate upon in the next section); our penchant for revealing in a very different way - our sense of and drive towards pure wonder.

Part IV: The Essence of Humanity & *Poiesis* as the Saving Power

Throughout Heidegger's essay, he maintains that as humans, our essence is to reveal. "Always the destining of revealing holds complete sway over man. All revealing comes out of the open, goes into the open, and brings into the open..." (Heidegger, 25). One must wonder though - what is this revealing of exactly? I would argue that the majority of our activity as humans is revealing of either the world, ourselves, each other...or all of these things at the very same time. It is through our language, our meaning-making, our connecting (ideas, patterns, people), our using, understanding, and creating that we reveal the world, ourselves, and each other simultaneously. Notably, the degree to which we carry this out (and perhaps most importantly, the degree to which we *need* to carry this out) is totally unique to humanity, and quite

obviously has the potential to be harmonious with the world around us. It is at this point that Heidegger's distinction between the two "types" of revealing becomes of utmost importance. While one is driven by technological thinking (our challenging-forth), the other is *poiesis.*

While we have maintained our essence of revealing, Heidegger suggests that the *kind* of revealing that we are carrying out is unsound, irresponsible, and at the very worst, completely unconscious. Our unawareness of the way we relate to, use, and *reveal* ourselves and the world around us leads to our blind acceptance of it - and it is our blind, unquestioning acceptance that leads to perpetuation, and our perpetuation that leads to a norm. Though much of what Heidegger and I are saying sounds quite defeatist, towards the end of his essay he does point towards a glimmer of hope - that hope, which Heidegger proposes as the root of our resolution, is *awareness.* "Human activity can never directly counter this danger. Human achievement alone can never banish it. But human reflection can ponder the fact that all saving power must be of a higher essence than what is endangered, though at the same time, kindred to it" (Heidegger, 33). As Heidegger makes clear, if we truly want to separate ourselves from our technological thinking, we *cannot* begin with sheer action - for all "activity" and "achievements" of ours (at this point) are charged by our challenging-forth. As

Heidegger states, "Only what is granted endures…" (*QCT*, Heidegger, 31); in our

obliviousness to our technological thinking, we permit and perpetuate it. Therefore, we

must *reflect* and *ponder* - we must question, recognize, and confront our Enframement -

how it drives us, inspires us, how it colors our world completely. It is only through this

process - through our awareness - that we can gain any distance from this mentality -

this false consciousness - that has seemingly become second nature to us. Once

distanced, I argue that we will have the chance to re-examine and reorient our

relationship to both the world and ourselves. We will have the chance to ask ourselves

how, as revealers, we want to conceive of and enact our place in this world. Our regard

for and use of nature, technology, education, work - all the ways in which we choose to

spend our time, day in and day out - will have the chance to be charged with wonder in a

way that we left behind long ago.

"Where this ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing. Above all, Enframing
conceals that revealing which, in the sense of poiesis, lets what presences come forth into appearance.
Thus the challenging, Enframing, conceals a former way of revealing."
-(QCT, Heidegger, 27)

In conclusion of my investigation of humanity's loss of wonder through a

meditation on Martin Heidegger's *The Question Concerning Technology*, I will begin in

referencing back to Heidegger's distinction between the two types of revealing:

challenging-forth and *poiesis*. Though at this point, much of our revealing lies within our challenging-forth, as Heidegger stated, "the saving power must be of a higher essence than what is endangered, though at the same time kindred to it…" (*QCT,* 33). Kindred, yet of a much higher essence, to our challenging-forth lies the second kind of revealing - *poiesis*. I argue that it is *poiesis*, or what Heidegger calls "bringing-forth" (in contrast to our challenging-forth), that is the type of revealing - the type of relation *to* the world - that we must become more in touch with. It is this sort of revealing - this *bringing-forth* - that lends itself to be the antithesis of the mentality that inspires all aspects and relations and activities of our being as we now know it… it is here that, I argue, we can renew our sense of wonder.

In Heidegger's own words, "It is of utmost importance that we think bringing-forth in its full scope…not only handcraft manufacture, not only artistic and poetical bringing into appearance and concrete imagery…*physis* also, the arising of something from out of itself…" (10). Here, Heidegger makes clear the different varieties of *poiesis*. Though it surely can be revealing in the sense of some concrete activity (where we manipulate or create a given thing), it also, perhaps most importantly for our sense of wonder, is the appreciation and *letting be* of what is, in and of itself. This sort of awe-inspiring revealing can be seen in the blossoming of a flower, the sound of thunder

amidst lightning, the gradual freezing of a pond, a slow, pink sunrise, or the transformation from tadpole to frog. It is humanity's recognition of the infinite ways in which the world, untouched by us, is eternally revealing *itself*. It's just a matter of our letting this be, recognizing it, and perhaps being willing to lose ourselves within it for just a moment.

> "To see a World in a Grain of Sand
> And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
> And Eternity in an hour"
>
> -William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*

It is a revealing, a thinking, feeling, producing, connecting, creating that does not come into being for practical benefit, or consumption, or profit. It is the Rhine river that exists not for power, but instead, a place of meditation or adventure, or as a site of solitary awe, or refreshment on a hot summer's day. It is a detachment from rationality, an immersement in a painting or a piano sonata, in the connecting of freckles on a lover's back, one's reflection in a mirror, the sight of certain shapes within the clouds. It is our tapping into what reveals itself right in front of us, it is our *learning how to* partake in this sort of revealing of ourselves and the world. This, I insist, is wonder.

> "Wonder is the beginning of wisdom."
>
> — Socrates

Dear Fairle
IS THAT
YOU THAT
ROUND SPOTS
IN MY MOMS
ROOM XXX
PS I LOVE YOU
Callen

Dear fairys,
thank you for
helping me out.
Love callen

~ Chapter 2 ~
Poiesis and the Aesthetic Approach to the Wonders of Everyday Life

"Wonder is no more dissolved by reason than freedom by law or enjoyment by discipline. We must look for the causes underlying the loss of a sense of wonder and delight, not in the activity of reasoning, but rather in the *attitude* in which the activity is carried out."
- Sam Keen, *Apology for Wonder,* 57

I begin the forthcoming chapter with yet again, some disclosure of my inability to provide an absolute account of wonder - I dare not even let myself believe that such a thing is possible. Instead, I hope to only shed light on what I suppose is a certain *kind* or *sense* of wonder, one that seems to have been superseded by what we mistakenly suppose is a more beneficial way of looking at, thinking about, and using ourselves and the world around us. Beginning where my last chapter left of, it seems that we increasingly have begun to perceive our world and ourselves through the challenging-forth that comes along with our technological thinking. With this, we have come to neglect bringing-forth, Heidegger's alternative type of revealing, one that has close ties to *poiesis*. This practice of *poiesis* is painted as a picture of the recognition of, the appreciation for, and the letting be of what is. A fundamental aspect of such a practice lies in our ability to look beyond our own doing and benefit, and instead, open ourselves up to a world that holds wonders far beyond our very own selves. It is a young child's gaze into the infinitely starry sky, the presence of warm, strong sunshine after a long

and cold winter, or perhaps even the sight of a loose plastic bag's dance in the street on a windy day. I hope to make clear how moments of wonder like these - moments in which we seem to carry out an internal, experimental *poiesis* of sorts - can be better understood and facilitated through the cultivation of an aesthetic, *distanced* and *disinterested* receptivity to the world around us.

Part I: *Poiesis* as the Revival of an Aesthetic, Appreciative Wonder

Although Heidegger's notion of *poiesis* is a strong foundation for my understanding of this certain sense of wonder to stand upon, I believe that a more evolved, contemporary theory of *poiesis* is necessary before we can truly understand the inner-workings of the deep ties between wonder and aesthetic appreciation. To develop what exactly I mean by *poiesis* in such a way, I will use Derek Whitehead's *Poiesis and Art-Making: A Way of Letting-Be* as a reference point. To start again with Heidegger, his understanding of *poiesis* that is presented in *The Question Concerning Technology* derives from the ancient Greek take on it as the ability to "bring something from concealment into the full light…[it] has nothing to do with the exercise of a will and everything to do with 'the production of *aletheia*', with 'unveiling', and with the opening of a world for humankind's being and action" (Whitehead, 3). This move away from our immediate

tendency to carry out our will and, on the contrary, the move *towards* an initial

recognition of the world as it truly is stands to be a clear reflection of Heidegger's call

for the importance of our "*bringing-forth*" rather than "*challenging-forth*". But before

moving any further, I feel it is important to distinguish between two different meanings

of *poiesis* that could potentially be mistakenly unified within Heidegger's one proposed

notion of it. In one sense, *poiesis* can stand to be a creative act of some kind that

eventually ends in the willful (and artistic) production of a given thing: poetry, pottery,

painting, sculpture, music, etc. But on the other hand, *poiesis* can be understood as a

more internal practice or attitude that ultimately inspires in one a unique perception

and understanding of the world. It is this conception of *poiesis*, as a sort of psychological

unveiling of the *self* to the world (in contrast to an unveiling of the *world* to the self) as it

truly is that is central to my exploration of wonder.

Though Whitehead's call for a revitalization of the "*poietic act*" rests upon more

concrete and literal artistic practice, I instead want to focus on these psychological

roots of *poiesis* - ones that lead to an aesthetic *perspective* on the world. As made clear in

my past chapter on technological thinking, we have become increasingly comfortable

(*too* comfortable) with our role as producers - for in such a position, we feel we have the

most control over the world around us. This internal practice of *poiesis* that I speak of

achieves its significance in its ability to (even temporarily) alter our position into that of *receivers*. This is only possible through our "working with the raw materials of the imagination (ideas, concepts, schemata)...[as a] means of renegotiating our sense of 'place' with a renewed and peaceful place of *poietic* and non-exploitative encounter" (Whitehead, 2). We must look inside ourselves and honestly take note of what is there to be able to step back from our all-knowing, all-powerful, self-appointed role in this world - and to eventually, instead, open ourselves up to an aesthetic understanding of and appreciation for the world as it was before us and is beyond us. As noted by Whitehead, mention of Alphonso Lingis' "schematized intentionality" (*Poiesis and Art-Making*, 4) in which one's experience of the world is driven by meaning found within everyday sense-impressions has great relevance here. This sort of intended perception allows even the most quotidian of things we perceive and experience to be meaningful to us in some way that they otherwise might not have been. I argue that it is exactly this sort of *poietic* approach to the world that inspires our everyday, living reality to become aesthetically charged. It is exactly this "inner creative seeing that regathers the things of the world" (Whitehead, 6) that inspires a unique relation between self and world; we begin to learn how to not only see and experience the world as *meaningfully* separate from us, but also, increasingly wondrous *because* of it.

Part II: *Poietic* Practice, Aura, and the Sentimentality of Everyday Life

I now want to delve deeper into what exactly I mean by the day-to-day sentimentality that this inner, experimental *poiesis* draws out of us. With this, we will move into Karsten Harries' *Transcending Aesthetics*, a piece that offers significant musings on what it might mean to extend the realm of aesthetics as we know it into one's everyday existence. I argue that such an extension relies on this experimental *poiesis* and its ability to inspire in us a shift in the self-world relation. For us to find ways to not only reinvigorate our sense of wonder, but to also allow and relish in its gaze being directed at the most ordinary of everyday objects and events, we must explore the necessary relationship that *poiesis* and everyday aesthetics share with one another.

A glowing pink and orange sunset, an awe-inspiring desert landscape that seems to go on forever, the tremendous size and sway of a willow tree hundreds of years old, or perhaps the thick, excited anticipation that exists in the air of a room in which a mother gives birth to a baby. There is a familiar and fleeting quality to such experiences, one that Harries' most definitely would call "auratic". She begins with an account of this concept of aura as "some elusive magical other" (Harries, 210) - an attribute that

experiences of certain kinds possess. Very similar to the meaningingful perceptual

experience that comes about due to schematized intentionality, Harries proposes that in

the case of aura, "the material object seen is experienced as a figure of utopia. That

figural significance gives the perceived its special resonance and depth" (210). This

material object or experience, whether it is that astounding sunset or the sway of a

mighty tree, seems to innately - *effortlessly* - for one reason or another, provide the

viewer with the feeling that it is beautiful, notable, *meaningful* in some way. Though

some may argue that aura's bond with physical phenomenons imply the fact that it has a

material basis - that is, only truly incredible *physical* circumstances have an auratic

quality to them - I argue just the opposite. Similar to Harries, I believe that the

potentiality of aura exists within the psyche of the perceiver; it is a result of the way in

which we perceive and reflect upon the world, and therefore, is inherently

psychological. To me, experience of an aura seems to be the difference between a person

who stumbles upon a field of flowers and momentarily has their breath taken away, and

that of a person who walks right past that very same field, their eyes glazing over it as if

it has nothing at all to offer. It is the difference between the person who becomes

enchanted by the small blue moth fluttering around them for a few minutes, and the

person who shoos it away, or perhaps, doesn't even notice the tiny visitor at all. Aura is

easy to recognize and experience when "looking at some sacred object...we are drawn to something nameless and far removed from the cares and concerns that bind us to the here and now" (Harries, 211), but what might it mean to attempt to consciously make these rare, fleeting, touching, wondrous moments move beyond the sacred and the obviously remarkable? How might we come to recognize the auratic quality that even the most ordinary of objects and experiences certainly do hold?

> "To perceive the aura of an object we look at is to invest it with the ability to look at us in return. This endowment is a wellspring of poetry. Wherever a human being, an animal, or an inanimate object lifts up its eyes, it draws him into the distance. The gaze of nature thus awakened dreams and pulls the poet after its dreams."
> -Walter Benjamin, *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*

We now arrive back to the (potential) sentimentality of everyday life and the role that *poiesis* plays in our ability to both recognize and appreciate this auratic quality - the objectively wondrous and meaningful nature of the world around us - that I argue is only able to be perceived through an internal shift in how we take to the world. As previously made clear, this recognition and appreciation are effortless in the experience of sacred objects, beautiful landscapes, and starry skies. But what I find to be of utmost importance is the ability to look beyond the obviously and effortlessly wondrous escapades of existence, and instead, focus on why we *should* and how we *can* become more in touch with this sense of wonder in our daily lives. Harries offers an example

from Walter Benjamin's On *Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, in which "the acquisition of a

book, for example, is described in a way that suggests a marriage. The aura some book

or work of art possesses for the true collector is not unlike the aura that any person

possesses whom we encounter and cherish as such. He invests what he collects with his

own humanity...that helps to explain its aura and his bliss" (217). This sweet

sentimentality - that is, our potential to recognize the independence and individual

reality of something outside of ourselves - as if, in marriage to it, we recognize its

freedom to exist meaningfully outside of us. Here we come to see that whether it is a

book, a person, a work of art, or a landscape (truly, *anything* at all), regard for the auratic

qualities of the world around us relies on one's ability to ascribe these things meaning

outside of themselves. Though, my intention has been to make clear how difficult it is to

do so when are are (as often as we are) unable to see beyond ourselves. So then how is it

that we can charge our everyday lives with an aesthetic appreciation of things that are

beyond the self? Fortunately, "what matters about art, in this view, belongs to spirit

rather than matter…[it] belongs to the human spirit" (Harries, 215). We must not only

make the distinction between self and world - "spirit and matter" - but also, embrace

the fact that perhaps what it is that we see and experience is not at the core of our

experience (of wonder), but *instead*, our experience of the world (and again, of wonder)

relies solely upon the sort of relation - one that relies on the *human spirit* - that we have

to the world. I'd say with certainty that what we take from an experience relies wholly

on what we bring to it. And ultimately, if an experience is colored by only the self - our

opinions, desires, fears, etc. - we then succumb to closing ourselves off to anything

within that very experience that exists *beyond* ourselves. With this, I will provide an

account of how exactly it is possible to make sure that one is not in fact just bringing

and taking themselves from a given experience - how exactly we can come to recognize

how, in our everyday lives, the world is already colored by meaning, with aura, *and*

wonder - all beyond the self, and that much more worth recognizing.

"Wonder is an emotion which responds to the pull of the object, and one might say that in it the subject is maximally aware of the value of the object and only minimally aware, if at all, of its relationship to her own plans."
-Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions,* 54

Part III: The Aesthetic Attitudes of Psychical Distance and Disinterestedness

While I am sure at this point my call for an aesthetic, auratic, *poietic* appreciation

of the world is clear, it seems time to inquire into how exactly one can foster such a

sense of wonder in themselves - how exactly one can step away from the self within a

given experience. At first thought it may seem nearly impossible in practice, or perhaps

even an absurd idea to put forward. But seeing as the crux of my argument has been that

wonder does not necessarily rely on the experience of something unusually spectacular,

and instead, rests upon the attitude we have toward the world around us, I argue that an aesthetic approach to the world - a *distanced* and *disinterested* approach - illuminates exactly how such a separation from the self, and in turn, a discovery of the small wonders of everyday life is possible. Furthermore, I hope to argue how disinterestedness as an aesthetic theory and approach to the world reflects the way in which this internal practiced *poiesis* truly works, as it calls for an encountering, experiencing, and understanding of the world that is for its own sake, on its own terms (leaving all personal motives and preconceived notions aside). This is surely a lot to unpack, therefore, I will begin with a brief history and background of Jerome Stolnitz's *On the Origins of "Aesthetic Disinterestedness"*.

The concept of disinterestedness was introduced by Lord Shaftesbury in the eighteenth century. At first independent of aesthetics, Shaftesbury's initial notion of it was very much rooted in the resistance of egoism and instrumentalism (though not necessarily aesthetic, such a basis for disinterestedness has obvious ties to my argument as a whole). In the beginning, disinterestedness had "only the negative or private meaning, 'not motivated by self-concern'" (Stolnitz, 132). But as time went on, this ethical theory soon evolved into a sort of equally aesthetic theory. Soon enough, disinterestedness became known "as the 'love' of respective objects 'for their own

sake'…the term no longer [had] to do with choice and action but with a mode of attention and concern" (Stolnitz, 133). Seeing as it is exactly the self's attention and concern that make up the way in which one experiences and understands the world, the heart of disinterestedness is based upon our ability to direct our attention and concern beyond the self and wholly onto the experience at hand. To help us better understand the workings of this abstract aesthetic concept, I will briefly delve into Edward Bullough's *'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle*, in which his concept of psychical distance proves to have deep ties to the disinterested approach, and therefore, will allow for a better understanding of what exactly it means to place one's self outside of a given experience.

We'll begin with our usual, (self-)"interested" approach to the world. Bullough asks us to…

"Imagine a fog at sea; for most people it is an experience of acute unpleasantness. Apart from the physical annoyance and remoter forms of discomfort such as delays, it is apt to produce feelings of peculiar anxiety, fears of invisible dangers, strains of watching and listening for distant and unlocalised signals. The listless movements of the ship and her warning calls soon tell upon the nerves of the passengers; and that special, expectant, tacit anxiety and nervousness, always associated with this experience, make a fog the dreaded terror of the sea (all the more terrifying because of its very silence and gentleness) for the expert seafarer no less than the ignorant landsman" (Bullough, Aphorism 3).

Such a description makes evident how much more aware we are of ourselves (as in, our subjective reaction to whatever we are in contact with) than we are of the actual experience at hand (in this case, the fog). It seems that in this particular case, our own

fears of the fog, what it may or may not lead to, our desire to escape it, etc. color our

perception and understanding of the experience, arguably leading one to have not really

experienced the fog at all - they merely experienced *themselves*. With this, Bullough calls

for the objective appreciation of the world around us through his concept of psychical

distance. Psychical distance (as well as disinterestedness) cultivates a detachment from

the self in one's perception and experience at a given time, leading to a focus on the

objective features of the phenomenon - features entirely independent of us. "Like a

momentary switching on of some new current, or the passing ray of a brighter light,

illuminating the outlook upon perhaps the most ordinary and familiar objects - an

impression which we experience in instants of direct extremity, when our practical

interest snaps like a wire from sheer over-tension, and we watch the consummation of

some impending catastrophe with the marvelling unconcern of a mere spectator"

(Bullough, Aphorism 4). This inevitably fleeting yet deeply remarkable recognition of

the world stands to be a brief (though much needed) escape from the self, and a move

toward complete immersion into the experience at hand. It allow for a rare appreciation

and delight in a range of experiences, objects, and relationships - this distance, this

disinterestedness - inspires in us the uncovering of realities that have always existed, but

are far too often overlooked. It is the recognition of the eerie beauty of the fog, "the

curious creamy smoothness of the water...the strange solitude and remoteness from the world..." (Bullough, Aphorism 4), rather than the self-oriented perspective we so often take.

To truly understand what is meant by this distance (and eventually, disinterestedness), one must question what exactly this distance is between. According to Bullough, this "distance is produced...by putting the phenomenon, so to speak, out of gear with our practical, actual self; by allowing it to stand outside the context of our personal needs and ends, in short, by looking at it 'objectively'" (Bullough, Aphorism 6). Though it may seem that to achieve real distance, one must (only temporarily) part with their own subjectivity, I fear that may be near impossible. Instead, we must read Bullough's concept as distance between the self and its use of experiences/objects as the vehicles in which it *reflects its affections and subjectivity onto*. Instead of our turning a thick fog into a mere reflection of our own uneasiness, psychical distance inspires a step back from oneself, and allows for a newfound ability to see and experience what is in front of oneself for what it truly is. With this, we can now move into how this aesthetic consciousness of the world can inspire our everyday experience.

"We are not ordinarily aware of those aspects of things which do not touch us immediately and practically, nor are we generally conscious of impressions apart from our own self which is impressed. The sudden view of things from their reverse - usually unnoticed - side, comes upon us as a revelation" (Bullough, Aphorism 8).

This revelatory, "reversed" recognition of the elements and experiences that make up

our everyday lives is exactly what I am hoping to get at. Through our treatment of

objects and experiences as ends, in and of themselves, - with no practical or immediate

ties to our own subjectivities - to be within an experience only for the sake of being

there and experiencing *it*, (*poiesis!*) I argue that one moves closer to this certain sense of

wonder that I feel is all too often and far too easily neglected.

Having provided an account of Bullough's psychical distance, I now hope that the

role that disinterestedness plays in the facilitation of our sense of wonder will become

increasingly clear. We should begin by delving into the (perhaps quite obvious)

paradoxical nature of disinterestedness. Compared to our usual, subjective self-centered

attitude toward the world, disinterestedness (as an "object/experience-centered attitude)

relies upon an unusual amount of "vigilance and control, [and] attention to the object

which scrupulously shuts out whatever might diminish or subvert it" (Stolnitz, 138).

Despite this strong sense of self-realization *and* self-mastery that disinterestedness

relies on, "the total experience is [actually] one of ease, fluidity, and delight" (Stolnitz,

138). To redirect our strong instinct to control toward *ourselves* - shifting it inward

instead of outward - learning to master our tendency to reflect onto the world our own

desires, fears, notions, and upbringings...and in turn, allowing for the world as it is to pour into us...it seems that both the way we see the world (and ourselves) *and* act within it could be forever changed. "To perceive disinterestedly is to make oneself a pure, unflawed, mirror, prepared to receive without distortion all the impressions, which the objects that are before us can produce" (Stolnitz, 138). It is exactly this opening up of the self that characterizes the internal practice of *poiesis*; this (not only) letting be of what is, but the *recognition* and *appreciation* of it. Think of the almost effortless willingness one has to step beyond and away from themselves during especially spectacular moments - witnessing marriage between two lovers, the glimpse of dolphins swimming out in the blue salty sea, or perhaps the sights and sounds of a firework finale overhead on the fourth of July. The basis of my writing and questioning stems from these so very special and all too rare moments. The distance between the world and the self that they inspire makes us feel *good*. So what if we could practice such distance - this *poietic* disinterested wondrous relation to the world - throughout our everyday lives? Could we find it in us to learn to love the slow movement and tick of a clock, the small silvery dust particles floating through the air that can be noticed when the light is just right, the vast field of flowers that one might otherwise walk right past, or maybe, just one flower, one fierce enough to peak its way through the still-cold soil in mid-March.

Before I conclude, I hope to remedy any concerns regarding how impersonal this disinterested aesthetic attitude may seem. Though I surely have attested to the good that can come of temporarily parting with the wants, needs, aversions, opinions, and ideas that we keep so near and dear to us, it must be made clear that disinterestedness as I argue for it does not imply a *complete* separation from the self. With this, comes the necessary role of one's imagination. In Stolnitz's writing on disinterestedness, he recalls Joseph Addison's musings on the role of the imagination within the aesthetic experience. The "exercise of [the] imagination is innocent…the imagination finds satisfaction in dwelling upon the ideas of color, figure, etc. One's interest is in perceiving, and in that alone" (Stolnitz, 141). I too insist that the imagination lies far before and beyond the affections that we reflect upon the world. It is unique in its ability to both recognize and create the strange, the beautiful, the uncomfortable, the possibilities, the far too often overlooked - the wonder. With this, I argue that it is the imagination that stands as the foundation of our internal *poiesis* - of the disinterested approach that we can take to the world. It is the seed in which our ability to look, feel, and appreciate beyond ourselves and our common concerns begins to grow. In the writing to come I will reveal how the imagination is not only the inception of this wonder, but how it is also nourished *by* this very wonder that comes of it. In becoming

more comfortable with stepping outside of ourselves - in consciously learning how to

thwart ourselves from using the world as a mirror of our own affections - I believe we

allow ourselves the chance, every *single* day, to actually become better people; people

with more open minds and hearts, with more acceptance and forgiveness, people with

ever-growing *moral* imaginations.

Dear Farise
sorry I codint
rite to you
I Love you
guys you
are the best →

~ Chapter 3 ~
Wonder and the Moral Imagination

"**Two things fill** the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: **the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me**"
-Kant

I want to begin this final chapter by looking back to the very beginning of this all

- that is, back to the Heideggerian "technological thinking" that we have come to know

so well. I have argued that in the contemporary world, technological thinking has come

to dominate our conscious lives; in many ways, it acts as the root of much of what we

think and do, how we carry ourselves and plan out our day to day. Despite however close

we may feel to the world in the midst of our illusory power over it, I have argued that

such a relation to the world, roused by technological thinking, leads to a great gap

between the self and experience - a sense of alienation from ourselves *and* the world

around us. Similar to the paradoxical nature of technological thinking (in which it *seems*

that we become closer to the world, though it really is just the opposite), the distanced

and disinterested aesthetic approach to the world (which I have portrayed as a sort of

practiced, inner *poiesis*), at first glance, may also seem somewhat contradictory. Such a

relation to the world seems to cause immediate *distance* between oneself and the

experiences of everyday life - but with my last chapter in mind, we must recall that this

is not entirely true.

We now know that this psychical distance - this *disinterested* approach to the

world - is not actually a distance between the subject and the experience, but instead, a

distancing between the subject and the subject's affections (desires, needs, fears, etc.)

toward the experience at hand (that are more often than not reflected *onto* the subject's

perception and understanding of the experience). I have argued that it this momentary

detachment from the self that actually allows for a pure recognition of the world as it is

beyond us, and ultimately, an appreciation, and closeness between oneself and the world

that is otherwise quite difficult to attain. It seems to me that in stepping away from our

innermost selves, we lend ourselves to be opened up to the world around us - we allow

the world to reveal itself to us as it truly is, in ways that we often cannot recognize. I

argue that this unbiased and complete embracement of a world that extends, exists, and

flourishes far beyond ourselves inspires in us an immense growth of something called

the moral imagination. In this chapter, I use Michael McGhee's *Moral Sentiments, Social*

Exclusion, Aesthetic Education as the foundation for my account of the moral imagination

as a universal moral sentimentality that I argue is of utmost importance to catalyze in

contemporary society. What I now hope to make clear is the ways in which a more

objective and aesthetic experience and appreciation of the world (a sure move *away* from

technological thinking) can actually, quite simply, make us better people.

"This is what Plato had already anticipated, when he indicated that the duty of those who escape from his
famous cave, dazzled by the sun of the Idea, was to return to the shadows....Only today can we fully assess
what this return means: it is that of Galilean physics back toward technical machinery, or of atomic
theory back towards bombs and nuclear power plants. The return of disinterested-interest towards brute
interest, the forcing of knowledges by a few truths. At the end of which the human animals has become
the absolute master of his environment - which is, after all, nothing but a fairly mediocre planet."
- Alan Badiou, *Ethics*, 59

Part I: The Imagination and the Moral

I will begin with an account of what I believe the moral imagination is, and

within this account, portray the roles that aesthetics, morality, and of course, the

imagination, play within it. We must first come to understand the imaginative

underpinnings of both morality and aesthetics - for the heart of imagination is its ability

to foster in us alternative and expanded understandings of reality as we usually know it.

Quite simply, the imagination inspires in us - from the inside, out - different ways of

seeing. In Amy Mullin's *Moral Defects, Aesthetic Defects, and the Imagination*, she portrays

the imagination as a "creative, reflective activity...a process is imaginative insofar as it

involves ordering or structuring representations in a new manner" (249). She makes

clear how the imagination can reach and alter mental images and representations of

many kinds, including those regarding emotions, ideas, and judgements. I argue that it

is exactly this matter of creative, alternative *seeing* that is essential to both the moral and

the aesthetic.

What is this imaginative seeing truly made up of though? To that, I answer, a

balanced blend of emotion, reason, and the senses. A fundamental conflict within not

only morality, but also much of what we experience in life in general, seems to be rooted

in the clash of these three components of our conscious lives. Our sensuous experience

of the world relays one thing to us, while emotion and reason then quite often diverge in

what they make of it. For morality, this has major consequences. I often find myself

questioning whether I should base my decisions off of what I *think*, or what I *feel*...for

they generally would lead me down very different paths. In McGhee's text, he begins by

recalling Hume's conception of morality that is something "more properly felt than

judged of" (85); here we see the ever-present conflict of consciousness, and the pressure

to trust and choose one (either judgement or emotion) over the other that it incites

within us. With this, McGhee calls for a recognition *and* mending of the unnecessary

and often problematic divide between reason and emotion, thinking and feeling. "I want

to consider a view of morality as involving the 'moral sentiments', in a way that restores

the unity of judgment and feeling" (McGhee, 85) - that is, a reconception of morality

that embraces reason *and* emotion for the very different potentials that they allow for

within us. I argue that the imagination, the *moral* imagination specifically, is fundamental to this unification of feeling and thinking - and ultimately, this unification allows for the consistency, the *universality*, in our moral sentiments that makes the moral imagination as important as it.

It seems that we have stumbled upon yet another paradox; the nearly impossible task of pulling apart the ways in which we can simultaneously allow for judgment *and* emotion to inform us. (Someone once told me that things that seem to be opposite of another another are actually not truly opposing at all - their seemingly antithetical positions often come of a deep, complicated closeness. I wonder if the friction between what we think versus what we feel can be explained by this. I feel sure that the intense difficulties I have had in writing this thesis are rooted in this very problem: All of my thoughts, feelings, and ideas either feel far too connected - making it impossible to pull them apart and truly understand them independently of one another - or, just the opposite...they begin to seem distant and detached from one another, which leaves me questioning what ties (if anything) all of this together at all.) If I have learned one thing though, it is that one must not become paralyzed by neither the connections nor the disparities. With that, I will continue on.

I understand the moral imagination to be a creative and wide-reaching moral

sentimentality - a (quite literally) imaginative point that reason allows us to arrive at,

and subsequently, then gives itself up to emotional understanding. In Steven Fesmire's

Imagination in Pragmatist Ethics, he cites Patricia Werhane's conception of the moral

imagination as "the ability in particular circumstances to discover and evaluate

possibilities not merely determined by that circumstance, or limited by its operative

mental models, or merely framed by a set of rules or rule-governed concerns…[it]

broadens, evaluates, and even changes one's moral point of view" (63). It is this breaking

out of one's instinctive, self-centered, often logical norm that is of utmost importance to

the facilitation of the moral imagination. This temporary escape from ourselves seems

to rely heavily on reason (in that, we must logically recognize the necessity of stepping

outside of ourselves in a given situation). To realize particular realities, possibilities, and

comprehensions that are so often otherwise left uncovered, we must relearn the

balanced dance between emotion, reason, and our sensuous experience of the world.

"We routinely encourage young children to use their imaginations in order to develop

empathy, and we chastise older children for failing to imagine how the victims of their

thoughtlessness feel" (Mullin, 250), yet it seems that at some point in our growing older,

we too fail to remember in our everyday lives what it looks like to feel, see, and

understand beyond the self. Perhaps the very wonder that I feel has been lost to technological thinking - a sense in which we can see beyond the obvious, beyond the calculable and controllable, beyond *ourselves* - lies at the end of this dance between the different elements of our conscious lives. But where, and *how*, does this dance begin? I'd say, in the midst of *poiesis* - within psychical distance and the disinterested aesthetic approach.

Part II: The Moral, the Aesthetic, and the Everyday

In my reading of Michael McGhee's writing about morality and aesthetics, it seems that our initial intentions are quite similar; that is, our seeking out of the sources of morality within our everyday lives - the smallest of moments and interactions that reflect who we are, *morally*, as people (94). I believe that a justified account of the moral imagination (and morality in general) must necessarily include consideration of our day-to-day lives, as it is within the smallest, most commonplace and often overlooked actions, reactions, and relationships, that we move closer to (or further away from) an expansion in our moral imaginations (which ultimately informs our sense of morality as a whole). This examination of everyday experience of course relies upon first, our sensuous experience, and second, what we make of it. With this, it seems right to

propose that perhaps this dance between reason and emotion is set on the very stage of sense perception.

In James Mesa's *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: The Aesthetic in Moral Imagination* he sheds light upon these fundamental ties between judgment, feeling, and sensuous experience. In recollection of Russell Kirk's description of the moral imagination as "that power of ethical *perception* which strides beyond the barriers of private experience and momentary events" (240), he alludes to the way in which our morality (or for my argument, the moral imagination) is quite literally imbued by our ethical *perceptions.* I hope to take this a step further in my argument that it is our *aesthetic* perceptions that actually inspire these *ethical* perceptions. I claim that there is no real gap between how we perceive "normally" and how we perceive "ethically" - for the two are inherently wrapped up within one another within our everyday lives. Notions of what is right and wrong, fair or unjust, color our experience on a daily basis; the moral imagination is constantly open to and inspired by what we see (and *fail* to see) in everyday life.

"There is a connection between virtue and *vision.* One has to *see* correctly before one can act correctly."

- William Kilpatrick, *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong*, 133

This proposed relation between perception and emotion leads us back to the role that

reason has within this dance. For one to *see* "correctly", or as I have argued, *aesthetically*,

one must consciously, through some sort of split-second reasoning, direct their

attention, just momentarily, away from their affections, beyond themselves, and entirely

onto the experience at hand. It is here that we find ourselves opened up to the world,

disposed to see *and* feel it as it really is. Contrary to this picture I have painted, Mesa

offers a shining example that represents a very different scenario - one that I believe is

at the very heart of the problem I am grappling with. He puts forth how in our

perception of the world, "our aesthetic delight is much greater when the effects of

human intelligence are present. The bay of Rio de Janerio is indeed beautiful he admits,

but he is moved more profoundly by 'the port of Marseilles, as it opens its man-managed

secretive basins one after another, in a forest of masts, cranes, lights, and memories!'...in

perceiving beauty, intelligence recognizes its own indispensable role in the aesthetic

experience, and in some fashion comes face to face with itself" (Mesa, 243). This

example put forth by Mesa relays a situational experience that is undoubtedly quite

familiar to us all - that is, the ways in which the world seems *that* much more amazing

because of *our* accomplishments and roles within it. More often than not, the self stands

to be the conscious center of not only aesthetic perception and understanding, but of

course, *moral* perception and understanding as well - for morality cannot be thought of where our attention is not placed. In recognition of our narcissistic tendency to view, use, understand, and appreciate the world as a mere reflection of human achievement and benefit, the severe moral consequences that come along with this (that is, a *reducing of* our moral imaginations - and yes, wonder!) hopefully become clear. A self-oriented perception of the world leads to a self-oriented morality, which I'd say, is not much of a morality at all.

"There is always one question in the ethic of truths: how will I, as some-one, continue to exceed my own being? How will I link the things I know, in a consistent fashion, via the effects of being seized by the not-known?"

- Badiou, *Ethics*, 50

Part III: Disinterestedness and the Moral Imagination

Now that the connections between the imagination, morality, and aesthetic perception have been made clear, I will now delve into *how* exactly the disinterested attitude - a selfless, objective perception, understanding, and appreciation of the world - inspires in us a universalization of our moral sentiments. To do so, we will begin on the grounds of McGhee's stance on the role of feelings within morality. "Differences within the emotions, even between instances of the same general kind, are a matter of our descriptions of the world as it affects us. One reason that sympathy, for example, can

hardly be a *ground* of morality…is that our moral assessments of different examples of

sympathy depends upon our descriptions of their objects" (McGhee, 85). Here, McGhee

points to the strong bond between sympathy and the self; often times, what we feel

sympathetic towards is very much tied to our subjective experience of the world - that

is, our personal affections that we reflect *onto* the experience at hand. This mercurial

nature of emotion lends itself to what McGhee calls the "bias to the near" (86) - a bias

that seems to be responsible for moral inconsistency. This is characterized by a

"fickleness of attention to specific realities that the sentiment *itself* has identified"

(McGhee, 86) as both worthy of attention *and* sympathy. Both our perception and moral

compass are naturally triggered by things, people, and experiences in the world around

us that we feel relate to our own self-experience…but although our "*feeling* may ebb and

flow [in such a way, how is it that we can] latch on nevertheless to the facts about people

and other sentient beings [outside of ourselves] that engage our moral feelings"

(McGhee, 86)?

Once again, we arrive at the fact that our moral attention is very much tied to our

own specific reality, in which it can recognize and interact with itself (think back to the

example about our heightened enjoyment of aesthetic experiences in which we can

recognize the role of the self). So with this, my questioning lies in our ability - *despite*

this self-specified ebb and flow of feeling - to shift our focused attention away from the self and out towards the objective facets of reality. We need to "correct the bias to the near, and, more generally, correct and train the moral sentiments, which depends upon a relation between judgment and feeling, in which the critical scrutiny of judgment alters feeling, [and] allows us to make a connection with the neglected" (McGhee, 86). It is here that McGhee provides a perhaps unintended, but nonetheless very helpful, account of how the disinterested, aesthetic approach to the world embodies this balance between our thinking and feeling. Judgment, or reason, allows us to step away from our affections momentarily - it transforms both our perception and the feelings we experience along with it. It is this necessary, conscious, *reasoned* shift away from the self and *toward* the complete immersion of oneself into a given experience that leads to wonder.

   With what we know about disinterestedness (and psychical distance) in mind, I hope that its ability to open one's eyes up to the small yet significant elements and experiences of day-to-day life, its power to summon in us a recognition of and reflection upon a world that has a rich existence that is entirely free of one's self, and ultimately, the altered relationship between the self and the world that then emerges because of this, is evident. But in the spirit of how ultra-complicated all of this truly does feel, let

me further explore how this process actually works. To do so I will adopt a few terms put forth by McGhee in his own writing, in which he too examines morality's move from the particular to the universal. Most often, we begin with attention (and sympathy) toward the *immediate* - that is, what most concerns us in relation to ourselves and the outside world. An example of this might be one's failure to notice the beauty that exists within a morning's heavy, rolling fog because they are so focused on getting to work on time, or perhaps one's simply failing to notice the needs of a friend because of the chaos that has ensued in one's own day. In our attention's move *away* from the particular and toward the universal, McGhee posits that there must be a revelatory moment in which "the immediate becomes *reflective*" (McGhee, 90). I argue that the immediate's capacity to become reflective relies on the disinterested approach. That is, the "*revelation* which broadens the descriptions under which [one's] sentiments become engaged" (McGhee, 90) in which we look, feel, and think far beyond ourselves. This is, quite literally, the disinterested attitude's ability to detach the self from it's affections (or more specifically, one's *reflection* of these affections *onto* the experience at hand). This universalization of our moral sentiments - this moral moment of wonder - is what I argue is responsible for the moral imagination. It is these revelatory moments that we gain perspective on what is outside of us - *despite* our immediate desires, fears,

obligations, and interests. These moments are fleeting, and they can come of both some of the most spectacular occurrences *and* the most quotidian. Though the spectacular (a fiery-orange sunset, or the dance of a flock of birds above us) provides much more noticeable ground to stand on, I argue that it is our ability to notice these moments within the quotidian as well (one's shadow walking beside them on a sunny, Spring day, the sparkle within a best friend's eyes as they speak of a newfound lover, or the comforting aroma that spills out of an old, dusty book) that is of utmost importance. One's awareness of these small wonders in our ordinary, day-to-day lives, is simply just a matter of how open we are *to* them - how willing we are, on a daily basis, to allow ourselves to feel taken and amazed by not only the biggest, but also, *the smallest* of marvels that are all around us.

Though it often feels most comfortable to write in hypotheticals, it seems necessary at this point for me to provide some concrete examples of what I mean by all of this. I will happily begin by presenting an account of the work of one of my favorite artists, Diana Thater. Collections of her work on exhibit are invariably known as *The Sympathetic Imagination*; these exhibits are made up of a variety of different immersive video installations that seem to transport the viewer into an entirely different realm of the natural world. While walking through her artwork, one might find themselves

seemingly swimming amidst dolphins in her *Delphine*, or perhaps walking through the colorized architecture of a buzzing beehive in her *knots + surfaces*. Instead of just standing in front of a screen, with literal, *physical*, distance

Delphine. LA Times, Fredrik Nilsen/LACMA.

separating the viewer from whatever it is that they are watching, Thater's projections fill entire walls, ceilings, and floors, turning what once looked like a normal room into a dynamic and mesmeric reflection of a subjectivity entirely different than our own.

knots + surfaces. TimeOut, Chicago, Zach Long.

Considering our tendency to understand the world through our *own* subjectivities (and how exceptionally easy it is to do this with art in particular), Diana Thater's ability to quite literally create an environment that is a breeding ground for aesthetic disinterestedness has never failed to blow my mind. Walking among her art, one feels almost out of body - the lines between oneself and the external, entirely blurred. It seems that in her removal of

the *physical* distance between the viewer and the artwork, she ends up creating *psychical* distance between the viewer and themselves. One is suddenly able to infiltrate into the space between the self and external world, and quite literally (through her projections), become one with the other. Thater somehow provokes in us a desire, a *need*, to step away from one's self - it often feels that my mind as I usually know it, full of lingering thoughts, worries, inclinations, etc., exists only within the shadows of myself that I pay no mind to while standing within a given projection. It is *this* revelatory, reflective moment that broadens the moral - or as Thater might say, the *sympathetic* - imagination.

Another example that seems in many ways to have direct ties to both aesthetic disinterestedness and the role it plays in the moral imagination is the psychedelic experience. Seeing as such an experience might not be known by my reader (along with my hesitance to speak from any personal experience I have had of it), I will use Aldous Huxley's depiction of it in his book *The Doors of Perception*. It feels right to begin with his conception of our normal state of consciousness, one that aligns more with Heideggerian technological thinking (and stands to be quite the opposite of the disinterested attitude). He states, "the function of the brain and nervous system is to protect us from being overwhelmed and confused by the mass of largely useless and irrelevant knowledge...and leaving only that very small and special selection which is

likely to be practically useful. The suggestion is that the function of the brain and nervous system and sense organs is in the main *eliminative* and not productive" (Huxley, 22). With this, Huxley alludes to our instinctive attention to what seems most relevant, useful, and beneficial to the self at a given moment in time; all other things that reside outside of this ideal are often left overlooked. His conception of the brain as a "reducing valve" of sorts is then put up against his notion of the potential "Mind at Large", in which the self (within a psychedelic experience) is opened up to all that is usually overlooked.

Many speak of the sort of ego-dissolution - the temporary loss of subjective self-identity - that often comes along with a psychedelic experience; it is within this state that once again, disinterestedness - a *psychical distance* from ourselves - makes its way to the surface. For Huxley, the use of mescalin allowed for the rare experience of this ultra-*poietic* "Mind at Large". "The other world to which mescalin admitted me was not the world of visions….the great change was in the realm of objective fact. What had happened to my subjective universe was relatively unimportant" (Huxley, 16). I cannot overstate the importance of this distinction between "objective fact" and one's "subjective universe" - with this, Huxley makes clear that it is not so much about the fleeting, subjective psychedelic visions that are often thought to make up a

trip...instead, the significant shift in consciousness resides within the prominent change in one's *attention to objective fact* - elements of the world that hold a meaningful existence outside of the self. Once one is "shaken out of the ruts of ordinary perception" (Huxley, 73), "the man who comes back through the Door in the Wall will never be quite the same as the man who went out. He will be wiser but less cocksure, happier but less self-satisfied, humbler in acknowledging his ignorance yet better equipped to understand the relationship of words to things, of systematic reasoning to the unfathomable Mystery which it tries, forever vainly, to comprehend" (Huxley, 79). The psychedelic experience is undoubtedly one way to experience a sort of open-minded, changed perspective on the relation between the self and the world - one that seems to effortlessly lead one to take notice of the wonders of the world that exist all around us, always. Contemplation upon the clouds floating above us, the grass that we lay among, the sheer brilliance of tiny droplets of water, the soft touch of a friend's hand in yours...these small yet ever meaningful episodic experiences of the world have a new light shed upon them throughout the psychedelic experience - an attentive, inner light that seems to stick around long after the trip has concluded, a light that I believe pours into the moral imagination.

Though there may be nothing quite like the psychedelic experience, I feel strongly that the reflective, *revelatory* attention that it inspires within us is something we can and *should* attempt to facilitate within our everyday lives. This of course depends upon our ability to actively resist our selfish desire for some sense of control over and subjective knowing of the world around us - that is, our technological thinking. As Nietzsche once wrote in his *Slave and Master Morality*, sympathy is not a major value in the lives of masters, and as I have argued, this lack of *attention to* and *sympathy for* facets of our everyday lives leaves us closed off to a certain sense of wonder, a certain discerning of and appreciation for the small and large realities that exist all around us - *beyond* us. So with this, it seems that we must take a step back, and as Heidegger called for, examine and question what it is we do and why it is we do it. "We have to learn when to force our will on things and when we have to remain obedient to their qualities and aptitudes" (McGhee, 98), and remind ourselves that there is an easily forgotten beauty inherent to the untouched, the "pure", the separate from *our* own doing and being. And beyond just this, we must remember that there is value in not only recognizing the more easily overlooked facets of the *physical* world, but of course - and perhaps most importantly for the moral imagination - there is a necessary value in recognizing certain elements of human existence (ideologies, traditions, etc.) - elements

that persist far beyond our own subjectivity. McGhee provides a helpful portrayal of what I mean by this in his anecdote about the different forms of thinking and being that come to dominate our conscious lives. We often struggle to think outside of this box of the self, "thus an academic's failure to help the man who fell among thieves might be explained by a habit of analysis, a businessman's by a habit of calculation, *dominating* their minds as they pass, so that neither can pay the attention that moves the soul" (McGhee, 102). We become increasingly comfortable in our particular customs of thought, therefore, it is of great importance to find ways in which we can relax, even shatter, these mental confines. Similar to McGhee, I posit that *poietic* practices are a sure way of doing this. Although "narrative, song, music, and drama are public forms of *reflection*, in which a community looks at itself and discovers at the same time the *terms* of its own reflection" (McGhee, 98), I have called for an extension of this *poiesis* out beyond the aesthetic realm as we know it - an everyday, internalized, *disinterested* sense of *poiesis* that can interact with all aspects of the external world, one that can allow us to think, feel, and act among realities that are not our own, feeding and filling our sense of morality along the way.

This all brings to mind the tiny beautiful sensitivities that often times I feel children are most apt to pick up on - the joy of squishing wet sand between one's

fingers, the excitement that comes along with the chance to take a walk outside, the heartbreak that ensues with the death of a pet frog, or the strange mix of astonishment, fear, and utter delight that is brought about by thunder and lightning. It is *this* sense of wonder, this utter enchantment by both the quotidian and the spectacular, that I believe feeds into a sort of selflessness and *awareness* of the "other" that is of extraordinary importance to cultivate. Children have not yet had the chance to become attached to a certain way of thinking and seeing, they have not yet been tainted by the illusory power dynamic that comes to exist between the self and the world. In Kevin Tobia's *Wonder and Value*, he recalls John Dewey's conception of this certain sense of wonder, and what exactly it means to have lost sight of it. "Dewey felt that to lose the feeling of wonder is to 'lose the sense of the universality and objectivity of mind; it is to sink back contented into one's own subjective possessions, and thus commit intellectual suicide" (Tobia, 21). Might this be what we have done? I say, yes.

With this, I'd like to move into a final account of what might be possible for the moral imagination if we can find it in us to take a more disinterested, *poietic*, approach to the world in our everyday lives. At this point, hopefully it is clear that in compelling our imagination to reach beyond ourselves in our day-to-day sensuous experience, our technological thinking - this dominant, false consciousness - is relaxed in a way that

transforms emotion, reason, perception, and of course, morality. So then, "perhaps the dominant moral sentiments of the [contrary] *constructive* mode are benevolence, appreciation, and a kind of 'sympathy' marked by...an attitude of sympathetic joy in the flourishing of another" (McGhee, 97). This "flourishing of another" - the recognition of, appreciation of, and *letting be* of what is - reflects exactly the sense of *poiesis* that I depicted earlier. And although this of course begins in our perception of the world, it inevitably ends up inspiring a questioning and re-orienting of what we pay attention to - what we truly *value* -outside of ourselves as human beings. What we pay attention to (and appreciate) in our everyday lives has ever-lasting ties to what we consider (and feel is right, or wrong) in our moral imaginations. This all brings to mind the space that exists between invention and discovery - we must question what each brings to us, and how our technological thinking is often tied to our affinity for invention (for change, production, possession, etc.) and how on the contrary, *poiesis* is much more reflective of our sense of discovery (the revelatory experience that comes about in recognition of what is *beyond us*). But "the rhythms of [this] process have to be learnt and taught, and humans relationships themselves are discovered to be of the same kind, as friendship themselves are discovered to be of the same kind, as friendships form and develop according to processes that are not for any individual to invent, but only to discover"

(McGhee, 99). This parallel between the inner-workings of friendship and our discovery

of the world beyond us sheds light upon what perhaps this sense of wonder that I am

reaching towards really is - that is, a *befriending* (not a power over, control of, or

possession) of the world we experience in our everyday lives.

      To conclude, I must make clear that the great growth in our moral imaginations

that can potentially come of all of this is absolutely dependent on us actually *and*

consistently carrying out this changed relationship to the world. As McGhee makes

clear, we have mistakenly come to think that morality stands by itself - that morality is

independent and separate from how we carry ourselves in our everyday lives. The moral

imagination "depends upon experience of and participation in the relevant activities

[what I argue to be, the disinterested approach]...In the absence of the relevant

experience, the value discourse [morality] loses its grip because of the *absence* of what it

expresses" (McGhee, 100). As I have said once before, morality is not a part of ourselves

that can so simply be turned off and on - there are no isolated moments of morality. The

moral imagination - what I have argued to be at the heart of morality as a whole - has

the potential to grow, shift, and change on a daily basis. Without our internal sense of

poiesis (disinterestedness), I argue that it slowly, but surely, begins to diminish. But with

it - with this sense of wonder that we surely can and should find in the quotidian and

the spectacular alike - we nurture our moral imaginations. We allow ourselves the

opportunity to cultivate a wider, more universalized, attention to and sympathy for the

world as it is far beyond just ourselves.

"Observe the wonders as they occur around you. Don't claim them. Feel the artistry moving through and
be silent. Don't grieve. Anything you lose comes round in another form."

-Rumi

I Love you with all my hart you are my famly I love you sorry If I sgard you next page

~ Conclusion ~

Having traversed through my account of our loss of wonder, the *poietic*, aesthetic

means by which we can revive it, and ultimately, the moral value *of* such wonder, it

seems we have (at last!) reached the end of this journey. I began with an account of

modern-day technological thinking - the pervasive mentality that has come to not only

influence the ways in which we go about our everyday lives, but also, in turn, has lead to

some loss in our sense of wonder. In response to this deprivation, I then posit that an

everyday, (psychically) distanced, disinterested aesthetic perception of the world - one

that portrays the internal practice of *poiesis* - is a way in which we can not only enliven

our sense of wonder, but also, ultimately allow for a more expansive and accepting

moral imagination. My writing of this project has been equally cerebral and

emotional...even somehow, sensory and quite physical at times. Though there is so

much of me within this, I have benefited greatly from my willingness to - my *need* to -

think and feel beyond myself and my surroundings amidst my writing of it. Perhaps we

have here, in some strange form, a sustained experience of *wonder*. Let us recount.

It seems necessary to end where we began, and perhaps then, see what we can

make of the ties I have formed to arrive back to this ending. My first chapter, based

heavily upon Martin Heidegger's *The Question Concerning Technology*, aims to shed light

on the modern-day mentality that I hold responsible for our lapse in wonder. Heidegger

provides a riveting account of the deeply flawed relationship between humanity and the

natural world - a relationship that he intends to better understand in account of the

technological thinking that is at the heart of our state of Enframement. This

technological thinking is characterized by a strong sense of efficiency, utility,

calculability, and productivity...it is the way in which we have come to perceive,

understand, and make use of the world only insofar as it can stand to benefit *us*. Though

Heidegger maintains that such thinking is actually not inherently bad (it is undoubtedly

necessary in many ways!), what does stand to be the heart of the issue is our mindless

perpetuation of it throughout our everyday lives. Going beyond just the states of

alienation, disenchantment, and Enframement that technological thinking is reflective

of, I conclude that such socio-psychological conditions are illustrative of a loss in our

sense and experience of wonder throughout our everyday lives. Though Heidegger

called for the importance of questioning such systems of thinking - of re-interpreting

how we act, why we act this way, *who we are*...I believe that my writing is indicative of

what I argue is our *need* to ask such questions. Heidegger makes clear how the ways in

which we reveal the world (our *challenging-forth*), are not only inherently connected to

the way we understand it, but also, the ways in which we use it. Our technological

thinking is not isolated - it permeates out into unknowable, unforeseeable aspects of

our being. With this, we must follow Heidegger in his questioning...and then begin our

very own. In answering to my own questioning, I posit that a different type of revealing

that Heidegger puts forth, *bringing-forth* or *poiesis* - which inspires not only the

recognition and appreciation of, but also, the *letting-be* of what is, in and of itself - is

what can reinvigorate our lost sense of wonder.

In my next chapter, which sustains a much happier and hopeful note, I delve

deeper into the connection between *poiesis* and our sense of wonder. I offer a

reconceptualization of *poiesis* as a sort of internal practice or attitude that inspires in us

a uniquely aesthetic perception and experience of the world around us. This perception,

allowing us to become more receptive to the world as it is *beyond* our own needs,

desires, opinions, etc. (quite the opposite of technological thinking), allows one to relish

in the quotidian as if it were (as it is) truly remarkable. I use two aesthetic theories,

psychical distance (by Edward Bullough) and *disinterestedness* (by Jerome Stolnitz) to make

better sense of the way wonder is reinvigorated by *poiesis*. Both theories, as we now

know, speak to the significance of our attention being placed upon, and subsequently,

entirely immersed within, the objective qualities of an experience. In this encountering

of the world for its *own* sake, overlooking the affections that one usually reflects upon their interpretation of a given experience, one is able to recognize and appreciate what is independent of their own subjectivities. With this, I allude to the great possibility of our recognition (and appreciation) of the small, more often overlooked, wondrous realities of the world around us. It is this fleeting and complete immersion into the world as it exists outside of us that I argue exemplifies an openness to the world as it is beyond us - our openness to wonder.

Carrying on in the spirit of my second chapter, my third and final chapter seeks to further understand the effects of this internal, *poietic*, disinterested taking to the world - one that I argue stands to be a source of morality within our everyday lives. Using Michael McGhee's conception of morality that involves the "moral sentiments" (in his *Moral Sentiments, Social Exclusion, Aesthetic Education*) - a morality that involves both reason *and* emotion - I posit that the selfless experience and appreciation of the objective qualities of an experience (that comes about through *poiesis*) leads to an immense growth in our moral imaginations. Marked by our ability to conceive of a wider range of possibilities, explanations, and perspectives (outside of our very own) within a morally relevant situation, the moral imagination as I argue for it relies heavily on the imaginative underpinnings of our aesthetic perception in everyday life. Similar to

a very significant facet of my first chapter, I maintain here that our everyday (aesthetic)

relation to and experience of the world is reflective of who we are (morally) as people.

This *poietic* perception of and relation to the world - the *disinterested* shift away from

subjectivity - informs and inspires the expansion of our *moral* perceptions; it allows for

the moral sentiment's move from the particular (our subjective "bias to the near" as

McGhee would put it) to the objective and universal - it as at this point that the moral

imagination grows.

Prior to my account of the more broad philosophical (and personal) implications

that my writing imparts, it seems right to first consider a few lines of thought that stand

in some opposition to my argument as a whole. The first that I would like to consider,

one that is most important for me to make clear that I have pondered deeply (and even

support, in some ways), is how truly amazing the human ability to and propensity for

relating to the world through their very own subjectivities is. The way in which we can

(and *do*) go out into the world, on a daily basis, and make connections between our

deepest desires, our fears, our own personal opinions and feelings...and the things,

experiences, and people that make up the external world - our natural drive to see

ourselves in all that is around us; I cannot deny how remarkable this really is. I see, and

appreciate, the intuitive and *personal* ties we come to have with the world - the affinities

that we learn of - through keeping ourselves in mind.

Though I have spent much of my writing arguing against this tendency, it is

important for me to make clear that it is *not* because I do not recognize its value. I do

feel that the way in which one, perhaps going through heartbreak, can suddenly hear

themselves in every sad song that comes on, is wondrous in its own right. Or perhaps,

looking back to Bullough's fog, the dreadful experience that one might make of being

stuck far out at sea in the midst of a heavy fog...it becomes all the more emotional and

meaningful *because* of one's experience of it through themselves. And perhaps that is

exactly why we often go throughout our lives in this way; to see ourselves in the world is

to better *feel* ourselves in it as well. This way in which we color our own experiences is

amazing - but it comes so easily to us. With this in mind, I suppose I have intended to

make the importance of doing just the opposite clear - what does not come so naturally

to us. The sense of wonder that I have been reaching for is one that takes root far

beyond the self and it's own affections...it is born in and of what we are able to make of

our experiences when we allow them to be what they are in their own right - *without* the

reflection of our own selves staring right back at us.

Yet another counter-argument, one that provides an evolutionary account of humanity's sense of wonder, comes from Richard Dawkins (within Robert Fuller's *Wonder: From Emotion to Spirituality*). It seems right to first begin with the ways in which Dawkins' conception of wonder is far different than my own; "Dawkins, moreover, is specifically interested in the origins and function of what he calls humanity's 'appetite for wonder'. He accounts for wonder by noting that 'it is as if the nervous system is turned at successive hierarchical levels to respond strongly to the unexpected, weakly or not at all to the expected'. [Wonder's] primary function is to intensify our cognitive response to the world" (Fuller, 58). Though we perhaps may agree that wonder does allow for some change and/or intensification in our response to the external world, Dawkins posits that it only comes about in response to something particularly surprising or extraordinary. I, on the other hand, have spent the entirety of my writing in support of a sense of wonder that is evoked by the most common, quotidian, "*unspectacular*" facets of our everyday lives - and of course, the profound value that comes along with experiencing the world in such a way. Though Dawkins - keeping to his evolutionary perspective - most likely would not agree with my notion of wonder, perhaps our varying conditions of it might be more worth overlooking if he, at the very least, gave it the esteem that it surely deserves. "We are told [by Dawkins] that humans

'have an appetite for wonder...which real science ought to be feeding (rather than being fed by religious superstitions)'. Thus, while Dawkins recognizes the central importance of humanity's 'appetite for wonder' in guiding us to productive relationships with the world, he believes that wonder has no normative value for this unless it eventuates in scientific rationality" (Fuller, 58). Beyond just his narrow conception of wonder, we see here how Dawkins *also* limits the value of wonder within only the scientific realm. In not only stripping wonder of its potential to be experienced beyond just the surprising or "extraordinary", but *also* stripping it of its promise to facilitate all kinds of thinking and feeling (*beyond* just scientific rationality), I fear that Dawkins just might exemplify the sort of technological thinking that I previously gave an account of. Outside of scientific knowledge - calculable, profitable, scientific "progress" - Dawkins does not recognize what we might make of our sense of wonder. He allows no space for the *poietic* letting-be of what already is, and instead, he calls for (an all too familiar) rationalization of what we come into contact with throughout the world around us.

To just momentarily step away from wonder, I find that perhaps one of the most significant points of my writing as a whole is the way in which I feel we must (especially now, of all times) become more aware and mindful of our relationship to the world around us. Whether it is the way in which one treats a friend or passes by a stranger, the

attention one pays to the plants in their house or the question that a young child asks...these interactions/relationships/experiences and the grace - the *wonder*! - that we have while carrying them out, I believe, says so much about us as people. Perhaps what my real point is, is that there is a deep, strong tie between how we act in our everyday lives (even within the most insignificant of actions) and who we are, at the core, as people. Despite how trivial the way in which one acts among a stranger, a plant, or a young child in passing may seem, I insist, wholeheartedly, that we show our truest of selves throughout these correspondences with elements of the world around us. The attention we pay to given things, how we *think* about these things, how we *act* with them - it is all informed by the kind of people that we are. As I have obviously made clear at this point, our hearts and minds are reflected in all that we do - so I suppose, at the very least, I am calling for some reconsideration of how it is that I - how it is that *you* - turn to the world around me - around *us*. What do we make of the small joys within everyday life...are we even noticing them? And how could we, in opening up our attentiveness and changing the way we understand and act among the world, become truly better, more moral people? Though I have tried my best to answer such questions, if I have not entirely succeeded in doing so, I can happily accept that at the very least I got you, as

my reader, to ponder these questions, and maybe even come to some answers of your

own.

As Sophia Vasalou promptly states in her *Wonder: A Grammar*, "thinking it is one

of the few means by which one might hope to retain it" (1). I think I can say, with

certainty, that that is what I have done here - and hopefully, in your reading of it, such

thinking of wonder, and in turn, the preservation of it, has been passed onto you - *into*

you - in some way. I would be lying if I said that this has not all been nearly

excruciatingly difficult to write about - in both the best and worst of ways. Wonder is an

experience - a sense - like no other, and it has proven to be one of the most (nearly)

inexpressible joys to attempt to put into writing. I hope you know what I have meant in

my contention that we must recognize the separate, individual, amazingness of all

creatures and things that make up our daily lives to ever *really, truly* know and appreciate

them. I hope you know what I have meant when I allude to the gaze that one can

sometimes take to the world, as if peering through the looking-glass of childhood. I

hope you know what I now mean when I say that all we have is who we are, *how* we are,

in our everyday lives. The wonders that you notice and delight in today might just be the

very last that you come across - or perhaps, they will have the chance to better shape the

way you think and go about something significant tomorrow. Though I began my

writing in fear, I now end it in peace. I feel more certain than ever that I have it in me -

that you have it in *you* - to unendingly feel enchanted by the shadows, the songs, the

sparkles of dust, the blooming flowers, the smell of a book, the breath of a friend, the

loss of a lover, the clouds in the sky, the creases in your hands, the roll of a fog...here is

to wonder, in each and every one of its forms that it may come to us within, day after

day after day; here is to being better *because* of it.

"... in the fullest bloom of pure being, even our sense of self is shouldered aside. We *forget ourselves*, lose ourselves. We become mere *experiencers*. We encounter selfless states of pure being. Such states can also bring us to the very lip of volcanic euphoria - or flood us with deep contentment, or make us (briefly) one with the universe and show us a spark, gleam, glimpse, or lightning flash of what is meant by 'God'."
-David Gelernter, *Tides of Mind*, 31
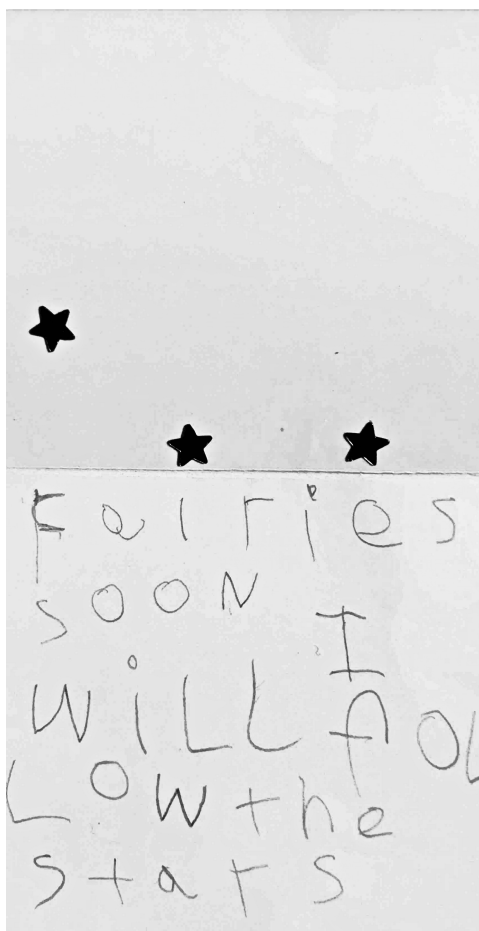
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