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***Heidegger's Indiana* by Panoply Performance Lab¹**



1/12

Oral history rural interview project

this is the correct translation of basketball statistics

this is an uninhabited subdivision

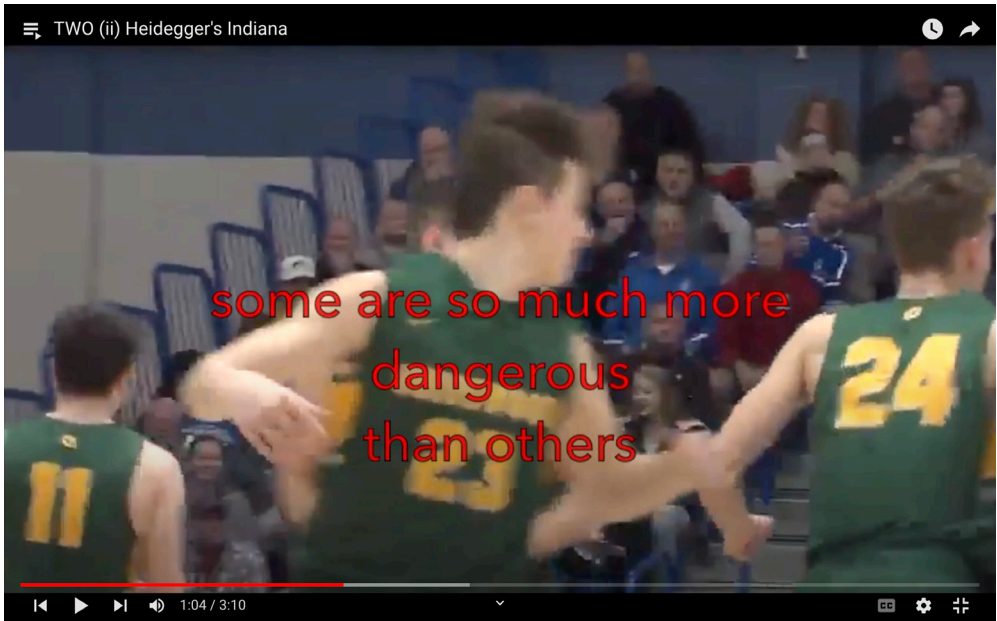
there are rooms for binaries and a firepit

signage is already in place

what we are trying to understand here though is not what but

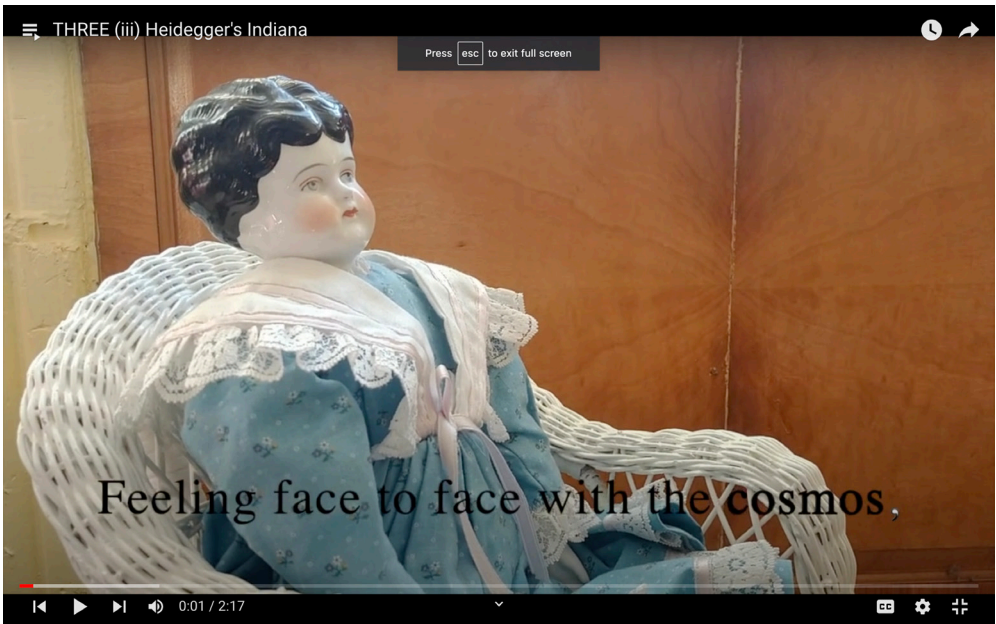
Why?

¹ Panoply Lab, "Heidegger's Indiana," <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLKHomiSa1mMys7t9XkrVJ4hG1b-wTrf5Kx>, acc. on March 23, 2023.



2/12

You played so good son you almost transcended
It's almost as if fate placed you here and not as if
Fate itself has been designed
By your existing state



3/12

This is the doll my grandmother always wanted me to have upon her death
I broke off its porcelain foot when I was five and my grandpa made a new one
with putty

His attitude generally was
Do things right the first time but
If within your best effort you make a mistake
Don't be sorry, just fix it

Decomposition is more important than deconstruction
Don't forget the past but digest it, each body is already compost



4/12

May world, in all its worldings near

Essentially unfold

As far from me as possible

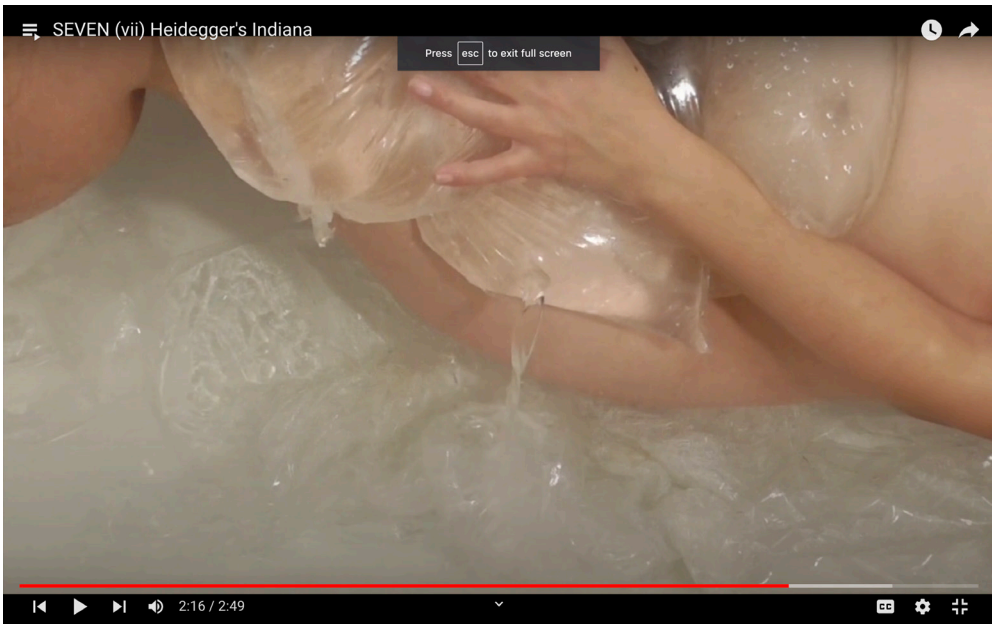


5/12
I am not a pocketknife
I think I misunderstood the part about 'dwelling'
I forgot that 'nothing' was a really formal concept
And I tripped over it
Blunting the blade in the gravel



6/12

This is an Amish man talking about waking up in the morning
Eating pancakes, he doesn't listen, something about mashed potatoes
He works in a factory
Sometimes the daily is interrupted by nightmares
An Indiana man would never mention these
Yeah, it's appropriated footage
One time an Amish boy called my breasts 'pancakes'
So there is a bit of an inside joke here lost in the steam
Created by pouring boiling water into pans inside a walk-in cooler
Steam, unlike gas, can be quite a spectacle and
Culture, unlike labor, is an especially productive technology



7/12

Most do not choose the distance between themselves and atrocity
Either one is right inside it, made of it or making it
Or one is far away from it, watching it
Yet this is a strange conception because if all is ordered by the political
(which means ways in which peoples are organizing)
(which means power play)
(which means governance)
(which means conditions of resource distribution and deprivation)
(which means hegemony)
(which means judgements and speech acts)
(which means bodies)
(which means power)
(which means)
Then nothing anyone does or is
Can by anything other than innocent or guilty



8/12

Featuring: small-scale milk farmer John Davis and former Indiana governor Mike Pence



9/12
Graph: uses of the word 'political' since 2017



10/12

Martin Heidegger was a German metaphysical philosopher in the idealist tradition, predominately inquiring into what being means and what it means to Be. During the Third Reich, Heidegger acted as a sympathizer and maintained his university position. He is connected via a love affair with his student, Hannah Arendt, a Jewish philosopher of mind and meaningfulness who would later theorize relationships between fascism and metaphysical conceptualizations of nature, self, and society. Heidegger's context and his philosophical ideas are the basis of this project, although his complex positions are read through Arendt (and subsequently Butler and other influenced poststructuralists). Alain Badiou has remarked that Heidegger is the last 'universally known' e.g., imperial Western philosopher). Indiana is a US state mapped across Pawnee, Miami, Piankashaw, Potawatomi, and Wea territory. The land has been occupied by a steady stream of European colonizers, migrants, and refugees, including Amish and Anabaptists (Mennonites, Quakers, Brethren) through German Catholics. In the 20th century, Jewish refugees were prevented from settling in many small Indiana towns, especially those which have been known as 'sundown towns', with historic municipal laws or at least threatening signage prohibiting Black (and

sometimes also Chinese, and other POC) residency, entrance, or (hence the name) warning against public movement after dark. Indiana is currently a solid 'red state'; Mike Pence was the governor before becoming vice president under Trump. As a little personal context, perhaps it's worth sharing that one of the two makers of this project (Esther) grew up on a small farm outside of Goshen, Indiana (historically a sundown town) and is of Swiss German (Brethren) and Jewish descent. Although Brethren are fundamentally pacifist (and unlike other neighbors, such as the separatist Amish, have participated in abolitionist movements, similar to the Quakers), my grandfather broke with his family's pacifist values to fight in WWII, where he was injured in a vehicle accident.

Heidegger's Indiana emerges as a disintegrated treatise on the desiderata of conceptualizing meaningfulness in the face of nihilism and connecting philosophical beliefs with behaviors.

Through layers of found footage, stacks of citations, and the dense physicalities of social isolation, the videos mark and unmark passages, stare (back) into the arbitrary terror(ism)s of Midwestern rural whiteness and Euro-phallic philosophy, and theatricalize disessentializing (*Verwesung*, decomposition + deposing of the suprasensory world and its 'essences') towards (non)enduring in particular, ethos-and-eros-driven ways. Of particular deconstructive focus is Nihilism, which Heidegger calls "a historical movement, and not just any view or doctrine advanced by someone or other. Nihilism moves history after the manner of a fundamental ongoing event that is scarcely recognized in the destining of the Western peoples."²

Heidegger romanticized rural life and the *Volk*, believing that 'mechanization' or 'technological' modes of thinking-being needed to be transformed into more 'essential' states of Being. He connected these essential states with Greek ideas of *poesis* and drew on Nietzsche to claim these ideas as the roots of Western (and specifically German) history, culture, and language. He believed that the German people – due to language – were best suited to prepare humanity for a state of 'god,' which is not a deity but a divine artistic 'dwelling' or mode of 'fourfold Being' (re)uniting humans and ('our') true nature. While Heidegger did initially speak out against scientific/genetic categorization of race, he was deeply bigoted in that he believed that peoples outside central Europe were less a part of history and did not have the 'poetic' prerequisites to cause or 'prepare for' his version of sacred essential nature, which he sometimes calls 'the mystery'. This bizarre form of nativist linguistic nationalism (Heidegger saw Jews and Roma people – as immigrants and transient peoples – as contaminants of or impurities in the sacred essential spirit of human Being) is contradictory with other white supremacist/white nationalist and colonial mentalities that locate 'Others' as closer to nature, more primitive, etc., and remains a conflict within contemporary 'thought' in the US and Europe (that is, who and where people 'belong,' who is 'native' to where, and who is 'replacin' or 'occupying' whom as well as who is 'closer to nature'). Here, Heidegger's ideas connect the most violent mentalities that may be currently seen in the geo-ideological state(s) of Indiana with ideas complexly and diffractively embedded in the poststructuralist thought of which

² Martin, Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 62.

he is considered the 'grandfather', (as well as in almost every political and legal debate over personhood and human rights, from trans rights through citizenship structures) through the sense of distinction between 'natural' or 'essential' Being and 'technological' or 'constructed' being.

For Heidegger, 'the danger' is in 'Enframings' that are technological/mechanistic, homogenizing, nihilistic, including technology as colloquially understood and technological modes of thought and being. At first, Heidegger did blame 'the Jews' for 'technology', but he also made a speech (in 1949) that conflated the Final Solution with factory farming (he was opposed to both, at least, though the comparison of human corpses to corn is bristle-worthy at the very least). Heidegger often discusses plants, animals, and people as if all are the same sort of raw material ('standing reserve'), in order to speak much more 'metaphysically' about Technological (or 'constructed') modes of Being that prevent natures to be revealed in their essential meaningfulness.

Sometimes, this type of brutal abstraction, his metaphysical 'transcendence', can be useful in attempts to discuss the *autonomous conceptual structures* of political situations wherein the 'enemy of that deemed essential' is always in co-constructive flux; when seen *solely* as a metaphysical inquiry, this idea is somewhat banal and basically a spiritual view, even an 'environmentalist' view, definitely an accepted 'poststructuralist' view. When politicized however, Heidegger's thought designs and demands problematic inquiries into who and how and which groups of people, are most 'natural' and who and what is seen to be advancing technology, i.e., who is holding the views that challenge the 'safeguarding' of so-called pure 'fourfold dwelling' of essential Being.

One can see how this thought and inquiry is 'dangerous' when the role of 'obstruction to essence' is filled by a group of people Enframed as such by orders of white supremacy, transphobia, homophobia, xenophobia, etc. Through insertion of these contemporary terms (which were not available to Heidegger) we can understand why he calls Enframings, Technological modes, or orders (what we might now call 'paradigms' or 'systems') for value and totalities 'the danger'. Additionally, one may also see how it can be 'dangerous' to maintain faith in 'essential Being' in any case. Heidegger does in fact encourage wariness of such paradigmatic modellings themselves, especially when they are used in blanket ways to reduce human Being to political conditions. He is, after all, discussing metaphysical Being in ways that (failingly, impossibly) attempt to *transcend* 'the political'. His various arguments for the 'integrity' of human essence, or soul beyond or above Enframings, are contingent with context, scale, and modality, and multiplicity imbricated with language itself and how language produces, reveals, conceals, and crafts meanings and 'truths' of and for being 'itself'.

Often, in any case, Heidegger seems totally unconcerned with actual people, and prefers to discuss poetry rather than anything so 'vulgar' as politics or human suffering. While Heidegger apologists will argue that this is because he was not a political philosopher at all, and others have already pointed out that this project's mixing of fragmented metaphysics, political theory, psycho-epistemology, and poetry can only result in frustration, my feeling is that Heidegger's poetic abstractions (and hopefully poetic abstractions of Heidegger) express and represent embedded and mimetic

mentalities, positions, fears, and fundamentalisms which are inherently participant in political being. On the most concrete narrative level, Heidegger is also a prime example of a citizen who chose complicity with fascism, which makes him an emotionally-fraught phantom character for a 'play' unfolding in this particular moment (January, 2021). He also frequently changed his mind and can be located on many different 'sides' of history, providing readers through time with different ways of seeing 'virtue' as a kind of *technê* or 'craft of life', a matter that much concerned Heidegger conceptually but not so much practically. His forms of thought in context thus are weirdly fit to contents and become an affective cipher, with almost every statement he makes causing either a shudder or an epiphany, sometimes both simultaneously, and sometimes switchily upon different readings from hour to hour.

Finally, in terms of appropriating Heidegger's philosophical inquiries themselves in and as 'art', I would argue that his most important position is not a position at all but a useful explication of a dramatic conflict. Basically, he is debating between two modes of being both differently seen as part of 'human nature': A) the idealistic need to transform being into the Nothingness of true, essential Being (which is natural, physical, non-metaphysical, the *nihil* itself) and B) the empirical 'essential nature of man' to produce totalizing logics (technological thinking, mechanization of being, meaningfulness, metaphysics itself). The former Being is an unintelligible plentitude of potential ways of thinking, being, seeing, becoming (insights), while the latter is the conclusory, deadening project of 'the machine' (oversights). While the former is 'freedom' because it allows sacred, chaotic, and essential states of care and being-with to emerge, the latter is 'the danger' because it establishes a singular essentialist clearing that obscures true Being, excluding all truths that are not shaped or shaping its own ideals while also producing the only sorts of meanings a subject may know. Through this conflict, Heidegger generates questions about 'natures of human being' on multiple levels, many of which are difficult to cognitively access. Such generativity and access is, I believe, deontologically the project of philosophy, as such (further debates about why and if 'philosophy' is valuable or useful at all, likewise art, may also ensue). It seems to me (the maker of this project) however, that certain core questions must be perpetually phrased and re-phrased, conflicts staged and re-staged, because the assumptions pursuant to any stable position on them or articulations of them have massive political, ideological, and material implications.

All text for and in this project is written by Esther Neff except where cited otherwise. Text is sometimes a summary of Heidegger's writings but is more often a response or poetic mutilation/mistranslation from the German. Within the videos, "Martin says..." usually signals an interpretation of his text (especially in the 'songs') but in the 'dialogue' we are using the name "Martin" to refer to everyone and anyone we know. Video is shot by Kaia Gilje and Esther Neff on Android and camcorder, and sampled from downloaded YouTube videos featuring a small-scale milk farmer, Mike Pence, and a guy interviewed through an oral history project, etc. *Heidegger's Indiana* is produced on a budget of \$100 for the Exponential Festival, which was online due to COVID-19.



11/12

Imagine this bad a capella choir thing as a high school anthem

Imagine you live here

This imagination has a kind of manufacturing of placement

This placement has a kind of imaginative manufacturing

Imagine you never read Heidegger

Why would one, really?



12/12

This is a personal song.

You don't have to listen to it. Like all personal songs, it is dramatic and cringey.

This is a song about being an academic right now. This is also a grunge rock song from the 1990's, an angry & childish song for anyone who learned young that quite a few white men (through recent history and currently) want them and everyone they love dead.

For you, I would recreate, the conditions of the womb
As closely as possible