Abstractions are everywhere. They fill the air. Abstractions can belong to the realm of the pure imagination. They can inspire wonderment. And yet they can also summon forth the most terrifying gods and empires of worldly destruction. Abstraction becomes apparent every single time an original thought is birthed. It is also apparent in the conceptual delivery of each and every philosophical claim. There are no metaphysical principles without the abstractions from which they emerge. We cannot think without them. They are the energy defining our existence. Without abstractions, we are reduced to the mere biological fact of being or sometimes in the darker moments of history even less so. Everything in these base-level terms is simplified and reduced to the question of pure survival. Hence, mindfully thwarting the attempted destruction of the human as abstractedly conceived, humanity has continually aspired to become worthy of the abstractions of its own devising. How often do we wish to live up to the expectations of our impossible dreams? And how often do we torment ourselves when the reality of the vision doesn’t match expectations? We live through and are governed by the abstractions of our impositions and choosing. Belongings, borders, beliefs; they all appear as abstractions before they are consecrated in the corporeal realms of the symbolic real.
Abstractions are in fact what purposefully separates us as humans. Only the human is capable of conceiving of the abstract in thought and deeds. It is the only life form we know that intentionally imagines beyond itself. That was what made us exceptional. That was until now.

Ever since Plato ventured into the dark and illusionary metaphorical cave, political philosophers have debated the distinction between the abstract and the real. Plato for his part actively mobilised the shadows, recruiting their phantoms in his scathing attack on artistic pursuits\(^1\). Often separated in thinking, these concepts have given rise to fundamental debates between fiction and truth, imagination and science, madness and civility, chaos and security, along with deeper questions concerning absence and presence. But the abstract offers not only answers and permits imaginative explorations at the same time; it is also capable of merging the internal and external complex processes of life we humans have been exploiting throughout our existence – processes which we call “creation”. Moreover, despite a brief moment in history where European abstract expressionism was brought into direct conflict with the forces of historical fascism, there has been an overriding tendency to see the abstract as either some dangerous distraction or the hidden force that makes all violence and oppression possible. But the abstract is not something modern or fashionable, much less simple. We see this in earlier debates concerning the abstract nature of religion and its demands for sacrifice, onto the theorisations of Karl Marx (1857) who in the *Grundrisse* declared, ‘individuals are now ruled by abstractions whereas earlier they had depended on one another. The abstraction, or idea, however, is nothing more than the theoretical expression of those material relations which are their lord and master’\(^2\). A concern that would later be addressed specifically in the terms of “violence” and its relation to historical materialism\(^3\). This concern with the abstract has more recently been picked up by Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2002, 16) who defined racism as ‘a practice of abstraction, a death-dealing displacement of difference into hierarchies that organize relations within and between the planet’s sovereign political territories’. We don’t deny the abstract can be appropriated and turned back upon itself by the ever-changing mechanics of calculative thinking and its modalities of control. Nor do we deny the

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\(^1\) Plato’s most scathing critique of poetry and the arts appears in *Republic* X. A digitalised version is available here: [http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.11.x.html](http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.11.x.html)

\(^2\) This quote comes from “Notebook 1: The Chapter on Money”. A reprint is available online here: [https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch03.htm](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch03.htm)

For a good overview of Marx concerns with abstraction see Best (2010)

\(^3\) See Sayer (1987)
abstract can become a formidable mythical excess capable of totalising claims over life and the future. After all, everybody is abstract, and all power is abstracting. But what matters politically and philosophically is the type of abstraction we are concerned with? Not all abstractions are the same. Indeed, since the dawn of philosophical time there has been a continued battle taking place over the meaning and the mastery of the abstract, which is inseparable from how we understand the value of life. Or to put it another way, if we start from the idea that everybody can make use of the abstract, indeed the abstract is key to any ethical claims we might have towards the other, “the stranger”, then its relation to the self and the horizon of infinite possibility allows us to focus our critique on those paths we have drawn in a movement that forecloses its freedom or seeks to turn the abstract into an enslaving machine.

Mindful of the deep philosophical stakes here, let’s start our concern literally at the beginning, so to speak. In Ancient Greek mythology, everything was said to begin out of a state of sheer emptiness. Preceding the creation of the universe, this original scene is what we will elected here to call “the void”. This was also seen by the Greeks in this primordial state as a realm of chaos. Kháos (χάος) refers here to a rupture in time, the nether abyss and infinite darkness before and yet beyond all being. The appearance of Gods would in turn promise to bring order to this chaos and to mitigate against its eventual return. From Zeus to Apollo, so the battle was always about managing the chaos that was now condemned to the underworld, while unleashing the forces for violence from time to time. This idea would be later picked up by Christian eschatology and its story of Genesis. There too the idea that everything emerges from nothing would be integral to narratives of creation. In both cases, the primordial wouldn’t refer to complete absence, but could be imagined in the form of some primordial darkness, primordial air or the primordial waters that birthed life. When we think of it, in many ways the latest thinking in the fields of quantum physics haven’t really moved too far from this original proposition⁴. Here, too, there is still a certain allegiance to the idea of the unknowable void out of which the universe and its galaxies are formed. Indeed, if it can be assumed that the original state to life is the beckoning void, what becomes the original state of creation has to be the scattering of yet to be formed energies across the darkened expanse. Such scattered energies in their

⁴ For an accessible overview on the relations between quantum physics and the concept of the void see Weatherall (2016)
atomised state are what we elect to call “abstract”. The abstract is the sum of all primordial energy, whose traces only become visible when the sands of time fall. To speak of the abstract then is to speak of the original appearance in the explosive forces that give rise to life. The abstract is the coming into being of things before they are named, formed and determined. It is the ephemeral dust (figure 1), which contains within the generative capacity to create infinite universes through its chaotic distributions, colliding energies and unpredictable events.

But if we understand this sequence to be the generative condition to acts of creation and originality, why do we deny it when it comes to thinking about history the value of political and philosophical life? Literary scholars and poets have been less deceived. To echo the poetic wisdom of the incomparable Samuel Beckett (1981, 31) from his most compelling engagement with the concept in his short novella *ill Seen, ill Said*:


While avoiding the void is the often-adopted approach for conventional political and philosophical theorists alike, deciding that since it literally gives us nothing it therefore has no value other than to point again to the spectre of a complete unknown⁵; humans have nevertheless sought to tame its emergent forces as they have been seduced by the lure of power, which have demanded appropriating the abstract so that its force and its will might be imposed upon all other things – humans included. So, if the void is the original scene and the abstract the original appearance, the name we give to the mastery of both – the will to appropriate and harness the power of abstraction, is the sacred⁶. After all, how we might give meaning to the primordial void of existence is the basis for all religion. It is also the will to every claim to order and the hidden terror, which has driven the immortality complexes of every deluded human who believes they can use the sacred to defeat the voiding of life. Moreover, how we might learn to steer the creative energies of the abstract for the purposes of such theologies has also been the order of progress. Marx was certainly correct on that

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⁵ Mapping out this history and taking up this challenge on the philosophical question of nothing, see the brilliant short essay by Davis (2021)

⁶ These relations between the void and the sacred have been dealt with extensively elsewhere. See Evans (2021)
count. Such power we maintain is only made possible through the technologization of the abstract, what amounts to the complex instrumentalization of the poetic sensibility. No surprise that the history of the sacred is also a history of sacrificing the poets of history. Something Plato played his important part in instigating out of a reasoned scientific pursuit. The stake for this battle then is not simply a revolution in the fight for established power. It is a revolution in the fabric of time itself. There is as such still an alternative history of the abstract yet to be told.

Before detailing this history, let’s offer more clarity in terms of the key definitions. As mentioned, what we understand to mean the abstract belongs to the real of pure potentiality. It is the sum of all hidden potentiality that resides upon the infinite space of the void. The abstract is the unmediated idea before its defined. It is pre-grammatical, pre-figurative and pre-descriptive. It is nevertheless full of primary movements and intensities, which are yet to figure into the realm of reasoning. Understood this way, the abstract could also be named the ineffable, the virtual, the chaosphere, the haecceity or the exceptional. Crucially, it is within the abstract where we encounter the creation of the multiple “abstractions”, which influence, shape and govern all human life. Such abstractions often first appear to us as concepts. These may be affirmative concepts such as freedom and justice, or they may be totalising concepts such as a God, Ideology or Nation. What marks the latter in particular is effectively the aspiration to become “the definitive abstract”. The definitive abstract is the “One” – the immersive and folding projection of all given truths. Such abstractions seek to replace the multiplicity of the infinite with a singular infinite. Everything, in other words, can be reasoned and explained by connecting to a totalising abstraction, which appears to be inseparable from the abstract ideal. If you are feeling lonely, it’s because you don’t have God in your life. If you want security and freedom, give yourself over to the Nation. And so, on and so on. There are three points to further make here, 1) while these abstractions in their primary state are largely ephemeral, that doesn’t mean to say their expressions lack visibility. Indeed, we are in partial agreement here with Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, who insisted that the lines of the art-abstract are the most primary expressions we know (figure 2). As they wrote in their Thousand Plateaus (2002, 496-497):
‘It is [Wilhelm] Worringer who accorded fundamental importance to the abstract line, seeing it as the very beginning of art or the first expression of an artistic will. Art as abstract machine. Once again, it will doubtless be our inclination to voice in advance the same objections: for Worringer, the abstract line seems to make its first appearance in the crystalline or geometrical imperial Egyptian form, the most rectilinear of forms possible. It is only afterward that it assumes a particular avatar, constituting the “Gothic or Northern line” understood very broadly. For us, on the other hand, the abstract line is fundamentally “Gothic,” or rather nomadic, not rectilinear. Consequently, we do not understand the aesthetic motivation for the abstract line in the same way, or its identity with the beginning of art. Whereas the rectilinear (or “regularly” rounded) Egyptian line is negatively motivated by anxiety in the face of all that passes, flows, or varies, and erects the constancy and eternity of an In-itself, the nomad line is abstract in an entirely different sense, precisely because it has a multiple orientation and passes between points, figures and contours: it is positively motivated by the smooth space it draws, not by any striation it might perform to ward off anxiety and subordinate the smooth. The abstract line is the affect of smooth spaces, not a feeling of anxiety that calls forth striation. Furthermore, although it is true that art begins only with the abstract line, the reason is not, as Worringer says, that the rectilinear is the first means of breaking with the nonaesthetic imitation pf nature upon which the prehistoric, savage, and childish supposedly depend, lacking as he thinks they do, a “will to art”. On the contrary, if prehistoric art is fully art it is precisely because it manipulates the abstract, through non-rectilinear, line: “Primitive art begins with the abstract, and even the prefigurative… Art is abstract from the outset, and at its origin could not have been otherwise”. The abstract line is at the beginning as much because of its historical abstraction as its prehistoric dating. It is therefore part of the originality and irreducibility of nomad art, even when there is reciprocal interaction, influence, and confrontation with the imperial lines of sedentary art’.
Where we do however depart from Deleuze & Guattari is in their insistence on the language of “the machine”. In their corpus, everything is machinic: art machines, war machines, sex machines, and so forth. To our minds, despite their poetic sensibilities, this language remains too technical and instrumentalising.  
2) Even if such abstractions begin by operating across the ephemeral spaces between life, that doesn’t mean they are in any way divorced from reality and its material effects. We might think here of the example of death, which is as real as any material concern humans care to share. Death is biologically certain. And yet conceptually, without death there would be no philosophy, no metaphysics, no conception of time, no mediations on life, no infinite demand to reach beyond7. Death is as much an abstraction as it is a truism on the nature of the human condition. We might also say the same of other forces, which have been central to the formations of life. Take fire as another meaningful example. We know how the element has been central to the story of human evolution. But we also know how it has inspired the most abstract and yet vivid of tales8. Fire in all its beautiful abstractions lovingly dances before us in ways more poetic than Plato ever conceived. 3) While in their primary state it is possible to distinguish between affirmative and totalising abstractions, in this moment the latter still retain the capacity for freedom. Their meaning is far from settled. They retain something of the intensity of abstract potentiality. The truth of the God may be uncertain and its reach into the minds of people far from determined. Nevertheless, the intention is already there to instigate a power move to become the definitive abstract. And it is precisely this intention to take hold of pure potentiality where violence first marks its conceptual entry. What we can refer to as being the “original violence” is precisely the attempt to become the abstract by replacing the infinite with a determinable account of the sacred.

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7 The most celebrated articulation of this position is found in the work of Martin Heidegger, notably his Being & Time (1962). The importance of this has been neatly summarized by Simon Critchley (2009), who observed: “This is what Heidegger famously calls “being-towards-death”. If our being is finite, then an authentic human life can only be found by confronting finitude and trying to make a meaning out of the fact of our death. Heidegger subscribes to the ancient maxim that “to philosophise is to learn how to die”. Mortality is that in relation to which we shape and fashion our selfhood. There are four rather formal criteria in Heidegger's conception of being-towards-death: it is non-relational, certain, indefinite and not to be outstripped”.

8 On this see especially Bachelard (1964; 1988; 1990)
Once the abstraction is set and opened to the impositions of power, it is here we encounter the attempts to materialise properly its potentiality. These impositions may have gone by many different names (foundationalism, the concrete, the real, sedentarisation, sedimentation, territorialisation, the objective, idealism, the figurative, positivism), but the shared desired outcomes were always the same. Namely, to harness the power of abstraction and steer its vital energies in a particular direction, so that it becomes possible to settle the definitive meaning of the abstract and ensure everything can be internalised within its imaginary. Such abstractions are besieging and beseeching. They compel allegiance, unto death. This is where “the technical” makes its entry. What we refer to as being the technical here are not simply the machines humans produce. The technical is mode of thinking and practice – a form of political and philosophical arithmetic, whose technologizing calculations are put into service for a notion of truth in order to tame the poetic fires and close off the very uncharted ground that makes thinking and truth possible in the first instance. Its measures are determined to make the world of abstraction determinable. Technology as such appears here as a profoundly ontological phenomenon. At its machinic heart, remains the questions of being and its effective mastery as written in the name of life necessity. Understood this way, this secondary order of abstraction – where its power has been colonised by humanity’s technical thinking can be properly termed “subtractive abstractions”. Through the technical, so the creative and unbounded energies of life can be limited, and its excessive potentialities subtracted. With every question now fully answerable by drawing reference to the singular abstract, what follows is a mobilisation of the power of abstraction for definitive political ends.

It is at this point we invariably turn to Martin Heidegger’s (1977) landmark text, A Question Concerning Technology. The crux of the problem as Heidegger saw it was relatively straightforward. ‘We shall never experience our relationship to the essence of technology’, he wrote, ‘so long as we merely conceive and push forward the technological, put up with it, or evade it. Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it’ (1977, 278). Crucially, for Heidegger, since the essence of technology is not technological, it’s possible to pose the question concerning its meaning in a way that precedes the historical emergence of concrete forms of technological machines, which subsequently exploded (quite literally) following the advent of industrialisation in the eighteenth and
nineteenth centuries. In short, technology was more a philosophical problem than it was for the technocratic experts, the scientists or the anthropologists. To explain this philosophical demand, Heidegger begins by drawing attention to the ancient Greek word for technology, “Tecknikon”, which the philosopher notes was in its earlier conception’s inseparable from ideas on the poetic. “Techne”, he noted, was the name proper for activities that were not only technical or instrumentalising but belonged to the realm of the arts. It belonged to a ‘bringing-forth, to poiesis; it is something poetic’ (1977, 13). Such understanding is revealing insomuch as it allows us to see how the poetic roots of technology have been subsequently colonised by forces of mechanisation, which continue to compel us to harness nature’s energy into some massified homogeneous reserve. Human life thus appears merely as a resource, as exploitable as the mineral’s technologies enable us to extract from the earth, which has forgotten its ancestral roots in artistry and poetics. For Heidegger, where we have gone wrong then when it comes to technology is all about its “enframing”, which instead of connecting to the rich history of the arts, gives itself over instead to the power of measurement and calculation. Such an orientation means we need to recover a moment in history when art was equally as important as technology. Art in fact becomes the way we properly understand our connectedness to being, which both poetic and technical, reveals a new ethics which is more about a giving than exploiting, hence truer to our self and truer to the world, allows for new ways of seeing outside of the frames that contain us (Figure 3).
But let’s not also forget here that Heidegger wasn’t a lover of all things Greek. His disdain for Plato in particular is well noted, especially when it comes to poetics. It is worth reminding here that it was with ‘Plato’s continual attacks on poetry, especially the final and complete exclusion of poets’ (Partee 1970, 209) in Book X of the Republic, where we first encounter the sense of a division between the poetic and the technical. A pivotal rupture thus emerges through the Platonic doctrine of Forms, which identifies three clear realms of reality: ‘the gods, the carpenters, and the painters’ (Partee 1970, 217). Central to Plato’s understating is the notion that “the idea” belongs to the realm of the suprasensible or should we say, it belongs a force that exists above and beyond human life. We humans, then, through our productive efforts, try to reproduce the idea (which is given to us from above) through forms of re-presentation. While no doubt productive, human life still imitates the suprasensible, which should aspire to the good and the true. This is the basis of humanity’s mimetic condition, seeking as we do to live up to the original idea or principle. As Michael Taussig (1993, xiii) noted, the mimetic faculty refers us to ‘the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and
become Other. The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power’. Using the example of a bed, Plato developed his mimetic theory to develop both a theory of the virtuous and to also question the ethics of the poets, thereby affirming in the process the importance of the technocrats. The narrative is also very straightforward. The god, or divine maker, represents originality as they bring into being the form of the bed. The carpenter then proceeds to reproduce this form, copying its shape and design. Lastly, the painter arrives on the scene, already two steps removed and mimics the copy through their own subjective interpretations. Thus, the work of the artist is three steps removed – the imitation of the imitation – from the essential nature of the truth. What really concerns here is not the ‘abuse of the emotions, but a ‘confusing of the intellect’. Through art, humans do nothing more than deceive themselves. For Plato then, poetry, although beautiful, ‘had to be banished from the well-run state for its ethical as well as for its intellectual dangers’ (Partee 1970, 221). It was quite simply an abstract deception, which detracted from the true value productions capable of engineering something truthful through close approximation. Heidegger is therefore correct to bring Plato to task, for he undoubtedly begins the process where art is merely reduced to aesthetics, which in turn occludes the true importance, value and meaning for art that cannot be tabulated.

Despite our many agreements with Heidegger’s artistic demand and his anti-Platonic positioning in respect to the suprasensible Idea and its claims to truth, we might however temper our enthusiasm for his interventions on two counts. Firstly, rather than critiquing technology, what Heidegger’s search for the “essence” demands is a more certain, grounded and truthful account of the technological, which is fully at one with beingness. As he wrote, ‘what is decisive in techné does not at all lie in making and manipulating, nor in the using of means, but rather in the revealing mentioned before. It is as revealing, and not as manufacturing, that techné is a bringing-forth… Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where alétheia, truth, happens’. We recognise no such essence to being. Nor do we seek to return to a more truthful account of technology, which might allow us to reformulate a more definitive truth about humanity and the progress of the species through a better mastery of technical devices. And secondly, we note how Heidegger was deeply suspicious of the abstract, seeing it in fact as something which takes us away from the very essence of being and
merely serves to uphold some false unity and mystical claims to the absolute. Being in fact is the furthest away from abstraction, for true thinking lies in ‘something lying near, that which lies nearest’ (Heidegger 1977, 111), which in virtue of a certain proximity, still remains hidden in plain sight from us. This demands a more grounded notion of artistic beingness that’s vigilant to the conditions of the real. While Heidegger is notably taking aim here at what we refer to as being the secondary order of abstraction – a suspicion in both mythical thinking and its devastating effects we share, that there may be something more original to the abstract runs counter to his entire ontological project. This in turn means undoing the Heideggerian idea that art “grounds history” by “allowing truth to spring forth” (Heidegger 1971, 77). Or if we do recognise the primacy of art, which is always a form of poetry, it’s never for such a foundational concretion, but to shatter with artistic fury Urizen’s stone (Figure 4).


Staying with Plato for a moment, we also know how the history of art is seen as literally inseparable from the spatial figuration of the cave. They are said in fact to be the sites where the first experience of art takes
place\textsuperscript{9}. This may be true; though the reasons why such art takes place need not necessarily be tied to narratives of survival. Indeed, what’s often striking about early cave depictions is the primacy of movement. Hunters, wild animals, or even indecipherable lines which follow no evident trajectory, all appear to be momentarily caught in the act, while literally promising the vanish from sight at any given moment. If the history of art is painfully misunderstood when explained through the logic of mimesis, so it is also painfully misunderstood if simply tied to reductive tales of human survival. This is perhaps the most pernicious and enduring legacy of Plato’s allegory. We might already have enough suspicions with Plato in his antipathy to the Sophists and those with a more poetic sensibility, especially concerning tragedy. As Simon Critchley (2019, 137) wrote, ‘Tragedy presents a conflictually constituted world defined by ambiguity, duplicity, uncertainty, and unknowability, a world that cannot be rendered rationally fully intelligible through some metaphysical first principle or set of principles, axioms, tables of categories, or whatever. Tragedy is the experience of transcendental \textit{opacity}. As such, the experience of tragedy poses a most serious objection to that invention we call philosophy. It is not surprising, then, that the best-known example of Plato’s philosophical invention that we possess—the \textit{Republic}—should turn on a refutation and refusal of tragedy’.

But what’s also at stake here, is the question of Art. ‘The claim is that the mimetic artist cannot attain to the being of the thing that is depicted’, Critchley (2019, 163) adds, ‘it’s \textit{eidos}, and consequently because that which is true is only that which has being, the artwork is untrue. In this way, what Heidegger describes in his \textit{Nietzsche} as “the raging discordance between art and truth” opens up’. And it is for this very reason – the failure to account for the originality and radicality of art, that so irked Nietzsche who famously sought to destroy the Platonic image of thought. As Nietzsche wonders, ‘behind each of his caves’ whether there lies ‘another, deeper cave – a stranger, more comprehensive world beyond the surface, an abyss behind every ground, beneath every “foundation”’\textsuperscript{10}. It is, in short, to search for a different theory of the image beyond the theory of mimesis, which from Plato onwards has been upheld in order to approximate, invoked in order to deny, advanced in order to relegate, insisted upon in order to rightfully condemn.

\textsuperscript{9} In the search for the earliest traces of human civilisation, it is often art which becomes the principal focus and even competition amongst anthropologists. While emerging as a notable concern in the 1950s, the most recent claim on the links between art and cave dwelling existence relates to findings in Sulawesi, Indonesia. On this see, Brumm et. al. (2021)

\textsuperscript{10} Nietzsche, \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}(289)
Before moving on, there’s an important caveat that also needs to be acknowledged here concerning the links between abstraction and technology. Throughout history, humans in their states of abstraction have imagined themselves to be the sole possessors of metaphysical thinking. If there was a uniqueness to human life in the animal kingdom, it was the ability we possess alone to imagine abstraction as real. Or it was to at least conceive of the abstract in order think that we were more than merely human. And so, while the technical intervention certainly wages war on the poetic, we can agree with Heidegger that it didn't wish to do away with the abstract or lose command of its authority and articulations. On the contrary, it was driven by the desire to truly master its energy. Something that's all too apparent in the tyrannical suprasensible thinking of Immanuel Kant. As we will later argue, what’s different, indeed defining of the contemporary moment, is how this sole possession of the abstract is now being put into crisis and in fact given over to a more supreme being that no longer simply resides in the minds of humans, which is threatening to be the most pressing extinction event we collectively face. Of course, it is true that humans have always imagined and created formidable totalising abstractions that were far more powerful than they. Gods, Nations, Ideologies, all take the form of the one definitive suprasensible principle, which encloses, guides and helps nurture the creative energies of its wilfully subsumed subjects. But what ultimately defined and limited these abstractions was that they were fully created, and their destinies controlled by the authors of their own making: the human imagination. In this new age of machinic intelligence, it is precisely the creative authorship of the abstract which is on the line.

Let’s now turn our attention to the most dominant abstract machines throughout history. The birth of abstract appropriation begins with the God—abstract. Appearing in many different guises across the world, the naming of Gods becomes humanity’s unbridled attempt to come to terms with the realisation this world had no reason to ever want or ever need its presence. The world has always been indifferent to the plight of humans. Being thrown out of the void and down upon the terrestrial plane – the topos of the encounter as Heidegger would explain it - so we earthlings would scramble around for meaning until we eventually found solace in the metaphysical stars (or so our natural history of violence tells us). This would give rise to the great monothetic religions, all of which insisted that the one-true God remained unknowable, unseeable, untouchable, and yet undeniable. But in order for the miracle to be felt, there was a need for the
presence of an abstract God to be evidenced to the beckoning earthly followers. Such a sacred demand
instantiated the necessary for sacrifice to show allegiance to God’s power, and in the process, prove the
very metaphysical truth of its glorious being. Often this would be realised through the most brutal acts of
violence, which could, without contradiction, be narrated as both proof of love and the need for the sacred
to regulate the violence of men. Nowhere was this more apparent than with the body of Christ who became
the ultimate sacred victim. But like all religions, Christianity needed to ensure the power of the abstract
was regulated. That Christ might be seen as a transgressive poet or revolutionary would be cast side by
the notion that while the power of an abstract God, including his love and justice were infinite, the human
capacity for imagination must be put to use in his name, thus respecting the limits of his truth. Operating
within these limits, Christianity would however bring about its own lasting revolution. From Genesis
onward (figure 5), so the question of power would be primarily shaped by the question of time. The power
of the abstract in fact would be tied evermore to a temporal framing of life wherein the question of existence
reaches beyond here and now. If the original scene remained beyond all comprehension, at least the future
could be imagined in both its heavenly and hellish states. Indeed, following Dante’s own exhausting
traversal into the depths of the earthly abyss, so the idea of life as being indebted to the future for the sake
of its own salvation became an integral part of the political imaginary.

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11 On the importance of sacrifice here, we must continue to consider the work of Rene Girard and his landmark text Violence & the Sacred (2005).
12 On this see Evans (2021, 39-73)
13 The idea that Christ was a revolutionary poet was forcefully advanced by Oscar Wilde [1897] (2013) in De Profundis. For a more recent take on
this see Aslan, Zealot (2013)
What the advent of the monotheistic God introduced was the **inverted abstract**, which was born of a completed notion of time. History could be presented as some natural unfolding, even if making the abstract sacred was up to the various decisions the religious subject made through the indescribable invisible power felt inside and outside, while still retaining something of the mystery providing that its imaginations didn't transgress the idea of God itself. Calculated interventions in turn would be required to simply reveal the intended laws of nature\(^{14}\). The abstract thus became the source of a sublime trembling. That was the limit. And that was also the birth of the idea of what more fully became the colonial imaginary. Colonial racism was and remains a continuation of religious war. It exported European notions of the sacred and fused them together with global plunder and violence. With the abstract colonised, it might flourish, and the political, philosophical and cultural imagination let loose, provided it operated within the boundaries of the ecclesiastical time. Appreciating the idea of the inverted abstract is crucial here to our lasting concerns. As religious wars shaped and defined the affairs of human life, so the abstract would become inseparable from various techniques for intervening upon the souls of the living for the sake of their own salvation. Moreover, it is the dawn of the inverted abstract that strips abstraction of its original poetic meaning, which in turn

\(^{14}\) Such power has been brilliantly illustrated in Agamben (2011)
means it becomes devoid of its own particular meaning and inner truth. What becomes of the poetic fire is taken over by the daemonic vision of hell. Moreover, if anything could now become abstract, that it could literally mean anything and nothing, so it followed that the abstract needed to be authenticated by power precisely because of its inherent dangerous potentialities. Nevertheless, what haunted such power was the fundamental maxim that the only thing that is able to kill and abstract idea was another abstraction. And so, it proved to be.

God is dead. And he remains dead. Nietzsche’s declaration brought critical force to bear upon the dominance of the God-abstract. This wouldn't however be the end of the story concerning abstract appropriation. On the contrary, as the philosopher noted, no sooner had God been put to death by our own murderous knives, humans would invent new sacred games quickly assuming position of God in this world. In many ways, the position of the God-abstract was already transferred into the body politic itself, notably invested in a notable secularisation of an all too theological concept – the Sovereign—abstract. The idea of sovereignty has represented the most formidable of mythical creations. It is also a power that has reached into the infinite, forever presenting itself as timeless in the moment of its appearance. But with the advent of the sovereign-abstract, so we found ourselves confronting a monumental dilemma: unification, the unification of forms and modes of being in this world would prove to be very far, if not altogether removed, from the original understanding of the abstract. This could only be overcome through a naked appeal to raw and unimaginable power.

Hobbes Leviathan would become the surest embodiment of this idea. Here we have the abstract turned into an omnipresent force; its embodied and grounded form magnificently violent as the abstract claim to its unrivalled power can be seen physically emerging from the waters of history to tower over a wretched earth. But even here sovereignty begins as an abstract idea tasked with bringing order to the chaotic nature of human affairs. It belongs to the realm of artifice, as Hobbes himself would narrate. Recognising then nomadic subjectivities as a primary condition for human life (a proposition that would be central to the
thinking of Deleuze and Guattari in their conception of *Nomadology*\(^{15}\), it calls upon some claim to mythical unity in order to fold the abstract back in upon itself through the artificial construction of borders, which are as imagined as they are real. Crossing such borders, especially in the absence of any visible barrier, can often feel surreal and yet most revealing when considering the arbitrary designs for power. Indeed, the policing of such borders as any travellers learns, subsequently depends upon the power of a number of abstractly conceived technical devices, which can now service the abstract Sovereign machine. We encounter these in many guises, from the invisible force of law, to wider and more seductive appeals to constructs such as “the people”, “rights”, “identity” and “homelands”. So just as the body of Christ in its material form was necessary to give sure testament to the God-abstract, so the power of the Sovereign-abstract would also need to display its own concrete symbols of power. How little difference there really is then in the construction of temples of worship and parliaments for the multitudes?

While the divine right of Kings already put in place the idea that humans might rival God as the supreme source of authority in the world (albeit with their power derived from the abstract passage between heavenly and earthly rule), it was its morphing into the modern Nation state, which proved to be decisive in vanquishing monotheistic supremacy. The myth was to be recast through the no less theological belief in the secular imagined community\(^{16}\). While the glue that held these communities together was identity politics, it would take something far more powerful than symbolic accoutrements to compel lasting allegiance. This is not to say identity doesn't matter. The politics of identity has and continues to rely upon its abstract claims to some righteous unity of the species in order to pull everything into its inverted abstractions, which can also be imaged as real and truthful at the point of its consecration (and also critically denied as in the case of “whiteness” today). But more was needed if the metaphysical claim could also deal with the incommensurable void. This would be achieved through reworking the sacrificial, as the sacred object for power shifted from the body of Christ onto the body of the military hero, whose beautiful death could be appropriated to further uphold the mythical truth. But like Christianity, modernity also brought a further revolution, which was equipped with their own abstract powers of reasoning. Economy became the rule. This would give rise to the great ideological wars based on universalising ideas of history and progress.

\(^{15}\) Deleuze & Guattari (2002, 351-421)

\(^{16}\) On the idea of the imagined community, see Anderson (2006)
It would also accelerate the importance of time. Indeed, the measure of time would be now defined by its accelerations. However, while the logic of capitalism in particular further made the abstract all the more insidious to the conduct of human affairs, resulting in Marxists continuing to focus their critique on the abstract nature of money (notably by those who turned to the power of the credit and speculative economy to create systems of financial abstraction and an even more pernicious debt-bondage) (Graeber, 2014), it was always known that capital alone was incapable of unifying life. It may seduce the masses at an individual level through its promises of enrichment. But the individual allure of wealth needed political liberalism to justify moral inclusiveness, which would do so by effectively collapsing the political into the economic.

Liberal humanism was however never universally accepted. Throughout the 20th Century, while many critical scholars in fact noted how its attempts to govern global populations was less about political emancipation than to allow for the liberation of free markets, we might also further consider how it also led to forms of depoliticization through a reduction of life to biotechnology. This brings us back to the second modality of rule, which became all the more apparent with the resultant triumph of liberalism – the question of technology. While the critique of technology as mentioned can be traced back to the birth of philosophical enquiry, it is with the advent of the Liberal—abstract that its presence becomes inseparable from political and philosophical enquiry. This would become all the more apparent with the fetishization of technology, which increasingly defined the modern liberal condition from the late 1960’s onwards. Guy DeBord’s (1994) Society of the Spectacle proved to be notably prophetic in this regard. Indeed, in a globally ambitious post-war moment in which liberal powers needed to find novel ways of bypassing sovereign integrities, we would also see the emergence of the new scared object for liberal power to compliment technologies for rule: - namely, the body of the victim. This would be crucial to advancing the liberal will to rule by allowing actors to position themselves as the moral voice for truth and justice on account of a mythical demand to speak and act on behalf of an endangered humanity. In order to defeat the abstract figure of the sovereignty, liberalism would summon the abstract figuration of humanity complete, which

17 On this see Virilio (2006)
18 This argument on this links between liberalism and biotechnology has been previously made in Evans (2013, 42-63)
provided a sufficient mythical basis to bypass previous concerns with territoriality. But while this abstract play was taking place in the public arena, behind the scenes the very idea of the political was being slowly colonised by the power of a technological will to rule that would eventually take over the ideological currents of liberalism itself. This would become all the more apparent once the digital and information communications revolutions fully took hold, which were widely celebrated by the bourgeois liberal classes who could now imagine the entire world within their epistemological grasp. Others were less convinced. That we may be “ghosts in a machine” continually living out some simulacrum of experience, actively desiring our digitalised surveillance, and giving ourselves over to a reality that only revealed itself through its integral accidents which exposed us most fully to the deserts of the real now firmly belonged to the realm of science fact.

If there is something that brings together the many disparate criticisms of these abstract systems and key to our continued concerns here, it is what we can term “the violence of abstraction”, which in short means the imposition of unseen forces upon the human that denies it being the author of its own poetic freedoms/abstractions beyond the technologization of rule. Crucially, while abstraction is the term used to explain the existential force or idea that governs over the enslaved subject, what happens at the level of the human is actually a system of subtraction as the vitality of human life is subsumed. Abstraction and subtraction thus work together in a system of forced unification as the excessive nature of power absorbs and diminishes life as it is given over to something greater than the self. Metaphysical bonds are thus created between the violence of abstraction, which remains abstract in its presence (Gods, Nations, Humanity or the clouds today remain beyond material verification), and the violence of subtraction whose dehumanising effects can all too easily be detected and shamefully witnessed. The task of every sacred regime for power, in fact, remains to sever to known ties between the violence of abstraction and the violence of subtraction such that systemic complicity can be fully absolved. If there is violence, it does not belong to the order of the sacred, believers tell, it is merely the affairs of imperfect humans. Moreover, if something truly terrifying occurs, what’s really to blame is the technical details (ideology, distributions of power, juridical imperatives, the limits of reason, the failures of calculation) such that the enemy of the poetic abstract – the sacred order for power, can be presented as the humane solution. How often do we hear the claim that the
violence of technology is caused by a failure to recognise the sacredness of life? Or even how the void is really some sacred creative space? Just as humans would never give themselves over to power if it merely said no, neither would they give themselves over to the technologization of life were it not for some sacred claim.

Human bodies are abstract assemblages. We are just as fragmentary as the history that makes us part of its complex design. There is no such thing as a human being. There are only human becomings. We are undergoing constant change, adaptation and transformation. Our genesis is about excess, articulation, connection and subsumption by the worlds we have inhabited. But that still doesn't mean to say that humans are not unique or exceptional. We are “the human abstract” as William Blake maintained, but not only in some technological guise. Nor is the poetic escape as Blake surmised necessarily achieved by reimagining the divine so that we can recover something of the human out of its technological framing. What we do know is that singular bodies and societies as a whole cannot live without abstraction. This is not just about sacred meaning. Without the abstract, there is no imagination, no vision of the future, no theory of the creative, no possibility for the transgressive, no people who are yet to exist, no earth to come. What concerns then is the types of abstractions we are able to entertain and immerse ourselves within. There are abstractions which appear liberating and there are abstractions that seem inescapable. There are abstractions that affirm life and there are abstractions that contain and limit human potentiality. There are abstractions which are creative and there are abstractions which destroy any trace of the human. There are abstractions which are open to the infinite potentiality of life and there are abstractions which are limiting. There are abstractions that continue to precede markings of ascription and there are abstractions put to the service of identity politics. There are abstractions that break open worlds to imagine the new and there are abstractions that impose limit conditions. There are abstractions that take us into the intimate depths of life and there are abstractions that contain the suffering. There are abstractions that expose the wounds of life and there are abstractions that turn into self-flagellation. There are abstractions that jump into the void and there are abstractions that invoke only terror. There are abstractions that affirm the abstract in thought and there are abstractions that gospel for a universal truth. Hence, what’s really at stake in all this is ultimately a
fundamental battle between the poetic—abstract and the technical—abstract. Alongside religious war, this fight over the meaning of abstraction remains defining to the human condition.

Before finally confronting the death of liberalism, let’s consider more this question of technology and its violent effects. Shaped from its inception by the enlightenment ideas of development and progress, liberal societies were responsible for the ships that cargoed millions of slaves across the Atlantic; they were responsible developing killing at a distance; they were responsible for introducing the toxic use of gas into theatres of war; they were responsible for annihilating the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; they were responsible for the widespread militarisation of the world that allowed anti-socialist dictators to thrive; they were responsible for the high-tech bombardments on Iraq, Syria and Lebanon; they were responsible for the global refugee crisis this produced; and they were responsible for the hyper-technologization of war, from the introduction of unmanned aerial drones into the unregulated atmospheric shadows, onto the proliferation of planetary surveillance systems to map every possible human and inhuman terrain. Much of this is well documented. In fact, it is through exposing through this violence the myth of liberal universality (especially when it came to questions of security, rights and justice) that the project eventually imploded from within. But what concerns us is not just these explicitly violent episodes in the history of liberalism. It is the inner workings of its technologies for governing life, which waged its own war not only on illiberal ways of life and alternative claims to autonomy, but on the poetic imaginary writ large.

As is now well documented, this concern with technology has a considerable genealogy in the modernist tradition. Beginning with Nietzsche, it would subsequently resonate throughout the critical works of Max Weber, Heidegger, and Hannah Arendt to name a few. While Heidegger in particular is widely regarded to be the most influential theorist of technology who takes the debate well beyond the machines we produce or even the logics driving applied science and onto the questions of enframing and calculative thinking, it was Carl Schmitt who offered the most purposeful critique in respect to liberalism. Schmitt’s contribution was significant for a number of reasons, as he understood how technologically driven forms

19 For accessible introductions to Heidegger on this subject see Ihde (2010) and Wendland, Merwin & Hadjioannou (2019). For a considered engagement on the relationship between technology and critical thinking post-Heidegger, see Campbell (2011)
20 On Schmitt’s critique of the role technology plays within the liberal political imagination and its will to rule see McCormick (1997)
of oppression are neutralizing abstractions of equalization that are latent within liberal regimes of power. Related liberal oppression to the problem of the economization/securitization of life, such that the political gets infiltrated by technologized vision of being. Understood that technology referred to an entire ontological framework through which notions of political authentication take place. Appreciated how technological processes of authentication are of an entirely different nomos to that of law, so that juridical safeguards tell us nothing and offer no protections from those technologies which fixate on the qualitative and the particular. Paved the way for an understanding of technology that moving beyond mere scientism, so that the bio-affective dimensions to political manipulations are appreciated. Set out a framework so that juridical “states of exception” appear markedly different from economizing “states of emergency” which denote a more normal (though no less oppressive) state of political affairs. Despite our shared agreements here, there is however also an evident danger to thinking with Schmitt. Like Heidegger, we cannot avoid the fact that his intellectual journey was politically disastrous. His personal affinities with Nazism in particular make it extremely difficult to engage his ideas, especially when dealing with the reality of violence. One possible way of navigating through these troubled waters is to expose the fateful and misconceptions of his particular thought processes and his inability to reconcile with the poetic. While Schmitt sought to rework mythmaking in more concrete ways to antidote the abstract depoliticization of liberalism’s technical positivism that served only the bourgeois as he saw it, he actually ended up supporting his own bounded abstract regime, which became the master of the types of technologization and enclosed aestheticization of politics his work was so keen to warn against. A contradiction that was already anticipated by Walter Benjamin. Serving as a prophetic warning against the restorative project of Schmitt, which invoked and rested upon a dangerously bounded juridical notion of the exception, the fall into fascism, as Benjamin observed, showed how aestheticization of politics collapsed the mythical fully into the sacred, without ultimately questioning the importance of a technologically driven modernity as war reigns supreme: ‘The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life. The violation of the masses, whom Fascism, with its Fuhrer cult, forces to its knees, has its counterpart in the violence of an apparatus which is pressed into the production of ritual values... All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war... “Fiat ars – pereat mundus” says Fascism, and... expects war to
supply the artistic gratification of a sense of perception that has been changed by technology’ (Benjamin 1968, 241).

Benjamin is also important here in mapping out the changing conceptualization of mimesis. For his part, Benjamin still continued to put forward the idea that life and nature were inherently mimetic. As he wrote, ‘Nature creates similarities. One need only think of mimicry. The highest capacity for producing similarities, however, is man’s. His gift of seeing resemblances is nothing other than a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else. Perhaps there is none of his higher functions in which his mimetic faculty does not play a decisive role’ (Benjamin 1978, 333). And yet, the influence of Benjamin in moving us away from the idealised types to which classical realism aspired should not be underestimated. He would thus pave the way for a more considered appreciation of mimesis, as notably developed by the likes of Jacques Derrida who would weave the idea of mimicry into his less determinable concept of difference. However, despite adding more complexity to our understanding as we moved away from Cartesian subject/object dualism to consider more the body in all its immersive and emotional states, along with the interpersonal relations that both demand a greater appreciation of the senses and recognition of the porous and multiple transgressions within the mimetic process, the idea that art begins from a consideration of ones place in the world (however idealized or critically conceived) as designating a form of experience proper to art remains a given. And yet, as Jacques Ranciere reminds in his mediation on Aisthesis, which demands an appreciation of the title and of mimesis where the terms take on a different meaning, there is nothing inherent or certain to either of these conceptual terms. Moving beyond seeing both as ‘designate categories internal to art’, Ranciere argues that we can alternatively question how they appear as ‘regimes of the identification of art’ (Ranciere 2013, xi). This attempt at ‘welcoming what was unthinkable’, as Ranciere puts it, we suggest can only be achieved by substituting world-body relationality and its hold on art with the unintelligible void. Doing so allows for a fundamental break with mimesis, which continues to relegate abstraction in denial of the original scene. We know of no meaningful art that doesn't take its leave from the void. From Caravaggio to Klee, Bacon to Basquiat, Tarkovsky to Beethoven, Mendieta to Rothko, the incommensurability of the abyss remains the unrequited measure of the work.
Returning to Schmitt, in spite of the violent limits of his thought (including his inability to recognize the dangers of his inverted abstractions), he would nevertheless force us to confront the dangers of liberalism and its processes of neutralization, which openly invoking its demands for pacification shows itself to be indifferent to life. He also forced us to confront how the politics of technology could close down the fields of political possibility, where even its laws become mere technicism. But Schmitt can only take us so far. Or to put it another way, it was never simply a choice between liberalism or fascism. It is here we return to the work of Deleuze. Not only did he offer a more considered reflection on the politics of technology which frees us from reductive accounts, he also appreciated the affirmative potential of the abstraction in a way that allows it to escape the violence of the abstract machine. Francis Bacon would be a notable inspiration in this regard. Deleuze argued that technicity was not simply “machine-like” or purely “technical”. Neither did machinic forms of enslavement precede social assemblages: ‘machines are social before being technical. Or, rather, there is human technology which exists before a material technology. No doubt the latter develops its effects within the whole social field; but in order for it to be even possible, the tools or material machines have to be chosen first of all by a diagram and taken up by the assemblages’ (Deleuze 2006, 34)\(^\text{21}\). While some technologies may therefore be completely indifferent to the politics of life, we nevertheless still produce what we desire. Since technologies were not enslaving *per se*, we needed to analyze the intimate relationships between social assemblages and the instruments it positively deploys in the daily functioning of its systems of power, knowledge, and rule. Deleuze thus allowed us to expose the mistaken link between biopolitics, technology and the abandonment of political agency thesis. He also allowed us to see that our problem is not one of de-politicization if one understands this process to be the full reduction of life to some purely instrumental vision of species being. We learn to desire the necessity for technology as though it was our liberation, and that is the problem! With machinic assemblages seconded by social relations, what mattered were the power relations which led to the (self)-deprecation of life. It is all about whether one prioritizes a totalizing sacred myth over the abstract, which Schmittean

\(^{21}\) Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (London, Continuum: 2006) p. 34
realists happily decided to embrace as it fully sucked the original life out of abstraction, and it’s all about whether one prioritizes over technical over the poetic, which liberalism did unto the end.

But liberalism is dead. And it remains dead. The global pandemic of 2020 was the first crisis of a post-liberal order. The name we have given to that order is the **techno—theodicy**\(^{22}\). Technology itself is now the dominant abstract machine. In these conditions politics is the exception; technology is the rule. It is now presented as the only thing that could possibly save us from our own wretched selves. With humanity now fully reduced to a pure state of ontological vulnerability, the sacred object for power has become a deeply fragile humanity, which must now atone for it sins and look upon its own digitalized reflection with lament. This reveals a number of dynamics already visible to us in this new moment 1) the explosions of race and class politics represent a continuation of religious war, which are concerned with battling over the sacred meaning of life 2) the left and rights collapse into culture wars reveals an inward turn in the order of abstraction, wherein the lack of imagination is palpable 3) what passes for the radical today has been fully absorbed into the technological abstract, as its millennial advocates celebrate the slaying of old ghosts and demand more and more power to be given over to the principle agents of technological change 4) everything is now reduced to a question of immanence – but an immanence that has no appreciation for the philosophical imperative of lived experience and the need to critically reflect with time 5) political conflict is replaced by non-negotiable posturing that is virtually driven by the hyper-arousal of emotions and the hyper-moralization of performativity 6) the post-liberal left has collapsed into a religious formation, whose subjectless critique takes direct aim at the artists, comedians and writers who have the temerity to disagree 7) with abstraction fully claimed by the technological-machine, difference is once again replaced by a politics of identity that is instantly compatible with commodification 8) the pandemic has further accelerated these dynamics and humans have been forced to give over two of the most preciously guarded privacy rights: political beliefs and conditions of health 9) with the poetic still a dangerous challenge, for art to mean something it now needs to evidence its willingness to be subsumed within the technological order of things 10) if the poetic is the penultimate frontier in the quest for total technological control over human life, the final frontier remains to become the author of the void itself for therein lies the source of

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\(^{22}\) On this see Evans (2021) and Evans & Meza (2022)
all creation. That is why the compliant techno-abstract architects now present the void as a sacred space. Technology no longer simply enables or progresses life; it’s advancing a new Genesis. And it’s advancing the idea that humans are no longer the sole possessors of the power of abstraction. On the contrary, we are too fallible for all that. Technology instead must be seen as the unrivaled abstract, which in turn means unrivalled in its abstractions. This is not simply a question of power. It’s about whether we live a non-existence. A catatonic digitalized death.

Some might reason today that nobody believes any longer in the “essence” of things. While the complexity sciences have unsettled all foundational claims to truth, so the claim that we live in post-ideological times might suggest that any definitive claim on the ontological nature of being has been rendered defunct. This couldn't be further from the truth. While the “nature of subjectivity” has been thrown into crisis, such a crisis has only served to promote and entrench the notion that life is ontologically vulnerable, and the societies we produce fundamentally insecure by design. What is more, despite the collapses we have identified between the human, the species and nature, its misguided to suggest this has resulted in the liberation of difference, even the liberation of a philosophical naturalism, and the logic of mimesis, which for so long has bound the political imagination. We are said to be incomparable to nature as a matter of intellectual design. And as fallible as we have become, indeed always were, so we cannot possibly aspire to match its beauty, sublimity, and the tremendous terror it also awakens in the minds of all living creatures. This is not simply about biospherical immersion. It’s to accept there’s no outside. There is no beyond. Little wonder we have collapsed back into identity, back into history, back into time. There is literally nowhere left to go, except the hyper-simulated open planes of the endo-colonized digital ecosphere.

For all our critical awareness and philosophical insight, we are still then yet to leave the entrapments of Plato’s cave (figure 6). Art continues to be explained in terms of its mimetic qualities. Whether we are looking at painting of performance, still it is widely taken that the artist re-presents or re-enacts an original idea, which lies behind its actualization. Artists are still therefore presented as imitators or simply parodies

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23 The term endo-colonisation is borrowed here from Paul Virilio. It would first appear in his book Pure War and feature elsewhere in his critiques of the accelerated technologization of the planet. For a short introduction on this concept see Mark Featherstones entry in Armitage (2013, 76-78)
of tragic figures who we might learn from in our shared demise. Indeed, with each passing day, especially with the digitalization of applications for artistic imitation, so art becomes less and less exceptional, less and less relevant. Indeed, aside from a few returns to the example of the abstract expressionists who allow us to fully contend with historic fascism, seldom is the power of art seen as integral to the art of the political. It remains, as with Plato, less virtuous than those who are properly tasked with producing things of value. Moreover, the very idea that our understanding of the creative and transgressive potentiality for life should begin with the abstract in thought, has been largely forgotten. Everything is now about bodies, their feelings and emotions, along with how they are subsumed within ideas, which agreeable or the source of all oppression, recognizes no outside. Life today then is haunted by the shadows, especially the shadows of our own extinction. So, if we must look upon the fires, we must do so in a way that fully accepts their part in both upholding tales concerning the survival of the species, while recognizing how they have also seduced us with their Promethean flames which have driven us to the point of our veritable ruination. There is certainly no room here for Bachelard’s more poetic mediation. Nevertheless, what we can also see is how Heidegger’s principal concern with enframing has become all the more prescient in this techno-theologized age. What gives truth to our existence, the only truth we can rely upon with any degree of certainty are technologies which promise to give us access to unknown knowledges about our fragile and fleeting existence. Without technology, we are simply doomed to live out a catastrophically fated time. Technology is our only escape. Or at least that's the next chapter in the story of our survival we now tell ourselves. Life as such only makes sense if we begin from the question of technology. Nature as such only makes sense if we begin from the question of technology. Art as such only makes sense if we begin from the question of technology. The abstract as such only makes sense if we begin from the question of technology. Death as such only makes sense if we begin from the question of technology. Survival as such only makes sense if we begin from the question of technology. Which is to say, the void as such only makes sense if we begin form the question of technology.
All this confirms the dominance of what we note to be a **digital mimesis**. It is increasingly apparent that contemporary artists need to give over to the digital if they want to remain relevant to the world of art. Even artist such as Maria Abramovich, who for so long insisted on the originality of her performative being and the radical relationality of her situated encounters, has now made herself virtually present, hence virtually immortal, at least until the electricity dies. Then again, maybe the performative already opened us onto a post/trans-humanized terrain, where the question of subjectivity actually became less and less important, while further enabling the potential for digitalization especially in respect to visual cultures. It certainly seems that the two most viable routes open for contemporary artists is to 1) present oneself as explicitly linked to a particular identitarian claim which are primarily centered on addressing injustices of the past. Here art is very much tied to explicit claims regarding truth and history, grounded and categorically determined 2) harness the power of the profound, through the medium of technology and its immersive capacities of hyper-realized production. No artist has been more successful here than Bill Viola, whose techno-religiosity is all too apparent. This no doubt reflects wider shifts in production, where digital culture is now inseparable from material production. It has in fact become the principal driver for our entire social morphology. The art gallery and museum have notably been caught up in these transformations, ushering in what has been called the “post-digital museum” where the primacy of technology has been normalized.
But this is not just about the settings for art, however important they are in validating what is true and proper to the “meaningful” artistic and creative process. It’s about further embedding the logic of mimesis, while controlling and regulating further the purpose of art. Indeed, rather than questioning the “hyper-normalized” (to echo the fitting terms of the documentary producer Adam Curtis) technological framing of art, the advent of the post-digital artist is presented as a truly emancipatory moment. And so, it’s not uncommon, as we have experienced, to watch children in museums fascinated by anatomically studying the intricate lines on a Leonardo da Vinci sketch, much like a surgeon used to cut open a rotting carcass for scientific discovery, while the real work remains ignored on a wall a few meters away. Why in fact see the real work at all when the digital experience promises to reveal something the naked eye simply cannot possibly detect? No doubt a landmark moment here was the selling of a digital work of art during the pandemic for near $70 million\textsuperscript{24}. A work that can only be properly appreciated by manipulating digitally enhanced perspective much like Google Earth. Knowing the world and knowing the art, all part of the same strategic design. But why stop there? Why in fact should future artists produce anything, once the intelligent machines learn to mimic nature, and replicate in ways humans could never imagine?

How this plays out is through deceptive claims concerning the democratization of art. This is not just about making art accessible to everyone. It is to claim that everyone, or anything can become a work of art. This brings us back to children, to whom the abstract expressionists were often compared in their denouncements. How often do we hear Picasso’s quip about the artistic brilliance of children? While it may be true that children don’t have to eventually learn to unlearn all the standardized nonsense society imposes on them, to say that children are the best artists is like saying the youth are the best philosophers or pre-pubescent adolescents the best poets or film makers. Without the intention of the subject, the comprehension of the suffocating image of the world, the lived experience of its tragedies and violence’s, there cannot possible be something of a creative and untimely rupture. This has little to do with privilege the elderly (though there is something deeply important to art that cannot be separated from the intensity and duration of time), and it’s certainly not a call to resurrect the dialectics of resistance. It is to insist that children should be kept away from galleries (which they never enjoy anyway), encouraged instead to simply

\textsuperscript{24} See https://www.businessinsider.com/art-auction-nft-beeple-top-selling-most-expensive-sale-millions-2021-3?r=US&IR=T
produce whatever, then later in life be introduced to the iconoclasts, not so they can mimic their styles, but bring something new into the world. Then again, by the time a child who has been born into the world in the last decade reaches ten, they will already figure that the only art worthy of fleeting attention is pixelated. And the same child will have in all probability, though multiple reproductions and imitations, unconsciously looked upon countless iconic artworks through their screened existence. Does such over-exposure help produce a more appreciative artistic and poetic sensibility? Probably not. What it does is rob them of the exceptional encounter with the original work!

Facing this condition, what’s required is a return to the poetic with more potency and commitment. This is no longer about attempting to bring the political back into our discussion, or even pushing the idea that politics is more an art than science, even though these moves are still urgently needed. It is to immerse us more fully in the history of abstraction by adopting a distinct poetic position. It is to start with more determination from the proposition that abstraction is the original movement in the creative processes of life, so that we can provide a rich critique of the history of abstract appropriation and the violence carried out in its name. Returning to the idea of abstract beginnings, which opens onto an artistic conception of the political that works counter to every claim to forced unification and identification, it is to more fully attend to those encounters with theologies of absorption and their abstract inversions (from religion to the State, Liberalism and then technology itself), so we might reclaim the abstract in thought. This in turn will add further critical depth into the creativity and violence of the void. And it will invariably require us to narrate and imagine new political fabulations in the contemporary battle against the hyper-technologization of life.

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**Biographies**

**Brad Evans** is a political philosopher, critical theorist, and writer, who specializes on the problem of violence. He is author of over 20 books and edited volumes, including most recently *Ecce Humanitas: Beholding the Pain of Humanity* (2020); *Conversations on Violence: An Anthology* (with Adrian Parr, 2020) and *The Atrocity Exhibition* (2019) Having led a dedicated series of discussions on violence with the New York Times, he currently leads the Los Angeles Review of Books “Histories of Violence” section. Brad is currently the Chair of Political Violence and Aesthetics at the University of Bath, United Kingdom.

**Chantal Meza** is a self-taught Mexican abstract artist based in the United Kingdom. Exhibited widely in Mexico, her work challenges our understanding of what Art means in the Third Millennium by abstracting the concepts of what we call being human. She persists in experimenting with new forms of observation to question the sensorial experience of life through the classical, if not ancient ways of painting and sculpting. Among her recent achievements include a notable Public Recognition for her contribution to culture in her province in Mexico and the publication of her work in a number of prominent international media outlets, including the Los Angeles Review of Books, La Jornada, ArtLyst, Pluto Press, NY among others. Her latest
initiative includes leading a project that brings together a number of International Academics discussing the ‘State of Disappearance’ in collaboration with the political philosopher Brad Evans.