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Modernity and the Good Death: Heidegger and Jose

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MODERNITY AND THE GOOD DEATH: HEIDEGGER AND JOSÉ CLEMENTE OROZCO’S *EPIC OF AMERICAN CIVILIZATION*

by

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MODERNITY AND THE GOOD DEATH: HEIDEGGER AND JOSÉ CLEMENTE OROZCO’S EPIC OF AMERICAN CIVILIZATION

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This thesis will analyze José Clemente Orozco’s mural *The Epic of American Civilization* in terms of the problem of suffering. It will focus specifically on two panels, “Human Sacrifice in Ancient Times” and “Human Sacrifice in Modern Times.” This analysis will comprehend not only the works of art within their historical context, but also within Martin Heidegger’s philosophical discussion of the question of suffering.

Heidegger presents a unique perspective on the question of human suffering when he writes that Western humans have forgotten how to “dwell.” This dwelling is defined by Heidegger’s novel conception of ontology as relational rather than individualistic. According to this theory, humans must identify themselves through their associations, both with other people and with things. Without these associations, humans are not be able to escape the anxiety
associated with suffering and death brought about by the isolating effects of Western modernity.

A discussion of Mexico provides a practical example of the complexities of the question of dwelling in Western thought. At the time Orozco was painting his mural, Mexican identity was rapidly fragmenting. In the decades after the Mexican Revolution, many artists wrestled with the concept of Mexican identity, and it was in this time of flux that Orozco offered his interpretation of the cyclical progress of humanity.

The two paintings depict two forms of suffering, which this paper will refer to as a “good” and a “bad” death. This nomenclature is not strictly accurate as neither form could be said to be desirable in any concrete way. Consequently a Rivera painting (“Revolution – Germination”) will also be presented that suggests an ideal death. However, the focus will remain on Orozco’s paintings. Of course, in his own paintings Orozco is not endorsing the act of human sacrifice. However, because of differences in their composition, they suggest not only a cyclic pattern to human history, but also a downward progression where the persistent problems of violence and suffering in human societies have grown more difficult and complicated since the advent of modernity.

As Orozco’s paintings seem to suggest and Heidegger will argue, the solution to the isolating ‘bad death’ is learning to live relationally. These relationships comprehend the social and the cultural, but the focus will be on the ecological and the divine, because, as several critics will argue, these are the greatest deficiencies in modernity.
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Introduction

The Question of Suffering

The question of suffering is a difficult topic, at once so simple as to be proverbial ("why do bad things happen to good people?"), and yet so complex that it drives whole systems of thought. Susan Nieman was able to make the argument in her book *Evil in Modern Thought: an Alternative History of Philosophy* that suffering is, in fact, the central problem at the heart of all Western philosophy (2). She considers it to be the basis not only of ethics, but also of epistemology, ontology, indeed, the whole of philosophy: “At issue are questions about what the structure of the world must be like for us to think and act within it … I believe [suffering] is the place where philosophy begins— (5)”

This paper proposes to examine this complex and broad topic specifically in terms of modernity. In the pursuit of understanding the problems of suffering in modernity, this paper undertakes to analyze works by José Clemente Orozco in his mural *The Epic of American Civilization*, painted on the walls of Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. While the context of the entire mural will be considered, the focus will be on three panels: “Human Sacrifice in the Ancient World” and “Human Sacrifice in the Modern World,” and to a lesser extent, “The Modern Migration of the Spirit”. This work and this artist are especially relevant to the question of human suffering as Orozco’s geographical, cultural, and historical context as well as his qualities and goals as an artist offer a unique perspective on this issue in modernity.
Keeping in mind the importance of Orozco as an artist, it should be noted that my approach to his work is more hermeneutical than documentary. Neither Orozco’s explicit intentions nor the traditional discussion of this piece will be discounted, yet they will be extended beyond the limits of Orozco’s place and time. This should not be interpreted as a casual or callous misinterpretation of Orozco’s work, but as a respectful exploration of his work in the context of contemporary issues. In this light, this mural can become an engaging discussion not only of circumstances in Orozco’s day, but of the violence and alleged downward progression of accountability in Western culture as a whole.

A New Interpretation

Traditional interpretations have understood this mural to depict the pervasive recurrence of suffering in every human epoch, both the forces that cause it and those that relieve it. He suggests that violence, particularly in the form of human sacrifice, is a kind of barbarism brought about by superstition and nationalism (if the two can be separated). Yet, in the light of the interpretation I present here, the two images of human sacrifice, while comparably violent, seem to differ at least in their representation of the act. In a slightly more nuanced interpretation, his first panel depicting ancient times can be taken to represent not a nicer or less painful form of suffering, but perhaps a more meaningful one. Neither death is desirable, but the death in the first panel is interactive: the victim is surrounded by priests and the ritual is watched over by a god. Conversely the second panel depicting modern times can be taken to represent a death that is truly horrific, a true annihilation, where all accountability has been lost. I suggest that the difference between the two panels can be explained by a deeper consideration of context, cultural, physical, and spiritual, that allows the first figure to come nearer to what Martin Heidegger calls a “good death” (“Building Dwelling Thinking” 151), while the latter panel reflects a downward progression
of civilization and a worsened state of suffering. The last figure, wracked with anxiety, faces only a dark abyss.

It must be understood that both panels reflect 'bad deaths' to some degree. The death of the first figure, if only by virtue of being a victim of a human sacrifice rather than a more natural death, still represents a corruption of civilization. To clarify what is meant by the good death, brief reference will therefore also be made to Diego Rivera's painting, "Revolution – Germination." This image depicts the body of a martyr of the Revolution, wrapped in a red cloth, being mourned at the foot of a flowering tree, suggesting more fully the contextual participation required for a 'good death.'

However, the focus will remain on Orozco for several reasons. First, as the first chapter explores in greater depth, Rivera’s work does not function on the same universal level as Orozco’s and is therefore much more difficult to apply to the modern situation. Secondly, its lack of ambiguity, that quality so valuable when drawing up a polar discussion of a ‘good’ and ‘bad’ death, becomes a liability when attempting to discuss real world situations. So while Rivera’s painting will prove helpful in offering a fairly clear-cut example of the “good death,” the focus will remain on Orozco’s panels.

Further, it must be said that the most astounding thing in the work of Orozco, which sets it apart from the work of his contemporaries and occasionally even earned their indignation, was its honesty. A principle theme in Orozco is this amorality of duality – he addresses both the positive and the negative aspects of his subject matter, never going so far as to completely endorse or completely vilify any one thing. It would of course be a mistake to say that his works depict amorality itself, as the work of Orozco is hardly devoid of moral significance. However, all is ambiguous: the barbarous human sacrifice among the Aztecs beside the wonders of their once-flowering culture, industry and art; the carnage and cruelty
of the Conquest depicted as clearly as the strength and order of the society they bring; the romantic heroism of Cortez acknowledged within the very same image as his undeniable cruelty; even the unity between Cortez and Malinche comprehends multiple perspectives. Their union is not born of love and does not create love, but it does create a new world, a new race and a new history, and is thus redemptive (although not forgiven). Orozco writes:

“My one theme is humanity. My one tendency is emotion to a maximum. My means, the real and integral representation of bodies in themselves and in their inter-relation” (Keen 530).

These panels represent then not a polar demarcation between ‘good’ and ‘bad’, but a cyclical progression—from contextualized, interactive violence to abstracted and alienating violence, the difference being grounded in the modern outlook. Unlike the Rivera painting, which idealizes the violence and traces it to the very center of regeneration and growth (a potentially quite dangerous perspective), Orozco condemns it in both paintings. However this condemnation does not mean that both panels should be taken as completely equal. Orozco’s second panel can suggest that the violence of the modern world is even more difficult to bear than that of the ancient, as, shaped by technology, science, and reason, it fails to provide that crucial context to human suffering. As such, modernity robs experience, of a comprehensible meaning that could, at least partially, redeem it.

**Martin Heidegger and Dwelling**

The works of Martin Heidegger, particularly in his later years, offer a useful guide in this exploration, as he both identifies and offers a solution to the problem of a lack of context, although he words it differently. His solution is the concept of ‘dwelling,’ an interior conviction of the worth of other things and the human being’s existence as relational, ‘among things,’ rather than above or beyond them. According to Heidegger, only
this mode of ‘being’ allows humans to experience suffering without terror and death with equanimity (“Building Dwelling Thinking” 151). Only when one identifies with something outside of oneself can the terror of death, and the anxiety produced by the repression of that terror, be overcome. This idea will be discussed in further detail in the chapter to come.

Organization of the Essay

The order of this thesis will therefore be as follows: the first section will be an in-depth structural analysis of the two main works in question, “Human Sacrifice in the Modern World” and “Human Sacrifice in the Ancient World” in Orozco’s Epic of American Civilization. It will also include a discussion of Rivera’s “Revolution – Germination” so that the idea of contextual dwelling and the good death, the ideal (that Rivera was so devoted to painting and that Orozco avoided like poison), can be better comprehended. This section should also bring the questions of this paper into clearer focus: in short, what is the importance of suffering in human thought and experience? Why is modernity’s approach to suffering problematic? And finally, what can or should be done about it?

In pursuit of these questions, the thesis will move on to a discussion of José Clemente Orozco, including his philosophy of art within the context of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 (an apt time and place to consider suffering). As an artist painting in early 20th century Mexico, Orozco was dealing with the problems of modernity firsthand. He was highly conscious of himself and his country as heirs to the violence of the Conquest and its ensuing damages, and he felt the weight of the history of his country (Orozco 19). He also felt personally the cultural hierarchical placement of the accomplishments of his people and his country beneath those of the imperial powers, as all ‘serious’ artists in his day were expected to study in Europe. His resentment is palpable in his autobiography:
It was inconceivable that a wretched Mexican should dream of vying with the world abroad, and so he went to that world abroad to “dedicate himself” to art, and if he ever afterward gave a thought to the backward country in which he was born it was only to beg for help in time of need, momentarily swallowing his proud ‘dedication,’ which in any case had never protected him from the suspicion of being a vulgar millionaire from the tropics….the ancients long ago reached perfection, they did everything that could be done, and nothing is left for us except to copy them and humbly imitate them. Florentine drawing with Venetian coloring. And if any painter wishes to be a modernist, let him be off to Montparnasse and there take orders (20).

Orozco resented this automatic hierarchical placement, and in his art he struggled to make a valid critique of his (and his country’s) experience that would be of universal value and application—one that would escape both the nostalgic idealism that he felt afflicted his compatriot artists and the smug centrality of the European artists, in favor of something universally relevant.

Using the discussion of Orozco to jump into a still broader pool of thought, the second chapter will proceed to discuss the nature of suffering in modern times in more detail, with Orozco’s works as an anchor. It will further elucidate the exact problems with modernity which seem to hinder dwelling, particularly as manifest in science. This section on modernity will be concluded with several short but relevant examples of scholarly and philosophical criticisms that have been made of modernity.

Following this discussion, the argument will briefly consider Mexico in a larger sense—as the stage where the perhaps definitive clash between modernity and pre-modern
cultures played out, as well as the scene of a good deal of suffering. As such, Mexico presents an ideal research area for 1) understanding what exactly constitutes modernity and 2) finding examples of what pre-modern cultures (allegedly) had that modern cultures have lost.

It must be said that this particular section risks perhaps an unacceptable amount of generalization and even sentimentality. Heidegger faced similar criticisms in his own discussion of dwelling, where he used the Ancient Greeks as his models. However, this paper concurs with Julian Young’s justification of Heidegger’s sometimes not-quite-accurate portrayal of the Greeks; in a philosophical (or artistic) endeavor scientific accuracy is not as important as symbolic value. Without undermining the value of such an endeavor, this argument will not be an anthropological text on pre-modern cultures. Instead it will use all tools it has at its disposal, including the dreams of a better time invented by artists’ and philosophers’ minds and projected into the past, to thoroughly think its ethical and philosophical point through (Young 42 – 43). In this way this paper hopes to honor Orozco himself, who, while wishing to avoid the sugary, nationalist nostalgia of his contemporaries, nevertheless did not seek to perfectly represent the history of his country himself. Instead he used his history as a symbol. However, unlike his contemporaries whose concerns were largely with the politics of their own day, Orozco endeavored to use these symbols to reach more universal values that could apply to both past and present.

After the problems of the concept of suffering in modernity have been sufficiently explored, the third chapter will consider Heidegger’s solution: dwelling. This concept was earlier described as an interior conviction of the worth of other things and the human being’s existence as relational, ‘among things,’ rather than above or beyond them. As will be further explored, this constitutes a rather drastic change in the modern ontological outlook,
which tends to view being as an individual experience. This chapter will consist of two
sections to further flesh out the concept: one will pursue a discussion of why nature,
symbolic of both relation and difference, must be the arena in which these problems are
solved. The second section will consider the final panel in Orozco’s mural, “The Modern
Migration of the Soul,” considering the deeply felt, indeed in a sense religious, nature of the
solution both Orozco and Heidegger seem to offer.

Lest this paper seem to focus unduly on works of philosophy, or take too much
interpretive license with the work of Orozco, ultimately, because of the unresolved question
of suffering here undertaken, this paper must have a uniquely ethical focus. It will attempt to
explicate and interpret the art of a particular artist and a particular time in terms of a specific
line of thought. Yet its ultimate goal will be contemporary relevance—to use the works of
the past to consider the position of Western culture on suffering at present, to criticize some
of its difficulties, and to offer some potential solutions. This goal seems appropriate in a
discussion of the Mexican muralists, whose “work is as much a comment on contemporary
politics as a representation of past and increasingly distant events—” (Rochfort 208).

An Artistic and Philosophical Hybrid

This philosophical focus does not mean to discount the importance of the art works,
indeed the two go hand in hand. Ultimately their union in this sense is very Heidegarian, as,
according to him, art can ultimately serve a purpose philosophy cannot:

Because [art] brings to positive presence what [philosophy] can only
indicate negatively, it possesses a kind of ‘power’ [philosophy] does not. This
is one way in which poetic thinking is superior to meditative thinking, why,
from, at least, certain points of view, a Cezanne “is worth a whole library of
philosophy books.” So far as power is concerned, a picture is, as we say,
worth a thousand words when it comes to reappropriating the ‘mystery’ in one's life as well as one’s head…philosophy is only the midwife [of what art expresses] (Young 20).

Thus Orozco’s panels present a colorful and effective illustration of the thesis of this paper better than a dry, didactic text ever could. Further, their very openness can inspire thought above and beyond either artistic intentionality or the ideas outlined here. This value in art, its intensity and facility in communication, should place it squarely on a level with philosophy. Certainly this paper would come up lacking if either were neglected.

In summary, Orozco’s two panels “Human Sacrifice in the Ancient World” and “Human Sacrifice in the Modern World” critique the ineffectiveness of modernity in providing the experience of suffering and death with meaning. The horizon of modernity has largely robbed human experience of a sense of context that results not only in continued suffering, but also in a sense of nihilism and boredom, which only exacerbates the problem. Only through reinstating value in context and relation will both modern society and the individual develop a fuller sense of meaning. Orozco’s murals are ultimately a reevaluation of suffering itself. They suggest that if humanity would no longer aim strictly to eliminate suffering, as some Enlightenment thinkers sought to do, but to lift it beyond the limits of the moment, suffering could take on a transcendent, spiritual meaning that may ultimately redeem it.
Chapter I

Death in the Art of Orozco

An understanding of the function of dwelling in Orozco’s murals should be rooted in direct analysis. Arranged in a loose chronological order, they focus on two time periods: pre-Columbian and modern, with the Conquest offering a stark division between them. The two panels “Human Sacrifice in the Ancient World” and “Human Sacrifice in the Modern World” are similarly situated in their respective times and offer some insight into the influence of context on meaning and suffering in human experience.

Rivera and the Good Death

Before beginning the analysis of Orozco’s murals, it is worthwhile to briefly consider Diego Rivera’s “Revolution – Germination” (see fig. 1) in order to set an example of the ‘good death’ at its most idealized. Located on the western wall of the chapel at the Autonomous University of Chapingo in Mexico, it is part of a larger fresco that depicts, as Rochfort writes, “a visual ‘shrine’ to the materialist philosophy and politics of revolution and to the earth’s fecundity, yet [also] an essentially Biblical atmosphere” (69). This combination of philosophy, the natural earth, and spiritual references is, as will be shown later, central to the idea of the ‘good death.’ Indeed, the essential quality of the ‘good death’ is participation within a context. This context should have social and cultural components, but it is still
more important that it be related to nature and a sense of the spiritual. Rivera’s martyred revolutionary is participating in all of these things, to some degree.

Color is perhaps the most striking device Rivera employs here, and the color red plays a significant part in the composition of the painting. The victim lays on the ground, wrapped in a scarlet burial shroud, some blood still running down his cheek from his mouth. The color red is echoed in various contexts throughout the painting, and it stands out particularly because it is the only bright color in the image. The rest are browns and creams, with only the slightest shade of blue to contrast with it.

In interpreting this use of color, it is important to note that Diego Rivera was associated with the Indianist movement in Mexican art. This movement was generally in alliance with the Revolution, and was an artistic attempt to overthrow European conventions in favor of a return to a more pre-Columbian culture to match the political struggles. For artists painting from Mexico City, the references are, of course, predominantly Aztec, although Maya conventions also find their way into some paintings. Rivera was considerably influenced by these older art forms, and the philosophy and theology that surrounded them—at least, to the degree he understood it. In terms of indigenous associations then the red color becomes very significant, as a reference not only to the violence of the martyr’s death, but also to concepts of rebirth. Red, as the color of both blood and childbirth, was considered to be a supremely regenerative color among several indigenous cultures. With these associations, even in death the martyr becomes the seed of the next generation. This indigenous association is further enforced in the trickle of blood that runs down the corpse’s cheek, bearing strong resemblance to certain pre-Columbian images of sacrifice. These older images often depict noblemen and women making blood sacrifice for their people and
country (often from the mouth and tongue), with stylized trickles of blood on their cheeks and chins.

These references to regeneration are quite clear, and Rivera makes them even more openly in his earlier panel of the same fresco entitled “The Blood of the Revolutionary Martyrs Fertilizing the Earth.” Certainly it doesn’t get more overt than that. But more importantly, particularly in terms of the ‘good death,’ this panel contains many references to the martyr’s context. First, people, their heads bowed in love and respect, surround him. This small crowd is composed of a variety of people: bowed, anonymous women who were likely members of the martyr’s family, townsmen, and soldiers, based on their heavy ammunition—all now inspired by his sacrifice to keep fighting for their country. The regenerative color red shows up again in the flag they hold—presumably they have been inspired by the sacrifice of the martyr to make one of their own, like the indigenous noblemen, so that their country and people can live.

However there is context beyond the human available in this painting, and arguably the most dominant figure in the panel is not the corpse of the martyr at all, but the thick, twisted tree growing up behind him. The tree occupies the center of the image, framed on both sides with standing soldiers and underlined by the corpse that lies just at its roots. Bright red flowers glowing from the tree’s branches echo the victim’s blood and shroud. The corpse is an image not only of the rebirth and continuance of the Revolution, but, in reference to pre-Columbian theology, of the earth itself. Surrounded by people he nurtures symbolically with his beliefs, and watched over by a strong, vibrant tree he feeds literally with his blood and body, this martyr has suffered a contextualized, ‘good death.’

Orozco and the Downward Progression of Civilization
With this image in mind as an ideal ‘good death,’ we now return to the discussion of Orozco. The context of the murals should offer some insight regarding their interpretation. While prestigious Dartmouth College in New Hampshire might seem a strange location to depict ‘Mexican history,’ scholar Desmond Rochfort has this to say about the location of The Epic of American Civilization:

Although described by Orozco as one of the best examples of liberalism in the north, Dartmouth College was in fact a bastion of white Anglo-Saxon educational privilege. Yet the college had had very different beginnings and intentions, and was founded in the late eighteenth century specifically for the purpose of providing education for the North American Indian. The indigenous ancestry of the college in part anticipated Orozco’s approach to the thematic concept of his mural…The mural was thus conceived not as a historical narrative in a simple sequential sense, but as the conceptualization of a historical idea. In this case it was an idea concerning America, a continent characterized by the dualities of Indian and European historical experience (Rochfort 103). Orozco was inspired by the history of the Americas, both Latin and Anglo, which he saw as intimately connected. Highly conscious of the history of the Conquest in all of the Americas, not just south of the United States’ border, he chose to paint an epic story, a saga of the history of the American continents. However this was to be painted not for strictly historical purposes, but as a concept, or a symbol, of something more universally human. Rochfort writes:

Unlike Rivera, Orozco did not conceive this historical visualization as a rhetorical call of nationalist or continentalist liberation and identity. Rather
he saw the idea of the American experience not only as a duality, but also as a base on to which he could map the important question of humanity’s endless struggle to realize its greatest aspirations and ideals and its simultaneous frustration by its innate fallibility. For Orozco, this dichotomy of the human character was tragically repetitive and could not be conveniently located within specific geographical areas, historical times, races, and cultures. The duality of the American experience, with the intrusion and subjugation of one people’s culture by another, was thus the perfect ground on which to reveal such divisions (103).

In short, the dualities of the Indian and the European were taken to suggest dualities faced by civilizations everywhere, even within individuals, and the comments made in The Epic of American Civilization are comments not only on Mexican or even American experience, but of the ancient human drama of all civilization—they are a meditation on the tension between order and chaos, freedom and oppression, and of course, life, suffering, and death.

The images do not pull punches, and the first panel “Human Sacrifice in the Ancient World” is quite shocking (see fig. 2). At first it seems to be a straightforward critique of pre-Conquest barbarity. The victim is masked and bound, inverted, while the priests, also masked, sink a knife into his naked chest. They grip his hair and his wrists, restraining him. Huitzilopochtli, who was both a god of war and a sun god, and therefore a god of life, is embodied in the statue that stands behind the priests. He demands this act, looming ominous and stoic, dominating the scene. He seems undeniably threatening, even if the onlooker isn’t aware of his association with war and sacrifice. In one hand the blank-faced, abstract god holds a red loop of what looks like blood, muscle, or some kind of viscera. In
the other hand is a fistful of spears and a round shield. His necklace is made of human hearts in a traditional Aztec style. Golden colored between the hearts, it resembles a knotted mass of veins or sinews. In short the only parts of the god that are anthropomorphic at all seem to be stolen bits and pieces of the humans he has destroyed in the name of his symbols. Between the helpless human and the silent statue, the message seems loud and clear—crimes are being committed in the name of something numinous.

This is an easy analysis to make, and it is still easier to stop here, examining this panel only as one of several of Orozco’s examples of the violence inherent in human nature and, presumably, his condemnation of it. However, on closer look, it seems to merit a slightly more nuanced approach. Orozco’s symbolism is not meant to be a direct anthropological reference to Native American practices, so it cannot be (at least not solely) an ethnocentric condemnation of native customs. However it is certainly not an idealization either—he had no interest, as the contemporary Indianists did, in conveniently divorcing Aztec heritage from its violent or shocking practices. It could be interpreted perhaps as a condemnation of the superstitious power of religion. However the structure of the painting seems to dispute reading this panel in this way, and there are several reasons for this.

First, in contrast to the later modern panel, and in spite of the violent act that forms its subject matter, this painting is quite legible, quite clear in its representation. Realism alone does not of course necessarily imply a softer subject matter. The clarity of many realist paintings can be interpreted appropriately as depicting the harshness of reality in their sharp lines and angles. And there is undeniably something harsh about this painting. Yet it is somehow softer than a true realist painting—legible, but not entirely photographic. The lines are soothing, warm, and organic. They curve and blend into each other. The position of the victim forms an X shape, which brings the viewer’s focus directly into the center of
the painting, making it structurally ordered. While all the lines in the painting point to the moment of sacrifice where the knife sinks into the victim’s chest, the violence is subdued. There is no blood or gore. The colors are warm and fleshy: browns, tans, and rusty reds. The only grey in the panel is in the sacrificial stone and the weapons in the god’s left hand. Further, the scene is stylistically idealized—some of the naked priests’ bodies are beautifully painted, anatomical and graceful enough for a Canova. And while the piece is not typically realistic, it could never be called abstract or non-representational. The form is clear and legible. In spite of the subject matter, the panel is somehow graceful and serene.

Its location further lends itself to a gentler analysis. Rochfort describes the chronology of the mural as a circular undulation of civilization, from its crest in a golden age of civilization to various low points in acts of violence (Rochfort 109). This pattern is noticeable in the progression of the figure of Quetzalcoatl, who appears early in the mural to bestow tools, laws, and other gifts of civilization upon the early inhabitants of the land (see fig. 3), inaugurating a “Pre-Columbian Golden Age” (see fig. 4). However, the priests and magicians become unruly and power-hungry, and the civilization returns to a violent trough in the “Departure of Quetzalcoatl” (see fig. 5), where the frustrated god leaves his people with promises of eventual return and accompanying righteous destruction. It is worth remembering that Orozco is speaking symbolically. In the mural Quetzalcoatl stands for universal benevolence, not a specific pre-Columbian theology or priestly cult.

The symbolic value of Orozco’s pre-Columbian panels mirrors that of those coming after the Conquest, as the pattern of the bestowal of the gifts of civilization and their ensuing misuse results in violence throughout the mural. After “The Departure of Quetzalcoatl,” Orozco proceeds to paint the Conquest and the somewhat unsettling, if orderly, civilization of the European emigrants. Because of this symmetry in the mural, many scholars, Rochfort
included, take the first human sacrifice panel to be suggestive of this degenerate violence that leads to the crumbling of a civilization.

There is no denying that the above interpretation is in many ways accurate. Yet, this does not have to be its sole purpose. After all, in terms of the symmetry of the mural, “Human Sacrifice in Ancient Times” seems startlingly out of place. Unlike “The Departure of Quetzalcoatl,” “The Conquest,” or the later “Human Sacrifice in Modern Times,” “Human Sacrifice in Ancient Times” is not situated among panels that depict corruption and greed. It is situated earlier, prior to the coming of Quetzalcoatl, prior to the instigation of the Golden Age, and certainly before its fall. This placement suggests that it is not an example of the full flower of degeneration and greed that Orozco is condemning.

That is of course not to say that Orozco embraced human sacrifice, or that it isn’t meant to depict an undesirable action. Presenting human sacrifice as prior to civilization does not make it desirable. The Aztec gods Orozco chooses to depict suggest this as well, as the sacrifice is presided over by Huitzilopochtli, not Quetzalcoatl. The placement of “Human Sacrifice in Ancient Times” before the coming of Quetzalcoatl suggests that the civilizing god would have done away with the practice in building up a golden age, and indeed he does. To make it still clearer that Orozco is not praising human sacrifice or even indigenous cultures in any preferential way, in the later panels the reinstitution of human sacrifice plays a role in the eventual degeneration of the Aztecs. This is suggested in the blood-red temple that rises up behind the corrupt, apish priests in “The Departure of Quetzalcoatl.” But “Human Sacrifice in the Modern World,” situated nearly at the beginning of the mural, is not a result of greed and degradation. This placement seems to suggest the possibility of some interpretation beyond either praise or strict condemnation.

Context and Suffering
As context has been used to set the panel “Human Sacrifice in Ancient Times” apart from others like it, context can also be useful in establishing its meaning. Again, the murals are widely acknowledged to be an examination of the tragic arc of human existence, and Orozco has no inclination to disregard the occurrence or significance of suffering and death. But this panel of suffering, unlike its violent brothers, is snugly situated within a larger context. It appears between a panel that depicts the immigration of the Aztecs to the valley of Tenochtitlán, and a panel of Aztec warriors dressed in feathers and skins, with strong, stoic faces. While neither of these paintings is idealized in an Indianist manner, the placement of the sacrificial panel between them is nevertheless integrated within the history of its subject, and given context. The human sacrifice it depicts, while undeniably terrible, nevertheless is presented as a part of a larger culture. It is integrated within a legible context, and the terror of the image, compared with the later one, is mitigated.

This painting could be seen, then, not just as a condemnation of violence, but as a statement on different varieties of it. It interrogates the ideological motivations and ontological assumptions behind such an act of violence. In short, why did they do such things? The answer is because the nature of their reality demanded it. The gods, whose images the priests assume, asked for such a sacrifice. And because the humans and gods lived relationally, each needing the other, humans obeyed.

The ritualized, sacred elements of worship are not hard to find here. The priests, like the victim, are masked. However, although their faces are covered, they have not been annihilated. Instead they wear the faces of the gods, transcending their individuality. Their naked human bodies and their divine faces could embody the joining of the sacred and the earthly. In this context, the sublime melts into the terrible, the sacred into the mundane, and the human becomes an integrated part of the universe, an organic member. The
perpetrators, bloody murderers to the modern eye, functioned in their time as holy, sanctified men, driven on by otherworldly command, acting as gods to minister in life and death; not via usurpation, but personification. The will of the gods and the sacred experience of the priests offer a context for the act of violence and suffering, which mitigates some of its terror and allows the victim, like Rivera’s corpse, to come closer to participating in what Heidegger calls a ‘good death.’

Young offers an apt description of the kind of worldview, defined by context, that could underlie such an act, as well as provides clarity on the comparison between Orozco’s Pre-Columbians and Heidegger’s Greeks:

The Greeks, then, experienced their world as brought into, and sustained in, being by an overwhelmingly powerful, utterly mysterious force. More exactly, they experienced it as the self-display of the simultaneously self-concealing divinity, ‘the most sublime of gods’, as Sophocles calls it. But this made the Greek world a place pregnant with the present of ‘the overpowering’, ‘touched by the exciting nearness of the fire from the heavens’. It was, in short, a numinous world, a holy, sacred place (Young 41).

The Aztecs can be understood, in this interpretation of the works of Orozco, in the same way, as existing in a holy world. Their existence, including their sufferings, is ‘sublime.’

Admittedly, here the analysis becomes rather difficult, as the artist never quite offers commentary on this kind of interpretation. While Orozco was no more a fan of modernity than of Indianism (Helm 62), he does not seem to ever define his painting as a contrast in suffering, or as a good and bad death. It could be suggested that the image of Quetzalcoatl the warriors bear in the panel “Aztec Warriors” represents a certain approbation to the
practice given by the gods, but even that is perhaps going too far. The image of Quetzalcoatl as the feathered serpent in “Aztec Warriors” is more likely analogous to the cross the later Spaniards carry as they execute the Conquest in the name of Christ. The violence is still condemned, even if it has been somehow culturally or religiously justified.

Nevertheless, there is some evidence for this interpretation. As has been mentioned, Orozco certainly took issue with some aspects of modernity, particularly technology, mechanization, and relentless war (Oles 197). These issues can especially be seen in his later panels depicting human suffering, where his system of representation changes. Where the earlier panel was tragic, the later panels are both tragic and disorderly. It could be said that the earlier panel tells a sad story that is soon remedied by the civilizing god, the latter panel documents a present condition that has not yet been fixed.

Indeed, the next panel provides a direct contrast to the first. “Human Sacrifice in the Modern World,” a titular and structural echo to the earlier panel, offers an example of human suffering that is truly frightening (see fig. 6). Like the earlier panel, its location in the general mural is significant. Located after the panel “Gods of the Modern World,” the modern sacrificial panel is nevertheless not spatially integrated within its era. It rests on its own wall, with about six inches of white space surrounding it, cutting it off from other things. It touches nothing—this white space suggests the visual equivalent of silence.

But the panels have other things in common. While it is located chronologically later, after the panels of “The Conquest” and “The Machine” and the mechanical abstractions that form the divisions between them, the makeup of this second half of the mural is structurally similar to the first. There is another migration (“Cortez and the Cross,” “The Machine”). The preceding panel “Gods of the Modern World” depicts another set of gods to give order to the world (see fig. 7). However, even compared with Huitzilopochtli
and his necklace made of hearts, these gods seem particularly horrific. While life under Huitzilopochtli was clearly no picnic (and Orozco, as will be discussed later, goes out of his way to avoid idealizing the Aztecs), his ominous depiction was not as frightening as these living mummies, these bony professors. They are skeletal, frightening figures, delivering stillborn babies in mortarboards from a wracked, bony figure [Orozco intended to name her “Alma Mater” although he never got around to painting it in (Baas 159)] strewn over a pile of books. And then the panel itself, whose location suggests like the earlier panel a degeneration of culture—the culture’s true tenets displayed in form of violence.

There are more structural similarities with the earlier panel. Here the figure is splayed on his back in the same manner, although inverted, and his feet, covered with thick, soldierly boots, face the viewer where the earlier victim’s face looked out from behind its mask. Like the other figure, he is on his back, floored by his attackers, and surrounded by the agents of his sacrifice. But where the first scene was clear and legible, this scene is far less straightforward. It is much more abstract, much more difficult to read, even down to its representational structure. The other painting contains easily identifiable human figures, although masked, and the god behind them is quite definable as well. In the second scene, the central figure is hardly recognizable as human. At such a strange angle he is difficult to locate under the heap of flowery wreaths and garish flags that cover him, and only his desperate, clawing hands and splayed feet eventually suggest there is a human underneath. Even then, he is removed from a state of recognizable humanity because, where the central figure in the first panel is flesh, this figure is only white bone. Bone clothed in boots and a soldier’s coat, but not flesh. And rather than being transcended, the human is utterly, literally effaced. In fact, he has no face at all. Instead of a mask of a god’s face and a human
body, simultaneously hiding and transcending his humanity, this figure’s entire head and body are obscured.

The use of masks in the mural is potentially suggestive. Orozco makes use of them more than once—the sacrificial victim in the first panel wears one, as well as the priests committing the sacrifice. The Spanish horses wear armored masks during the Conquest, although Cortez himself does not. And then, the figure of the modern human sacrifice is veiled beneath piles of flags and wreaths. This ubiquitous symbol seems to suggest a connection between these figures—that the terror and violence of the Spanish horses and the effacement of the modern sacrificial victim are to be identified with the violence in the first panel as symbols of barbarity and de-humanization.

Again, this interpretation is perfectly appropriate. However, it might be possible to add more as not all the masks seem to be equal. It would of course be foolish to deny the parallel between the use of masks in the first sacrificial panel and the last, yet again the representation differs. This perhaps suggests that the masks are of a different nature. Indeed, the latter figure can hardly be said to be wearing a mask. The whole upper half of his body is obscured, lost beneath chaotic folds. Nothing remains of him that even suggests a human face. Whereas the figure in the original panel, still masked (again, human sacrifice is not good), at least has a face, if not his own. He resembles the priests, holy men, and the god itself. He lies still, and whatever his personal reaction, the mask seems almost to smile. His situation is not enviable, which perhaps the mask’s presence suggests, but it is contextualized. He is still dehumanized, but his humanity (even as it suffers) is transcended, channeled into the divine, whereas the poor later sacrifice’s humanity is destroyed completely. Both masks can be said to dehumanize, but that does not mean there are not significant differences in the mode of dehumanization.
Returning to the analysis, the depicted context of the two actions differs vastly. The final figure is completely alone. Here no priests tug on his arms and legs. His bony fingers, not quite alive in their fleshless state but not quite dead in their convulsion, claw at the bare ground. His legs stick out in an undignified way. The modern context offered by his world does not extend an integrated sense of meaning to his suffering, and the whole panel speaks of anxiety and terror. There is one other human figure in the painting, a man to the left of the victim, but the two do not interact. Fat, isolated, white-eyed, he directs a band, or reads a speech into a microphone. But the sound has no audience apart from the tortured victim, whom the speaker neither observes nor touches, perhaps because the figure himself is terrified by the specter of death before him. The blaring instruments behind him only add a louder, more chaotic element to the scene rather than organizing it. The meaning this figure attempts to give the scene does not resonate.

The second chapter will discuss in more detail the significance of nature and the holy in dwelling, but for now it is telling that there is no sign of nature in the scene. The background is purely technical and inorganic. Nature is at least present in the first panel, if only in the background. It places the humans, making them both synonymous with it at the feet of the gods and higher than it as agents acting in those gods’ names. It is perhaps also significant that Aztec deities were aligned with certain natural forces. In many ways that heavily influential figure in the first painting is nature. In the second panel, these natural references are utterly absent.

But there are forces of influence in the modern painting that replace this simultaneously nature-based and divine source. No doubt inspired by the spectral, barren gods of the panel that precedes it, these new forces of influence include an anthropomorphic statue of a soldier behind the central figure, mid-bayonet thrust or rifle shot, on a large
marble block with stone laurel wreathes carved into it. This figure holds the same location as the god in the previous panel, but here it is not transcendence or nature being honored, but war, technology, and humanity as a machine. Significantly, this figure, obviously stone, appears more human than the actual body on the floor, more real than the real. And although he is a simulacrum, he is certainly more successful than the unfortunate victim.

The statue’s very lifelessness allows it to become an image of physical, modern perfection—a perfection the actual human body can never attain, certainly not under these circumstances. The flags stand in the foreground, the statue of the soldier behind, taking the place of the god that floated as an explanation for the destruction below in the earlier panel.

Color plays a significant role in this reading as well. “Human Sacrifice in Modern Times” lacks the organic flesh and brown colors of its counterpart, but it is not dull. A multicolored mess of a flag drapes the face and body of the victim. Other flags, colorful and garish, dominate the scene. The warrior is draped in bright pink wreathes, presumably given for glory or honor in war, but they don’t resemble flowers. In color and texture they resemble dead flesh, meat, bright wreathes of muscle or brains, thrown with abandon on the helpless, immobile corpse. In contrast, the figure itself, supposedly the central focus, is strictly monochrome. He fades into the background. The flags, wreathes, and greenish-tinted brass of the band are excessively colorful, distracting and confusing the eye.

In subject matter then, this also is a human sacrifice. But it is missing something that could make the ancient sacrifice, though terrible, closer to the meaningful death in Rivera’s painting. The forces that have replaced the gods to penetrate and persuade men towards destruction lack the colossal, bio-centric power of the earlier gods. They are now driven by strictly human drives: patriotism, scholasticism, modernity, science, and progress, inevitably culminating in the drive toward war and conquest. But even participation in that narrative,
life as a soldier, fails to provide any reciprocity or sympathy in the figure’s surroundings.

The modern commodification of a person through industry becomes the commodification of a person as a soldier, with patriotism as the hypnotic sleep word. The failing of both panels, worsening significantly in the second, is the figures’ inability to identify with things outside of themselves. The less contact they make, the less relational their death, and the less meaning and unity can be found therein.

The second panel then can be taken to function as an accusation, a depiction of the shortcomings of modernity. To repeat, neither form of suffering here can be said to be desirable. Yet if one accepts the inevitability of perhaps suffering and certainly death in the life of a mortal human, there are ways to make it more bearable. This should be clear in the earlier panel, where the humans are united with each other and with their god, and even the viewer can be drawn into the painting as the victim himself stares straight out. In the second panel everything is disjointed. It isolates, rather than unites, dissects more than mends. The results of this destruction are not transcendent as in the earlier panel. Rather they leave the figure dead, inert, and dreadfully alone. Significant, in the first panel the perpetrators of the crime are human; in this panel, the figure has been killed by abstractions and has already rotted away.

Universality in Art

The primary reason Orozco is the focus of this study rather than Rivera is partially because of the universal quality of his art. He wanted to depict the narrative arc of civilization, embodied within the American experience of the Conquest, and interrogate the things that can derail it. As such, as has been stated, Orozco was a vocal critic of the artistic movement of Indianism. This movement styled itself a return to the Aztec past and the grounds for a patriotic Renaissance. However Orozco saw it as dangerously paradoxical and
hypocritical. Naturally Orozco was no fan of European hegemony, and was skeptical of modernity, or at least of its progressive claims. However he questioned and even deeply resented Indianism’s pretensions of authenticity. For Orozco it was common sense that the Indianist pursuit of ancient culture was neither possible nor desirable. He felt the Indianists were either naïve or disingenuous in their romantic approach to history, and he expresses his indignation at their failure to adequately nuance the effects of the Conquest:

According to [the Indianists] the Conquest ought not to have taken place as it did. Instead of sending cruel and ambitious captains to the New World, Spain should have sent a great delegation of ethnologists, anthropologists, archeologists, civil engineers, dentists, veterinarians, physicians, country school-teachers, agronomists, Red Cross nurses, philosophers, philologists, biologists, art critics, mural painters, and learned historians. On reaching Vera Cruz the caravels should have unloaded carriages, adorned with symbolical floral designs, with Cortés and his captains in one of them, carrying baskets of lilies and a great many other followers and confetti and paper ribbon on the way to render homage to powerful Moctezuma and afterwards to set up bacteriological, urological, X-ray, and ultra-violet-ray laboratories, a Department of Public Works, universities, kindergartens, libraries, and banking houses. Instead of accepting the Aztec and Toltec maidens so frequently offered to them, the Spaniards should have brought along nice-looking girls from Galicia and Andalusia as gifts to Moctezuma and Cuauhtémoc. Alvarado, Ordaz, Sandoval, and other stout fellows should have been detailed to guard the ruins lest any least bit of the tremendous pre-Cortesian Art be lost. They
should have learned the seven hundred and eighty-two distinct languages that were spoken here. They should have respected the indigenous religion and left Huitzilopochtli standing. There should have been a free distribution of grain, cattle, and agricultural machinery. Free housing could have been provided for the country folk, and common landholdings and cooperatives established. Roads and bridges might have been built. There were new industries and sports to inculcate, all in the best manner, gently and affectionately. Human sacrifice might have been encouraged further, and a great packing house built for human flesh, with a department to handle canning and refrigeration… (Orozco 110).

Irony aside, for Orozco Indianism was not a valid response to the problems of his times. As he describes, it failed to address the little nuances and ambiguities of civilization, or of any discussion of history. Hopelessly romanticizing the Indians while vilifying the Spaniards was simply not constructive. Nor was it as novel as it claimed—Orozco felt that Indianism was a mere recycling of the same old, destructive tenets that would inevitably face the same outcomes and failures. In this light, beyond the naïveté of such a romantic approach, to Orozco the goals of Indianism were not only absurd but also dangerous, the mere reversal of the Hispanist colonial mindset. Rather than a return to Aztec society, whatever that might be, Orozco believed that Indianism had a conquering mindset of its own. It was not resurrecting something ancient and oppressed, but manipulating the same propagandistic tools of the earlier Conquest and the ruling class in order to establish a merely recycled, nationalistic, and in the view of Orozco, racist and dangerous order.

In light of these views, Orozco’s intentions, or at least the interpretations made possible by his murals, gain more clarity. His opinions on Indianism illustrate more sharply
his commitment to discovering something more widely applicable in his art. He is interested in more than the duality of Indians and Europeans, more than the historical details. He is making a statement about human nature and suffering that can be applied to all history, and all peoples:

Unlike Rivera, Orozco did not conceive this historical visualization as a rhetorical call of nationalist or continentalist liberation and identity. Rather, he saw the idea of the American experience not only as a duality, but also as a base on to which he could map the important question of humanity’s endless struggle to realize its greatest aspirations and ideals and its simultaneous frustration by its innate fallibility. For Orozco, this dichotomy of the human character was tragically repetitive and could not be conveniently located within specific geographical areas, historical times, races and cultures. The duality of the American experience, with the intrusion and subjugation of one people’s culture by another, was thus the perfect ground on which to reveal such divisions (Rochfort 103).

So while both panels depict violence and sacrifice, they are meant to act as symbols of things that are universal to humanity, not just the history of the Aztec and European. In his panels, the distinctly religious tones of the Aztec metanarrative at least partially draw the civilization together, but they could be any civilization with an adequate metanarrative. Only through this contextualization can the sacrifice become exactly that, a sacrifice—something sacred, that binds things together. The metanarrative of the first panel includes violence in its content, but it makes the world legible to its adherents, as the painting is legible to its viewers. In contrast, the metanarrative of modern times, equally universal in terms of the violence that results from its circumstances, has lost its sense of meaning, as reflected in the
painting’s illegibility. The ritual and art that surround it only detract from the sublimity of
the sacrifice, and the victim is not allowed to transcend his mortal state. He only succumbs
to it, becoming an abstraction of history. The sacrifice is meaningless.

José Clemente Orozco

Depicting Mexican history became very popular in Orozco’s time, and he, Rivera,
and Siqueiros all do it in one form or another. However Orozco’s work is unique. He was
able to move beyond the destructive idealism of Indianism to question the very nature of
suffering, and its impact on human existence. He recognized the need for change in his
society and his art was very much commenting specifically on the conditions of his time.
But Orozco wanted to do more than this. Unlike his fellow muralists, ultimately Orozco
was not interested in utopias. He was interested in an art that transcended these things, one
that would have universal application.

Born in the state of Jalisco in 1883, Orozco first came to experience art as an
observer of José Guadalupe Posada, the famous engraver and cartoonist. Orozco would
pass his shop on his walk to and from school every day, and was fascinated by the artist’s
process:

    Posada used to work in full view, behind the shop windows, and on my
    way to school and back, four times a day, I would stop and spend a few
    enchanted minutes in watching him, and sometimes I even ventured to enter the
    shop and snatch up a bit of the metal shavings that fell from the minium-coated
    metal plate as the master’s graver passed over it (Orozco 8).

    Posada was an early political as well as artistic influence on Orozco (Orozco xx). As
    a prominent critic of the oppressive Porfiriato, Posada’s cartoons were originally published in
    the leftist magazine El Machete. Because of his distinctly local art and the bold opinions
portrayed therein, he was highly influential on all three of the muralists. He was perhaps best known for his irresistible images of cheerful skeletons going about the business of ordinary people. Since grown famous under the name *Las Calaveras*, they quickly became a wider symbol for all of Mexico, with definite socialist undertones. Rochfort talks about the political tenor and influence of Posada’s work:

Posada’s work, usually published in Vanegas Arroyas’ street newspapers…was more than a mere catalogue of events. As a man of the people, Posada remained close to them all his working life. He was a rebel repulsed by the injustices of the dictatorship of the *Porfiriato*. Prints such as “The Ruling Misery,” “The Ballad of Four Zapatistas Killed by Firing Squad,” and “The Horrible Crimes of the Landowners” show Posada as a political populist, champion of the cause of freedom and justice. (Rochfort 17)

Posada’s art and politics were influential on all of the muralists. Indeed, one of Diego Rivera’s most famous paintings is an example of a Posada-inspired *Calavera* in his mural panel “A Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park.” In the painting a skeleton stands holding her purse and wearing a feathered dress, a wide grin across her toothy face. Around her people work and talk, and take no notice of this unusual figure. Rivera included other *Calavera* figures in his paintings, participating, as they did in Posada’s work, in scenes of everyday life: sometimes they play in bands, sometimes they dance, and sometimes they gather flowers. They are always interspersed among the living, who seem to be untroubled by their presence. Rivera recycled both Posada’s imagery and his goals: *Las Calaveras* were meant to embody a sense of unique national unity and communal experience. They united a sense of the imminence of the spiritual world with the quotidian in an effortless way that,
while perhaps not “authentically” Aztec, is distinctly non-European. In their time Las Calaveras inspired thousands of Mexicans with national pride. They asserted an identity that was uniquely Mexican—Aztec in its cult-of-the-dead references, Spanish in dress, and thus mestizo in apparent contemporary culture.

While Rivera’s use of Calaveras in his art is the most direct reference to Posada from the muralists, the goals they embody were common among them. And the muralists were not alone. In Orozco’s day, Mexico was afire with nationalistic fervor (Rochfort 15). Mexicans were searching for a national identity, partially defined by the desire to shake off the culture of modernity, associated with capitalism and conquest, which had driven the colonization and exploitation of Mexico’s land and peoples. Many revolutionaries and patriots felt that if all went right in the Revolution, this history would be transcended and for the first time Mexico’s divided population of Indians, whites, and mestizos would ostensibly come together to be Mexicans.

Orozco was deeply inspired by these things, even at a young age. The idea of creating an identity that was uniquely different from Spain, that could even compete with Spain (culturally if not economically), fascinated him and made him a willing convert to the Mexican cause. He believed so deeply in the value of Mexico’s culture that he refused to go to Paris to study art, a step taken by Rivera and considered necessary for all artists who wanted to follow the Western tradition. Orozco had no stomach for such European pretension. Through Posada and his associations with other Mexican artists, Orozco saw the colonialist assumptions about class separation and economics that were built into “The Grand Tour” and the conventions of acceptable art. He resented these assumptions and refused to reinforce them.

The Significance of American Art
However, Orozco’s artistic goals were not founded solely on a sense of rebellion against the social norms that held against him. For Orozco the restriction of artistic learning and display to Paris was not only ridiculous and elitist, but also completely backward. Like other American artists of his time, Orozco came to believe that European art was degenerate, not American art. For Orozco, European art was from a dying civilization, caught in an endless cultural round of trying to recapture old glories and aimlessly pursuing the blind alley of novelty at the expense of meaning. For Orozco, American art could offer precisely what European art was looking for: meaning, and wonder, in abundance.

More clarity on this idea can be found within the distinctly American literary movement of *lo real maravilloso*. Although the movement was not fully described until Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier wrote about it in 1949, it offers a sense of the multiplicity of Latin American reality that inspired Orozco. It is the sense of the uncanny, of surprise, of not being able to reconcile contradictions, yet being generally undisturbed by this. A play on the term magical realism, which described certain European artistic conventions within the surrealist movement, the term *lo real maravilloso* was coined by Carpentier, subtly altering the meaning of the phrase. Marvelous reality, as it were, defines itself against European magical realism. And while Orozco was too early to be a magical realist himself, his art surely foreshadows some of their conventions:

In Latin America, Carpentier argues, the fantastic is not to be discovered by subverting or transcending reality with abstract forms and manufactured combinations of images. Rather the fantastic inheres in the natural and human realities of time and place, where improbable juxtapositions and marvelous mixtures exist by virtue of Latin America’s
varied history, geography, demography, and politics – not by manifesto

(Zamora and Faris 75).

This sense of *lo real maravilloso*, then, included for many Latin American artists a certain sense of ‘magic’ and even what Heidegger will call ‘the holy’ as present every day, all around. It was not something that had to be sought for or imagined. It was not something symbolic, or at least, not solely symbolic. It was real, and a part of everyday life. This odd situation came about because of all the influences on Mexico, the dualities of culture and history, of geography and politics. In short, Mexico’s hybridity was a marvelous source of artistic inspiration, as Orozco well knew.

Indeed, Orozco had tremendous faith in the value of hybridity. His sense of marvelous reality was always accompanied by a stubborn sense of the value of the Mexican experience as equal with that of the European, and a strong faith in Mexican potential. After all”

We too had a character, which was quite the equal of any other. We would learn what the ancients and the foreigners could teach us, but we could do as much as they, or more….Why must we be eternally on our knees before the Kants and the Hugos? All praise to the masters indeed, but we too could produce a Kant or a Hugo. We too could wrest iron from the bowels of the earth and fashion it into ships and machines. We could raise prodigious cities, and create nations, and explore the universe. Was it not from a mixture of two races that the titans sprang (21)?

For all of these reasons, Orozco wanted primarily to paint from the Americas, about the Americas. In contrast with the heavily-trodden, rainy streets of Europe, the Americas,
and Mexico in particular, seemed fresh and new. Its experiences were pure, its reality distinct and enhanced. Since the Academy was “a warehouse of mummies and fossils,” (26) Orozco took his art to the streets of Mexico City. His art flowered as he explored “the wretchedest barrios in the city. On every canvas there began to appear, bit by bit, like a dawn, the Mexican landscape, and familiar forms and the colors” (21). His symbolist sympathies allowed him to engage and expand upon the physical realities he saw, turning the everyday world around him into a marvellous reality, full of meaning and wonder.

Further, Orozco sensed that the act of creating something in art gave it place and memory in a culture (Orozco 21). And if that was the case then it was Mexico, not France, which needed creation and appreciation. It was Mexico whose people had been oppressed for centuries, not only under the physical and economic mantle of class division and slavery, but also under the cultural and mental burden of a perceived inferiority to the dominant class, partially perpetuated through the conventions of art. Orozco wanted Mexicans to take pride in their Mexicanness, not to pine for a country that was never theirs. These interests and passions quite naturally led him toward the revolutionary spirit that was brewing in the country.

Orozco as Unique

Yet he never fully converted to the revolutionary cause, for several reasons. The unique purposes of Orozco’s art come into clearest focus against the background of the work of his contemporaries. First, it is worthwhile to consider the things they have in common. They are after all historically grouped for more than chronological reasons. It is fair to say that all the muralists wanted their art to be informed by political sentiments. Both Siqueiros and Rivera were particularly inspired by Marxism, although Orozco, typically, had his reservations (Rochfort 119). Politically charged and supported by the people, the
muralists wanted to shrug off the elitist attitudes of European art. They wanted to make art big and accessible—art for the people, not for a small privileged class. The new mural art would be free to all, non-aristocratic, and would glorify the everyday lives of the workers and the proletariat instead of the indolence of the leisure class. Rivera and Siqueiros particularly wanted to inspire action and change for the better.

Arguably, this desire can most strongly be seen in the work of Diego Rivera, whose murals are literally crowded with working people. Rivera’s murals largely glorify work and labor and the plain life of the teeming peasant class. He paints the proletariat. These are people who cannot afford fine things or even privacy, but they are not unhappy (unless being subjected to cruel indignities by the occasionally painted oppressor). His murals send a Marxist message that is clear as a bell: while he is not offering leisure and abundance to all, he is offering freedom and dignity for the difficult lives of the working class. As mentioned, Rivera was associated with the Indianists, and used many pre-Columbian references (some accurate, some less so) to communicate his hope for a glorious, Marxist future that would be reborn from the ashes of the past.

Siqueiros’ work takes on a distinctly darker tone. Influenced by Italian Futurism (although abandoning its vicious optimism) and Russian Expressionism, he focuses on the pain and sufferings of the lower class at the hands of the elite (Rochfort 31). A devoted Indianist and Marxist, he wrote a manifesto describing the purposes of his art and the artistic progression he hoped for his country:

Repudiamos la llamada pintura de caballete y todo el arte de los 
círculos ultraintelectuales, porque es aristocrático, y glorificamos la expresión 
del ARTE MONUMENTAL, porque es una propiedad pública.

Proclamamos que dado que el momento social es de transición entre un
orden decrepito y uno nuevo, los creadores de belleza deben realizar sus mayores esfuerzos para hacer su producción de valor ideológico para el pueblo, y la meta ideal del arte, que actualmente es una expresión de masturbación individualista, sea arte para todos, de educación y batalla (Siqueiros, quoted in Wittman 174).¹

Thus afire with an enthusiasm for the dawn of the art of the people at least as strong as his contempt for the Academy, Siqueiros painted the history of the oppression of Mexico. This is a history which, under his brush, glorifies the struggle of the native and the Mexican and condemns the thoughtless excesses of the invading culture (Rochfort 109). Where Rivera’s work seeks to reveal the happy, industrious, bustling community the working class could be, Siqueiros points a finger at the forces that stand in the way of that reality and the subsequent sufferings of the people. Both Rivera and Siqueiros are aiming toward a brighter Marxist future, where the lower class will receive its dignity and the oppressors will be toppled.

This perspective couldn’t be further from the less optimistic, cyclical progression of *The Epic of American Civilization*. Certainly Orozco too had leftist leanings and sympathies. In his autobiography he records being influenced by the fiery Siqueiros who, post-prison stint for an attack on Leon Trotsky (Rochfort 185), had traveled in Europe and studied Marxism and Leninism in the Soviet Union (Orozco 92). However, he just couldn’t muster the same level of enthusiasm as his colleagues, whom he saw as driven in part by overly romanticized notions of the life of the worker. For Orozco the error in romanticizing the proletariat was as close as the artists’ patrons themselves, who were, ironically, nearly always members of the elite class:
Proletarian art consisted in pictures of workers on the job, and it was supposedly intended for them. But this turned out to be an error, since a worker who has spent eight hours in the shop takes no pleasure in coming home to a picture of workers on the job. He wants something different, which has nothing to do with work...the comical thing about it all was that the bourgeois bought proletarian art at fancy prices, though it was supposed to be directed at them, and the proletarians would gladly have bought bourgeois art if they had had the money...the halls in bourgeois homes are full of proletarian furniture and objects, like sleeping mats, cane-bottomed chairs, clay pots and tin candlesticks; whereas a worker, as soon as he had money enough to furnish his house, buys a Pullman sofa in heavy velvet, a breakfast set, or a set of those extra rare pieces of furniture built of nickel-plated iron tubings, thick crystals, and beveled mirrors (94).

Early on then Orozco began to feel somewhat cynical toward the lofty aspirations of the artists around him, or at least about their capacity (and his own) to paint and support the Revolution while remaining artistically honest.

Artistically, then, perhaps the qualifying difference between the three muralists lies in the purpose of their respective arts. Rivera understood his murals in a directly political way, and sought primarily to create a strong effect on the people. He offered a vision of the ideal, of what they should be working and fighting for. His works are not a reflection of society, but an explication of its ills and their potential cure. He trusts the people to find inspiration in his work and fight to bring about the utopia he predicts (Rochfort 81).

Siqueiros’ motives were similar. His work differed in its focus from that of Rivera, yet he nonetheless wanted to inspire a reaction among the people that would lead to the
creation of a Mexican Communist golden age. Where Rivera wanted to inspire change and progress, Siqueiros wanted to provoke pain and rebellion. His arguably most famous painting, *The Torment of Cuauhtemoc*, provides an excellent example of this. The painting is shocking, providing a stark contrast between the pathetic, human, and very relatable martyrs on the torture table and the anonymous, mechanical Europeans watching. The look on Cuauhtemoc’s tortured face of stoicism in the midst of unbearable pain would excite sympathy and outrage in any viewer. The pathos of the scene is increased for those who know the story, wherein Cuauhtemoc, Moctezuma’s nephew, was the last member of the Aztec nobility to attempt to rally his people against the Europeans. Where Moctezuma gave up quickly, for various reasons, Cuauhtemoc wanted to fight. However he was unsuccessful, and in this painting Siqueiros points out the tragedy and injustice of his end, using it to suggest the mortification and victimization of all of Mexico.

Both Rivera and Siqueiros used their art as a medium of communication and inspiration—they wanted it to have real results in the physical, preferably political, world. Both were affiliated with the Indianist movement, passionate about the Revolution, and working to inspire it into a full, righteous, frenzy that would ultimately result in a better world than the one they saw around them (Rochfort 93, 201).

But Orozco goes his own way. If Rivera presents a cure to the generalized ills of his country as diagnosed by Siqueiros, Orozco lingers over the nature of the disease in an attempt to do it justice. His depictions are not black and white. His approach to the Conquest is always, at best, ambivalent. His Cortez is terrifying, but no more so than his departing, furious Quetzalcoatl or his blank-faced, stern-featured Aztecs. And he wasn’t so much of a Marxist as to trust the people to make good decisions, either in government or in art. He found the more popular art of his day to be simplistic, benign, and ineffective. As he
puts it: “Art interests everybody but unfortunately non-art interests everybody equally as much, if not more. The world is bursting with vulgarities known and enjoyed by millions of people in every land. The worst movies last longest” (99).

He refused to create the sort of “diabetic art…the greater the amount of sugar, the greater the—commercial—success…” (99) that the people approved. For Diego Rivera (who was, incidentally, the most successful of the three in his lifetime) there was no problem. Generalities always ran in favor of his purposes. This applied also to Siqueiros—the more black and white the morality of the situation, the more dramatic and effective the art. But Orozco was searching for something more than ideals and progressive history. He was searching for the meaning in history, for something universal, which would go beyond the application (and manipulation) of history’s stories for political purposes. He was searching for something as complex as the arc of human suffering itself.

This longer view was not welcomed by everybody. Ultimately Orozco was no fiery radical, which was a disappointment to those revolutionaries who wanted to lionize him beside his fellow muralists. He discusses, with his usual dry humor, the mythology that rose up about his war service. In fact, he never served in the Revolution at all but spent the time in the United States:

I played no part in the Revolution, I came to no harm, and I ran no danger at all…It was consequently very funny to read the many articles that American papers published about my wartime adventures. A headline in one San Francisco daily ran, “The Bare-Footed Soldier of the Revolution.” Another paper gave the most minute details of my differences with Carranza, who, it seems, was persecuting me implacably for satirical attacks upon him. The most fantastic report of all was a dramatic account of how I had lost my
left hand while throwing bombs in a terrible encounter between Villistas and Zapatistas....Other stories had me carrying the banner of the Indian cause, and these were accompanied by a picture of my person in which I could recognize a Tarahumara (41).

Orozco had lost his hand as a child in an accident. Beneath his sense of humor, Orozco had little tolerance for the thoughtless frenzy of the Revolution. He often found himself as appalled by the misplaced enthusiasms of the revolutionaries as by the abundant excesses of the dominant class, and he saw the complexities of history too well to share in the fervor of his contemporaries. An honest approach to culture would not be found, Orozco believed, either in an impossible return to a romanticized past or in a heedless mechanical march toward the future. For Orozco, an honest approach would entail critiquing the present, in all its flaws and glory, and considering honestly the history that preceded it. He didn’t trust the progressive narratives of Siqueiros and Rivera to be honest. He felt they were misrepresentations and, as he put it, “History is subject to truly surprising and disconcerting corrections” (42). So he spent his days and nights not in battle, not feverishly writing revolutionary texts (or painting revolutionary murals), but wandering the city, watching the people.

Orozco’s ambivalence toward his fellow revolutionaries provides the perfect analogy to his art. Able to see the perspectives of both Indian and Spaniard, able to appreciate the beauty brought from the Old World without forgetting the suffering inflicted upon the new, his art can never be strictly propagandistic as it will satisfy neither side. But his instinctive cynicism about the solutions offered by Indianism counter-balanced by his disdain for the racist claims of Hispanism allow Orozco to meditate in his paintings on the good and the bad of human experience itself, with Mexico as the stage. Orozco’s murals, like those of his
contemporaries, are a manifestation of a larger movement toward a new sense of Mexican identity. But for Orozco the details, the messy things, the things that don’t work, hold the most interest. In studying these things, in considering them rather than denying them, the anxiety produced in modernity by the prospect of death and suffering can be faced and perhaps, resolved.

The pretensions of progress, embodied in both the Conquest and the ideology of Indianism, to create (or re-create, for the nostalgic Indianists) a new and improved world become secondary in this pursuit, particularly since, based on the pattern of the murals, in Orozco’s view those pretensions had largely failed anyway. In the interpretation in the first section of this chapter, the critique the murals offer of Orozco’s time, of modernity itself, can be taken thus: the attempt to eradicate suffering and death is misguided. While not diminishing its tragedy, suffering is inevitable and even definitive of human experience. Therefore, the task of re-imbuing suffering and death with meaning that will take away its terror becomes crucial. This kind of meaning, present in Rivera’s painting and progressively diminishing throughout Orozco’s, can be found only through context.

This context takes many forms, the most valuable of which are those furthest from human creation or comprehension, such as a sense of the holy which can’t be described, or an interaction with the reality of nature which can never fully be explained. For Heidegger, these two things are intimately related (Young 93 – 94). Only in the unsettling but beautiful context of the non-human can the human really exist meaningfully, and the experience of suffering be given significance.
Chapter II

Modernity and the Bad Death

Having explored the murals themselves and some of Orozco’s background and artistic motivations, I now turn toward the more philosophical questions a Heideggerian interpretation of his art poses. The question for this next chapter is how to understand the difference between Orozco’s two sufferers? Where the one is in frenzied yet smothered agony, the first lies still in his captors’ arms. The one is utterly isolated, the other in contact with men and his god. Why this difference, when both are undergoing terrible suffering and death?

Context and Dwelling

The primary thematic difference between the two portraits is their respective time frame. Orozco seems to suggest some quality that creates these different deaths. This quality is present in the violence of both paintings, but seems to become significantly worse in the second. The murals do not fully condemn modernity, of course, and Orozco would seem to admit, at least in his ambiguous portraits of Anglo-America and Cortez, that the modern worldview has certainly led to many benefits. However, they also suggest that such advances have not released humanity from its cycle of suffering. To be clear, Orozco would not embrace this; he would probably lament it. The murals are not depicting a masochistic or self-flagellating road to morality. They are acknowledging the recurrence of suffering and
death in the human drama. But they also seem to suggest that something in modern times has led to a deeper loss of the ability to calmly face suffering.

In considering why this might be, the paintings can be taken to imply that the experience of suffering is somewhat dependent upon its context. This statement is not shocking, and real-life examples of this are easy to find. To pick one at random, certain tribes in Africa practice ritual scarification in the name of aesthetic beauty. This purpose of aesthetics makes the practice far more tolerable for the individuals who undergo it. However if a Western woman were subjected to such practices, she would almost certainly feel deeply abused and wronged. Other examples of suffering made bearable or even desirable by contextual beliefs include: footbinding, circumcision (both male and female), high heels, tweezing, plastic surgery, dying for one’s country, and many others. Significantly, this paper is not taking a moral stance on any of these practices, although some may merit it. However the author withholds her opinions because the point of this paper lies not in the politics but in the philosophy (although the two may inevitably intersect in practical life). Still, these occurrences seem to prompt a second look at the experience of suffering and the power of a context that makes certain forms of it not only bearable, but even desirable, while others not at all. In short, how does context take the terror away from pain?

Martin Heidegger offers an answer. While the extension of Heidegerrian thought to ethical and social matters is still somewhat questioned, his later thought is particularly relevant to a discussion of suffering because he deals with the very question of ‘the good death.’ This ‘good death’ is defined principally in terms of ‘dwelling,’ a concept that merits further exploration.

For Heidegger, ‘dwelling’ can only be understood if first it is accepted that human experience is quintessentially relational. For Heidegger the self does not exist as an
independent subject at all. Rather the self finds itself in things, as a physical reflection is found in a mirror. It finds itself in things because it is so heavily involved with them in its everyday life, it cannot escape them, it cannot exist without them. Therefore for Heidegger, the kind of introverted, meditative self-reflection some influential (notably Cartesian) philosophies espouse cannot lead to true self-knowledge, which is necessary for dwelling. The self does not and cannot exist independent of its world:

[The self] never finds itself otherwise than in the things themselves, and in fact in those things that daily surround it. It finds itself primarily and constantly in things because, tending them, distressed by them, it always in some way or other rests in things. Each one of us is what he pursues and cares for (The Basic Problems of Phenomenology 159).

This passage suggests two valuable things: not only does it reinforce the concept that humans should be considered as relational beings, finding themselves in relationships between ‘individuals’ and things, but also that these relationships are characterized by the quality of “caring for.” This relational ontology can’t help but be a direct challenge to the ontology of modernity, as Young writes “’Man dwells,’ should be taken as a purposeful revision of Descartes’ ‘Man is a rational being’” (Young 38).

It seems that the ontology of modernity, then, would be a good place to begin the study of what in modernity precludes Orozco’s second figure from suffering a ‘good death.” Young writes:

[An important symptom of modernity] is man’s inability to ‘own’ death, the consequence of which…is that our fundamental way of being in the world is anxiety. We are, in a fundamental sense, insecure. Since we cannot own death, and since pain is an intimation of death, we cannot own
Young, after Heidegger, affirms that one central problem of modernity is the inability to own, or accept (this does not imply desire), death. Because death, and pain with it, remains inevitable and even central to the human experience, the inability to own it creates an unresolved difficulty in the modern mind, leading to a state of anxiety. In these terms, the figure in the second panel is in just such a state of ‘anxiety,’ because his modern culture forbids him from owning his death. In the first panel the figure seems calmer. He could even have offered himself as a sacrifice, as some sacrificial victims allegedly did in Aztec practice. Perhaps this last speculation goes too far, but whatever the circumstances that brought him to the stone table, like Rivera’s figure, he owns his death. And therefore he is secure, even in the face of it. This security is implied by the earlier-discussed serenity of the scene, including the warm colors, flowing lines, and the symmetry of its organizational X-structure. It is also implied by the almost content expression on his face, and his cooperative stillness on the table. Granted, he is being restrained by two priests, but they only hold one arm and his head in place. His right arm, legs, and torso are unrestrained, cooperative.

The reason the first figure owns his death and the second does not is because the first figure exists relationally. He is held by his priests at the feet of his god, who embodies both nature and the divine (perhaps the two should not be separated in this context). Heidegger defines dwelling in just this way: dwelling involves living in a state of “caring-for” among what Heidegger calls the “fourfold”: Earth, Sky, Gods, and Mortals (The Thing 179). In Heidegger’s language, this signifies human interaction with nature, time and/or weather, a sense of a deity or of the holy, and fellow humans. He nuances the fourfold more deeply
than this, but for the purposes of this thesis the above definition is sufficient. The first figure interacts with these things in his death, caring-for them and being cared-for by them. He could be described as Young describes the security of the dweller:

The ultimate threat to one’s security is, of course, death; death understood as annihilation, nothingness. So if one experiences oneself as ultimately—‘ontologically’ one might put it—secure, then one experiences oneself as secure even in the face of death. One confronts death, that is, not with fear but rather with—to use a favorite word of Heidegger’s—gelassenheit, equanimity…such an initiation, Heidegger continues, is by no means a coming-to-terms with annihilation but is, rather, an overcoming of the thought that death, the terminus or ‘goal’ of life, is an ‘empty nothing’ (Young 65).

In these terms, the second figure’s ordeal becomes clearer. He interacts with no one, cares-for and is cared-for by nothing. His death becomes an “empty nothing.”

For purposes of reference, then, let dwelling be defined in this way: a way of being-in-the-world whose fundamental attitude is care, both caring-for others and being cared-for. The term ‘others’ includes not only other humans, but also Heidegger’s fourfold. As such this attitude is fundamentally relational, and cannot be lived out in isolation. This attitude alone allows the human to face pain, suffering, and even death with what Heidegger calls “equanimity.”

**The Solitude of Modernity**

Now that the characteristic of dwelling has been explored in an effort to explain the more peaceful appearance of the first figure’s death, it is worth asking what exactly prevents the second figure from achieving the same. The order of
Orozco’s works suggests that it is not merely a moral failing on the part of the figure, a failure to ‘reach out’ perhaps, but something systematic and inherent, unique to the modern age. Heidegger calls this modern quality that prevents dwelling “Gestell.” This term can be, and often is, loosely translated as “enframing.” The implication of this term is something that places reality into a frame, that determines its interpretation. Heidegger also calls these ‘frames’ horizons, meaning systems of cultural norms that determine how individuals interpret information from the world. For Heidegger, all cultures and all eras have these horizons. What, then, is sets the nature of this enframing quality of modernity apart, and why does it prevent the second figure from dwelling?

The history of the development of the set of beliefs here referenced under the broad term ‘modernity’ or, more accurately, modernity’s quality of Gestell, is a long and complicated one. Much criticism of the modern system has come from the field of sociology, and prominent British sociologist Anthony Giddens offers a usefully concise definition:

At its simplest, modernity is a shorthand term for modern society or industrial civilization. Portrayed in more detail, it is associated with (1) a certain set of attitudes towards the world, the idea of the world as open to transformation by human intervention; (2) a complex of economic institutions, especially industrial production and a market economy; (3) a certain range of political institutions, including the nation-state and mass democracy… (94)

Related to and considerably influenced by Renaissance humanism, modernity is in a broad sense a set of beliefs that focuses on human power and prerogatives almost exclusively. Giddens suggests that modernity has led to the rise of the economic institution of capitalism,
and that the tenets of modernity and the tenets of capitalism cannot be separated. Further, these beliefs are at the roots of various modern political institutions, which, Giddens states, include the nation and ideas of democracy. While both capitalism and democracy will play a part in this discussion, the fundamental belief of modernity that both theorists describe and that this paper will consider is this: *that the world can and should be shaped by humans*. This belief by definition presupposes a human ability to understand the world in order to be justified in acting upon it.

As a useful second definition of modernity, Leslie Paul Thiele gives some history to the term:

> The term modernist was first used in the sixteenth century, often pejoratively, as a reference to someone who spurned tradition and advocated either new techniques of scientific inquiry or the study and use of vernacular languages rather than classical Greek or Latin. Breaking the chains of tradition, modernists assumed, would progressively liberate humankind, allowing it to claim its birthright as master of its world. Modernism was, and remains today, chiefly characterized by rapid innovation in the service of human power and prerogatives (Thiele 491). Thiele concurs then with Giddens’ description of the strictly human parameters of modernity, and its aspiration to master its environment. He also adds that modernity includes an attempt to distance itself from tradition and myth.

> As far as these definitions go, modernity might seem to be rather harmless, even beneficial. And few if any of critics would deny the good things that have been accomplished in the modern age. However, one problem with such progressive views on the supremacy of humanity is that the concept of suffering takes a back-burner, becomes, as
Young writes, something to be evaded. This is problematic because precisely this disregarding of the experience of suffering, the evasion of or inability to own death, as it were, renders Orozco’s second panel so much more terrifying than the first. Yet this evasion is common in, for Young even definitive of, modernity. In his discussion of the topic, Young includes a relevant and somewhat humorous anecdote:

In the mid-1990s there occurred, on New Zealand television, a pre-election debate between party leaders on the topic of health. The members of the live audience were given electronic devices which enabled them to respond with varying degrees of favour or disfavour to what the participants were saying, as they were saying it. The cumulative result was displayed as a kind of constantly fluctuating graph-line at the bottom of the screen which was known as ‘the worm’. At one point, the incumbent prime minister, Jim Bolger (a Catholic), exasperated at constant carping over the failures of the health system, expostulated: “Of course, death will always be associated with the health service.” The worm hit an all-time low and Bolger went on to lose his parliamentary majority (79).

How did masses of people in Western cultures get so out of touch with reality? The history of this development is worth tracing.

**Enlightenment**

The humanism discussed by Giddens and Thiele, so exclusive to human parameters, was molded during the reinterpretation of Renaissance humanism that occurred in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. And, like those behind Renaissance humanism, the motives behind the science and thought systems of the eighteenth century are hardly bad. Indeed, its roots lie in the very difficulty that inspires this paper, suffering.
Susan Nieman traces early Enlightenment thought to the experience of Alfonso X of Castile, who, after years of studying history was heard to mutter, “If I had been of God’s counsel at the Creation, many things would have been ordered better” (15). This assertion brought condemnation in his time, as it presumed to question the order of the creation, but later it sparked the sympathy of the Enlightenment movement (15). The Enlightenment thinkers saw the humanism and logic of modernity, and particularly the new methods of science they were developing, as a means toward improving the human condition. Appalled by centuries of what seemed to them chaos and gratuitous pain, by the plague, the Inquisition, the wars between Protestants and Catholics, and other tribulations of humanity (some of them wrote great lists of the ills that might have been prevented), the Enlightenment was a call to alleviate human suffering, to improve education, and to raise humanity above the bestial level.

Enlightenment thinker Marquis de Condorcet serves as a representative and articulate example of his age. A mathematician, scientist, and philosopher who studied under d’Alembert, he was a free thinker who involved himself in politics at many levels. He spoke out against slavery and in favor of women’s rights. A firm believer in the progressive tenets of the Enlightenment, some of his more famous essays (at least of the non-scientific variety) include “The Perfectibility of Man,” and “The Future Progress of the Human Mind.” In this latter he writes almost joyfully:

So…we are bound to believe that the average length of human life will forever increase unless this is prevented by physical revolutions; we do not know what the limit is which it can never exceed…Finally may we not extend such hopes to the intellectual and moral faculties? May not our parents, who transmit to us the benefits or disadvantages of their
constitution, and from whom we receive our shape and features as well as our tendencies to certain physical affections, hand on to us also that part of the physical organization which determines the sensibility? Is it not probably that education, in perfecting these qualities, will at the same time influence, modify and perfect the organization itself? Analogy, investigation of the human faculties, and the study of certain facts all seem to give substance to such conjectures, which would further push back the boundaries of our hopes. (Condorcet 38)

The faith of the Marquis and his celebration of human progress (for him always allied with science) are inspiring, even convincing in his works. His optimism and energy embody the spirit of his age. Further, for the Marquis, the gullibility and ignorance of the past had been responsible for the terrible crimes and human suffering his contemporaries were attempting to understand. So, logically, once that demon was exorcised, perhaps suffering could be as well.

The roots of the attitude of poor Prime Minister Bolger’s audience should be starting to shine through. Although it has been three hundred or so years since the Enlightenment, the humanist, progressive perspective on reality established then remains in many ways dominant. Of course the idea of one or two centuries creating such a wild sea change is a bit too convenient to be quite on the mark—the Enlightenment’s roots can likely be traced back in time indefinitely (Alfonso X lived in the thirteenth century), and its influence since the eighteenth century has been as complex. However, it remains fair to say that the modernity of the present was deeply shaped by the thinkers of the Enlightenment, and still treasures many of the values first embraced in the eighteenth century. Modernity firmly agrees with Condorcet’s idea of human moral progression aided by science, and tends to view the time
since his day in precisely those terms. It revels in the progressive advances of the Western world in terms of technology and in the extension of human rights and freedoms. These advances have brought power and comfort to large sections of humanity that would never have had such advantages in another time—certainly not in such numbers.

It shouldn’t be difficult to sense an approaching critique of this attitude. However before this path is taken, acknowledging that Heidegger, Giddens, and Orozco are not opposed to humanism in itself is important. All of them believe in the supremacy of the human within a larger chain of being. The criticisms to be explored do not embrace a system of thought that would demote humans, nor will they include luddism as a solution. As Young puts it:

There is nothing wrong, that is, in seeking understanding and therefore a measure of control over reality. Though the ability to control can, of course, become abuse, as when it becomes control for the sake of ‘unconditional’ exploitation, it can also be the opposite. One cannot care-for a delicate ecological system unless one knows how it works and what the forces are that threaten to destroy it (Young 79).

The search for knowledge and the pursuit of change for the better are not the targets of critics of modernity. Nor even the honor given to humans over other creatures or things, exactly. Rather the exclusivity of the focus of these pursuits constitutes Gestell. Heidegger will argue this exclusivity is not only misguided but also fatal for both the world and humans as beings who can only “dwell” relationally.

Science and Reductionism

An analysis of the phenomenon of science in greater detail can better supply what within modernity is the true target of this critique. Naturally, science played a crucial role in
the quest to alleviate suffering, even acting as the primary distinguishing factor between the 
humanism of the eighteenth century and that of the Renaissance. Under the influence of 
earlier scientists such as Descartes, Newton, and Bacon, many thinkers of the Enlightenment 
put their hopes in a technological world that could shake humanity free of its reliance upon 
what they saw as the ignorant and destructive superstitions of the Middle Ages.

Perhaps the flaw of this project can be defined simply and appropriately by 
Newton’s scientific method. This method states that taking context into account in 
the pursuit of truth is not only irrelevant but irresponsible: “We are to admit no 
more causes of natural things than such as are both true and sufficient to explain 
their appearances” (Newton 45). This perspective is generally central to the project 
of science, where only an object of study can only be understood by reducing it to its 
singularity and controlling for all contextual factors. John Deely describes this in his 
analysis of the Cartesian system: “In other words, what is proposed as novel in the 
Cartesian system is the system itself, in particular the method of analysis of objects 
into their simplest components, buttressed by methodical doubt maintained at each 
step of the way (54).

A protest might here be lodged that indeed, Newton’s method is the best and most 
efficient in the search for material facts. Further, not all scientific pursuits, especially 
recently, are defined by Newton’s statement. Certain fields, including ecology (significantly) 
in some cases seem to positively subvert it. However, both of these objections speak to the 
problem. Newton’s statement may well be the best method for finding truth, but only 
within a material realm. And if science has in some fields left Newton’s statement behind, it 
still maintains a strong cultural hold. The problem is two fold: it lies first not in the 
application of the scientific method to science, but in its extension into other realms, indeed
into all facets of modern culture; secondly, it lies in the pretension to utter objectivity.

Science often presumes not only the power to describe what can be positively seen (as in positivism), but also the authority to discount what cannot. This reduction-towards-knowledge alters the way reality itself is perceived—it reduces it, in short, to what is scientifically relevant and discards what isn’t, without acknowledging that it acts itself as an interpretive, and not merely descriptive, device. It “enframes” it. Young writes:

What it misses is…the fact that there are just these universal traits which have categorical status for us is dependent on the selection made from the smorgasbord of attributes possessed by reality itself which is made by the linguistic practices, the forms of life, with which we live, and move, and have our being. And missing that, missing, not our horizon of disclosure but rather its horizontal character—the perspectival character of our basic perspective on things—it elevates its account of the being of beings into the (one and only) categorical account of reality itself….it elevates (what is in fact) a particular disclosure to tyrannical status, a status which allows the possibility of no other reality-revealing itself. I shall refer to this phenomenon as “absolutization”. As Heidegger uses the term, the error that is [Gestell] may be defined as the absolutization of some (of any) horizon of disclosure (29).

Beyond the tyrannical absolutization of its own perspective as truth, the science of modernity also extends beyond its proper realm, attempting to explain things it simply cannot, and discounting them in that inevitable event. Carman offers some further nuances on this cultural hold, and the problems of extending scientific thought and method outside of the realms of science:
Heidegger is not trying (incoherently) to contradict the law of non-contradiction, but rather insisting that traditional logic is of no positive guidance in asking the question of being. What Heidegger calls the “hegemony” of logic is not its legitimate authority over formal judgment and inference, but its false promise to provide substantive metaphysical insight into fundamental, if still only semi-articulate, philosophical questions (568).

This promise of metaphysical answers is problematic not only because scientific thought fails to actually provide such answers, and too often presumes to discount the questions, but also because, in Heidegger’s terms, it changes the very perception humans have of their world. Young argues that the perspective of science, when extended, far from being truly empirical actually reshapes the world for the observer as such that it forbids dwelling (77).

For Young and Heidegger, this cultural reductionism, inherited from scientific pursuits, complicates dwelling partially because scientific thought and method have largely come to underlie truth-claims in all sectors of society. It is not uncommon to find members of a religion trying to justify their beliefs scientifically, or philosophers and scholars trying to prove the importance of their pursuits in scientific terms. Science has become a cultural value, exceeding its prescribed realm of the physical and material, bringing values of reductionism into the cultural ‘hegemony of logic’ Heidegger derides (Young77).

Nietzsche sums up the difficulties with the over-extension of scientific thought most poetically in The Gay Science:

We say [scientific knowledge] is ‘explanation,’ but it is only in ‘description’ that we are in advance of the older stages of knowledge and science. We describe better, we explain just as little as our predecessors…the
series of ‘causes’ stands before us much more complete in every case; we conclude that this and that must first precede in order that that other may follow—but we have not grasped anything thereby. The peculiarity, for example, in every chemical process seems a ‘miracle,’ the same as before, just like all locomotion, but nobody has ‘explained’ impulse. How could we ever explain? We operate only with things which do not exist, with lines, surfaces, bodies, atoms, divisible times, divisible spaces—how can explanation ever be possible when we first make everything a conception, our conception? It is sufficient to regard science as the exactest humanizing of things that is possible. . . (93).

The point, then, is this: scientific facts such as the quanta Nietzsche enumerates (lines, surfaces, bodies, atoms), no matter how well documented and described, can never add up to a whole that can explain all of human experience. They are useful, certainly, in their way, and Nietzsche was no more a luddite than was Heidegger. However they will never be sufficient to generate the necessary ‘mystery,’ to use Heidegger’s terms, because in this exact humanization of things, domination and control is the motivation, not the respect or caring-for that dwelling demands.

Science and Absolutization

One of the more important claims that Heidegger makes is that rather than documenting the world as it is, science shapes the world to its demands, without acknowledging it is doing so. It is an absolute absolutization. This is the quality of enframing. Yet this accusation would be outrageous to science, and against its very principles. As Young mentions, the central goal of science is to describe the world in its “ownness,” or as it actually is (79n). Scientific pursuits (and Western ideas about ontology in
general) are built on this theory of truth as correlation—that is, the idea that things can be
known as they are. For example if I were to point at a tree and say “That tree is green,” the
observer could look at the tree and observe whether or not it is so. For science, truth is that
simple. Presumably the tree was green before one pointed at it. But Young, using a similar
example involving a horse named Betty, explains how even such a simple communication
can become complicated if considered more thoroughly:

The mere correlation of words with bits of reality—merely saying
‘Betty stands for that’ and pointing—is insufficient to determine reference.

Normally, of course, communication flows smoothly and we do not suffer
from the kinds of misunderstandings illustrated by these examples.

Communication is usually unproblematic. But that is only because we share
a—usually unnoticed—background understanding as to the kinds of entities
that are being talked about. Generally, for example, we share the assumption
that the things named and pointed to are whole natural objects rather than
their surfaces or the spaces they occupy. What these far-fetched examples
reveal, however, is that it is only because of such a background assumption
that we know what kinds of things, and hence what kinds of facts, are under
discussion. Heidegger calls such a background understanding a ‘horizon of
disclosure’ (of ‘revealing’, ‘unconcealment’). Sometimes, echoing Nietzsche,
he calls it a ‘perspective.’ (Young 7)

Whether we are scientists pointing at green trees or ancient Aztecs performing a
human sacrifice, the world is determined not by a simple correlation between the senses and
reality, but by a defining cultural horizon of disclosure that determines what our filter on the
world permits to be disclosed to the human mind.
And truly, science could not be possible without such a unified perspective on the world that, if Heidegger is correct, both limits and shapes what can be perceived. However, the flaw does not lie in just having this perspective. Indeed, all times and places are defined by these cultural perspectives, and it is not possible, or even particularly desirable for Heidegger, to escape them. The flaw of Gestell lies in having this perspective exclusively—in the refusal to acknowledge other methods of finding truth, or the importance of the questions it cannot answer. While explanation may have been replaced with description, description necessarily still masquerades as explanation. When it cannot explain, it discounts, and thus precludes the possibility of a more meaningful explanation. This is part of the destructiveness of Heidegger’s ‘enframing.’

However, this inconsistency is only part of the problem with science and modernity in general, although understanding that science is defined by a horizon or disclosure and not an objective examination of reality is pertinent. Once science is acknowledged to be the result of a horizon of disclosure, the nature of that modern horizon should become clearer. And the news is not good—the horizon of disclosure that defines Western society, and its central pursuit of science, is not actually science or technology at all, but Gestell:

Young says that in the age of Gestell (enframing):

What is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but does so, rather, exclusively as resource. This suggests that while beings show up in every age as resource, the ‘way’ they show up that is unique to modernity is as pure resource, nothing but resource. ..We might say that modernity is the epoch in which world-disclosure is such that to be is to be nothing but resource. This formula…is confirmed by Heidegger’s well-known image of the world’s showing up to modernity as ‘a gigantic petrol station.’
The point about petrol stations being not that they are resources but that they are *nothing but* resources. There is *nothing to them* other than their resource-fulness, no being other than their being-as-resource. Petrol stations are, in a certain sense, one-dimensional places (which, to anticipate, has something to do with their charmlessness)… (Young 50).

According to Heidegger, the very nature of *Gestell*, of modernity, is violent because it refuses to acknowledge things in any way outside of its own enframing, which is based on things-as-resources. This seeing all things, humans included, merely in terms of resource, constitutes an act of violation. Young uses this to explain the violent nature of *Gestell*:

…violation is *essential* harm, harm to the ‘essence’ of something…Violation is, in one way or another and to one degree or another, preventing something being (or becoming) what it is. A woman is violated when she finds herself forced to live not as a person but as a mere sex object—a mere sexual ‘resource’—a forest, an intricately wrought and finely balanced ecological system, is violated when its exploitation as timber no longer allows it to be the ecological system that it is…(52 – 53).

Still more dangerous, because of *Gestell’s* specific enframing of reality-as-resource, it has no system for understanding this kind of violation. Young states that if everything in the world is seen merely as a resource, as a tool, even the concept of violation disappears. “It is not wrong to push a hammer to its limits or even break it” (53).

According to Young, the position of science that nothing can be known save by its method, including answers to metaphysical questions, enframes reality in such
a way that qualities that science has not yet learned how to explain are discounted—this constitutes a violation of what is being considered, as its qualities that are not useful as resource are ignored. Things that science has described, if defined exclusively in terms of Nietzsche’s atoms, lines, surfaces, etc. are violated since they are enframed in such a way that their ‘whatness’ is not allowed to shine through. This violation is Gestell, the qualifying point of modernity.

**Luddism?**

This discussion, then, is not meant to discredit scientific pursuits—they are useful and even essential in many ways to human existence. For Heidegger, man is inherently a technological animal and, save for a short period of luddism in his earlier days, he does not advocate the destruction of machines or technology. Young writes:

> The crucial point is that knowledge and the capacity for control that it brings are, in themselves, neutral phenomena. It is what we do with them that counts. Of course, if Heidegger is right (as he is) about the character of modernity in general, then modern natural science is, in fact, part of an enterprise of exploitation and violation (Young 79).

Rather than discredit science, this discussion has sought to clarify the concept of Gestell—absolutization is not something inherent in scientific pursuits, but because it defines Western culture, it defines Western science.

And, in a sort of relational reciprocity that Heidegger might have predicted, perceiving the world as nothing but resource results in perceiving other humans as nothing but resource. The “enterprise of exploitation and violation” is a self-perpetuating cycle, which converts or destroys all it touches since, if the value of something cannot be explained in terms of the values of Gestell, that is, as resource, then it will be destroyed. If something
can be explained in those terms, then it has already been converted to the same destructive system. An example of this could be the argument that wild spaces should be preserved because they lessen air pollution. Possibly wild spaces are beneficial in any horizon of disclosure, but in these terms, they have just been reduced to air filters, and nothing more. They become a part of *Gestell.* However saying they should be preserved because they provide a source of caring-for for humans looking to dwell relationally, or even further removed, that they should be valued for their ‘ownness’, for their ‘treeness,’ would never fly in the politics of ‘the real world,’ that is, of *Gestell.*

**Critiques of Modernity**

Young and Heidegger’s are not alone in cataloging the damages of *Gestell*—even in terms of suffering and the anxiety caused by its evasion. While older fears and problems have perhaps been largely corrected through science, medicine, technology, and the clever (if not careful) use of resources, the humanist perspective that defeated them has now come under fire from many angles. As modernity neglects to take into account its own contingent nature, it contradicts its own aspirations. While it espouses openness to all rational voices, the one qualifier of “rational” keeps modernity’s quest for knowledge firmly entrenched within cultural boundaries, in this case the horizontal limit of what is considered a rational voice (an adjective that has been notoriously mobile).

Indeed, the damage done by modernity is now a common topic in scholarly literature. Eminent sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has tied the tenets of modernity to the methods and motivations of the Holocaust, while Immanuel Wallerstein discusses the links between modernity, colonialism, and exploitation. There are many other prominent thinkers who further nuance this idea, examining the ways that modernity undermines systems of ethics and communal meaning. In this stripped state, Heidegger compares the
modern world to a “charmless” petrol station. Orozco’s rendition of modernity is chaotic, yet static, mechanical and horrifying. Sociologist Max Weber coined the iconic phrase “the disenchantment of the world (139)” to describe it, and Nietzsche and Heidegger both discourse on the subject in terms of the boredom and malaise of modernity, while invoking the reciprocal nature of Gestell discussed above:

Technology replaces the emptiness of Being revealed in the mood of boredom with the production and consumption of artifacts and the unrelenting manipulation of the world...the problem is not the human creation and use of machines but rather the creation and use of human machines—the making of ourselves into mere extensions of technological forces and processes. Refusing to lay our hands on everything simply means a halt to the imperial attitude which enframes everything, everywhere, as raw material awaiting exploitation…Heidegger warns that no amount of technological activity can satiate the existential hunger that it conspires to ignore (Thiele 507).

In short, modernity by its nature creates a hunger that it cannot satisfy.

Anxiety in Modernity

Wendell Berry discusses the effects of Gestell in terms of anxiety. This seems appropriate when considered with Heidegger’s assertion that one of the defining qualities of Gestell is anxiety brought about by the evasion of death. Berry frames his argument in terms of specialization in both work and thought. He claims this aspect of modern life isolates humans and disrespects the world, and distances the two from each other. After a passage discussing the anxieties of the modern individual (physical appearance, relationships, jobs, money, kids, etc) Berry’s diagnosis of depression avoids the drive for a technological cure,
but rather trusts the meaning of the symptoms:

> It is rarely considered that this average citizen is anxious because he ought to be – because he still has some gumption that he has not yet given up in deference to the experts. He ought to be anxious, because he is helpless. That he is dependent on so many specialists, the beneficiary of so much expert help, can only mean that he is a captive, a potential victim. If he lives by the competence of so many other people, then he lives also by their indulgence; his own will and his own reasons to live are made subordinate to the mere tolerance of everybody else. He has one chance to live what he conceives to be his life: his own small specialty within a delicate, tense, everywhere-strained system of specialties (21).

As the reliance upon specialization requires a certain reductive knowledge of one or two small, specific things, the kind of dependence Berry discusses only increases an individual's vulnerability and limits his understanding and freedom.

Yet Berry’s move toward searching the symptoms of a disease (here, anxiety) for clues to the real problem is the precise opposite of a modern, scientific solution. In an earlier passage Berry discusses the ineffectuality of such resources as therapy and antidepressants, at least in terms of the larger problem. They may treat the symptoms effectively enough, but they will never treat the disease. This becomes an excellent metaphor for this issue.

Arlie Hochschild also discusses drugs and anti-depressants as she offers a more concrete example of the transformation of human beings to standing reserve, to ‘nothing but resource,’ in her study of flight attendants. Her work offers a discussion of the working conditions of flight attendants and the considerable demands of the job, both emotional and
physical. They are not only required to fulfill their duties in serving meals, seating the passengers, and resolving disputes. Their greatest duty, they are told, is to maintain a certain emotional facade that will create the illusion of comfort in the cabin (54–55). She describes the isolation and confusion that comes from controlling emotions for market effect, ultimately showing that the objectification of these functions leads to emotional and physical breakdown (7).

But the airline has a solution for this. Hochschild describes the free anti-depressants and muscle relaxers given to flight attendants to solve their stress problems, or, more accurately, restore them to working order—all the while the emotional demands of the job are ever increased. Like Berry, she suggests that emotions serve as a barometer of well-being, much like physical pain. Yet modernity specializes and commodifies them into a tool or a product to be used for market purposes. When this commodification has an undesirable effect on the product (the flight attendant) that limits its profitability, the problem is “solved” through technology: pills and drugs. The ‘real problem’ of a stressful and dehumanizing working environment is never even considered. Violation in this case does not exist, not as long as there are pills and drugs to keep the flight attendants working. The flight attendants become ‘nothing but resource’.

Indeed, she argues that this chemistry-based method of solving emotional problems is not only ineffective, but also fundamentally misguided. She suggests that feelings are not only a barometer of well-being, but a method of connection with the world. Feelings form a crucial part of an individual’s ability to interact with an intersubjective world, to interpret a situation’s context and live relationally, to care-for and to dwell, as Heidegger would have it. But as workers’ feelings are objectified and commodified, the person becomes isolated from them and so loses the ability to connect to the world around them. They become estranged:
To manage private loves and hates is to participate in an intricate private emotional system. When elements of that system are taken into the marketplace and sold as human labor, they become stretched into standardized social forms. In these forms, a persons’ contribution of feeling is thinner, less freighted with consequence; but at the same time it is seen as coming less from the self and being less direct to the other. For that reason it is more susceptible to estrangement (Hochschild 13).

For Hochschild, not only are bodies, time, and labor sacrificed to the intangible and abstract demands of a modernist labor system, but the very hearts and minds of the people are commodified and distorted. The human self fragments, and the meaningful life and sense of dwelling described by Heidegger becomes ever more elusive.

Finally, the metaphor of anti-depressants provides an excellent summary to this section, which has attempted a more in-depth exploration of the problems with Gestell. William S. Hamrick explores the issues with the exclusive use and overextension of technology into solving all problems, physical, emotional, and cultural, and the sense of isolation this creates in his excellent book *Kindness and the Good Society*.

A very different but related example of technological hegemony consists of our constant tendency to rely on pills for solutions to personal and social problems. Sometimes this can entail unkindness to oneself, as when one can depend on pills to lose weight in order to avoid the self-discipline of eating the right amounts of sensible foods and getting appropriate exercise. At other times, this technique of medicalizing the body can lead to unkindness to others. For instance, pharmaceutical companies are now spending billions of dollars to technologize aphrodisiacs. The aim is
to guarantee great sex, even if – perhaps especially if – the participants do not feel like it…in Marcel’s terms, sexuality would become degraded to one (fast-paced) function among others. Correlatively, there is a risk of unkind objectification, in that sexuality could be reduced to performance judged quantitatively: duration, numbers of orgasms, how fast, how slow, and so forth (108–109).

Hamrick’s analysis is relevant not only because of the dangers of the “unkindnesses” of technology, but also because of the alienation (and violation) it implies—from the body, from nature, from other people, and from the self. Relying entirely on pills or other forms of technology to solve problems that extend beyond what technology can solve is a symptom of a society that has lost touch with non-technological modes of being, with the possibility of horizons of disclosure outside of Gestell.

Reciprocity

All of the approaches mentioned here, whether Berry’s anxiety, Hochschild’s commodification, or Hamrick’s mechanization (of course all three are related) document the practical difficulties and indignities of trying to survive as a human in a world that perceives and is perceived as ‘nothing but resource.’ Finally, the problematic way-of-being offered by Gestell can come into final focus through a discussion of some of the practical possibilities of its proposed opposite, dwelling.

The dweller will, therefore, wish to preserve the presencing of the holy rhythms in human life, in his own life and that of his fellows…He will resist, for example, seven-day, twenty-four-hour shopping, the sixty-hour working-week, tradable holidays…Accepting, enjoying, and communicating the enjoyment of the seasonality of fruit and vegetables might be another
example of passively caring-for sky. Dwellers do not demand a round-the-year supply of avocados (Young 111).

Now to be fair, all this may seem to present a rather extreme case. This paper is not taking a stance against medication, and remains aware that therapy, a perhaps more contextual, relational approach to depression, is still thriving. While the metaphor of anti-depressants proves useful, once again the answer does not lie in “luddite techno-phobia.” Rather technology, presumably including the use of pills and medications, can be “incorporated into a life of dwelling” (Young 112).

To sum up this section, technology itself is not the problem, but the nature of Gestell. And in these terms, ultimately Heidegger himself says it all:

Yet when destining reigns in the mode of enframing, it is the supreme danger. The danger attests itself to us in two ways. As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but exclusively as standing reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve. Meanwhile, man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself and postures as lord of the earth. In this way the illusion comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: it seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself (The Question Concerning Technology 332).

The description of man’s higher position as “delusion” underlines Heidegger’s discussion of the dangers of the assumption that man constructs and so controls everything.
Not only is there a danger of humanity becoming ‘standing-reserve’ itself, although that is certainly there (deeply ironic for a system that claims to value the human and the individual). The real danger is that in encountering everywhere only himself, humanity loses the ability to care for and be cared for by others—the ability to dwell.

Post-modernism

The movement, or set of movements, called post-modernism, are worth addressing briefly as they may be offered as an alternative to the Gestell of modernity. Indeed, sophisticated perceptions of this problem, or at least the idea that there were problems with the progressive optimism of the Enlightenment, date as far back as the Romantic period and go on today. These are often grouped under the heading of ‘post-modernity.’ The appearance of a consciously post-modern, sometimes anti-modern school of thought, and works that support it, is telling in itself. Of course, post-modernity is notoriously difficult to define, not least because it actively resists definition. However generally speaking, post-modern thought breaks down the singular voice of objective, often scientific, authority espoused by modernity in favor of a more subjective point-of-view. To use the Derridean term, it thrives on the idea of “play” (Derrida 14). And in terms of the critiques made in the last section, it would appear to be taking positive steps. John Deely defines postmodernism thus:

Post-modernism properly begins with a dawning realization that the shift from being-narrowly-understood to discourse-equally-narrowly-understood, which took place at the beginning of modern times, was something of a misbegotten choice. What was needed for philosophy to mature was not so much a shift as an expansion, an expansion of the notion of reality – and with it, being – to include the whole of experience as the
prior ground off of which human understanding arises and on which it
throughout depends (19).

That is, post-modernity helpfully acknowledges the horizontal character of modernity and
*Gestell*, equating it with the narrow perspectives of the Middle Ages some Enlightenment
thinkers so vigorously condemned. It generally seeks to expand reality from the narrowly
defined terms of enframing into the whole of human experience.

These are not bad things, perhaps even steps in the right direction. However, for
many thinkers, it does not solve the problems presented by modernity. The very etymology
of the idea of post-modern thought is informative—it does not qualify as a new system of
thought, but functions on many of the same principles as modernity. While it’s true that it
often serves as the anti-modern, as something attempting to break away from modernity, its
arguments are nearly always made using the assumptions and language of modernity.
Bauman, mentioned earlier, refuses to use the term “post-modern” at all, preferring to refer
to the two periods as “solid modernity” and “liquid modernity” (23). He traces the
multivalency of post-modernity not to intellectual dissent, but largely to market forces, for
whom concepts of plurality, identity, and cliques provide the opportunity to sell more
products (137). He argues that true ethics, another way of putting Heidegger’s solution to
the problem of *Gestell*, is not even possible in a society so driven by consumerism (51 – 55).

John Deely finishes his book with a fairly typical assessment of the advantages of
post-modernity:

This new beginning labels itself “postmodern” for want of a better
name, since it knows in its nascence what it is against (modernity) more clearly
than what it will itself become. Positive features of postmodernity will be
acquired by advancing along the way of signs…The purpose of human life is
to bring to expression the stories things are. In the telling is the living of our lives as human. We are explorers and inquirers, and when society turns in from that, it dooms itself to suffocation (248).

The movement, then, is not entirely negative. Scholarly inquiry into the nature of signs and the role of stories in human life are particularly rich fields. Yet it does not address the relationality Heidegger views as so crucial—even in this optimistic passage, the seeker of truth is advised to turn further in upon herself, into the ‘way of signs.’ The study becomes strictly introverted, continuing to peer behind the structures of things, to reduce them to their components, not unlike science itself. Deely concludes this passage with a rousing invitation to explore and inquire. He attributes these actions to human nature itself. However, while these things are not bad in themselves, the language is saturated with the imagery of modernity, of conquering and questing, of discovering truth by penetrating mysteries—then of nature, now of language.

This paper is not the first to say that post-modernity plays out the same methods and goals as modernity itself. François Lyotard offers a succinct discussion of this process and the ensuing instability of such a system:

Simplifying to the extreme, I define post-modernism as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it…The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal…Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside (24)?

Lyotard notes that although post-modern incredulity and skepticism is a natural product of scientific progress (a product of modernity), it ultimately tends toward the dissolution of
modernity’s cultural hegemony. However, with that dissolution comes the danger of losing the ability to locate legitimacy anywhere, resulting in the same disenchanted results earlier discussed. Thus neither modernism nor post-modernism are able to endow the world with wonder, to make it compelling, to make its gods “shine” as Quetzalcoatl shines for Orozco, as Christ himself shines at the end of the mural in his hopeful gesture toward the future.

Finally, the results of such a lack of legitimacy and the disenchantment that follow are summed up aptly by Thiele:

Boredom is the basic mood of the technological age. It accompanies another basic mood of the times—horror—a state of spiritual shell-shock that, no less than boredom, paralyzes one in the face of utter meaninglessness. Horror is an appropriate, but often repressed, reaction to the experience of a nihilistic world in which everything is permitted. Its relationship to boredom is complementary. A deep, pervasive boredom, a boredom with life and being, may induce forms of nihilistic behavior…to which horror seems the only appropriate, if ineffective, response (504).

The criticisms discussed in the previous section allege that modernity has caused certain unique forms of suffering—nihilism, boredom, anxiety, even horror. It seems clear then that the problem of suffering with which many of the Enlightenment thinkers struggled still exists. This is evidenced in not only the continuation of the older forms of poverty and physical deprivation, but also through these new forms—the nihilism, deep boredom, etc. This is not to suggest that the problem of suffering is utterly insoluble, although it may be. Heidegger offers a possible solution. Following the advice given in the previous section on searching for root causes rather than just symptoms of a problem, it becomes important to examine the possible causes of these new forms of suffering.
Thiele gives a solid clue when he writes of boredom that: “It is an emotional and spiritual paralysis that arises from the repression of anxiety or fear” (492 – 494). Whence this anxiety and fear? Heidegger supposes that all of Gestell in fact comes about as a result of the fear of death and the attempt to evade it. Young in turn writes that Berry’s anxious humans allow the insecurities and the painful aspects of Gestell to continue because they offer precisely that illusion: an escape from death. He writes:

The thought here, I suggest, examines the question as to why it is that the modern human being, quite typically, is perfectly prepared to regard not only others but also himself as a mere ‘human resource’, as a mere cog in the global mechanisms of consumption and production, or, better put, a mere information processor …

The important thing about information processors is that their consciousness is entirely outwardly directed, directed to the task at hand. Consciousness of mortality is, however, self-directed, inwardly directed, consciousness. Hence, information processors do not have consciousness of mortality, cannot fear death. Abandoning metaphor, to become nothing but an obedient, efficient and reliable ‘human resource,’ in other words, a ‘workaholic,’ is to have a purely outer consciousness and therefore to evade knowledge of mortality. The life of a ‘pure human resource’ thus presents itself as a kind of narcotic, an evasion of mortality. ..submission to Gestell is, then, yet another technique for evading ‘ownership’ of death (Young 67).

In these terms, the earlier discussion on the purpose and symbolism of antidepressants and other pills becomes especially trenchant as humans themselves become the narcotic desired. This reciprocity actually serves a function, however, as narcotics
(resources, standing reserve, information processors or what have you) do not have to face death. For a society so terrified and anxious of death, the price of modernity is not too high to pay for such security.
Chapter III

The Turning

Here at last, this paper begins to retrace its steps. Beginning with a discussion of the work of Orozco, the argument has leapt and bounded until it presumes to apply to all of Western humanity since the Renaissance. It becomes necessary now to narrow, to seek out a practical application of the theory and return to the question of Mexico and the art of Orozco.

Mexico

This section will analyze Mexico because of its culture’s obvious influence on Orozco, as well as because of how it represents a prime example of the flaws and failings, as well as the benefits, of modernity. A direct product of the Conquest (arguably the inaugural event of modernity) it offers in its culture and art a unique example of the struggle between pre-modern cultures and modernity, as well as a history of exploring what might constitute a successful post-modernity—in other words, what it might mean to dwell.

Orozco’s “Human Sacrifice in the Modern World” is not the only medium where features of the modern human condition within the Mexican experience can be found. Octavio Paz’ famous work *The Labyrinth of Solitude* makes a very similar analogy. He compares the experience of the Mexican people to that of orphaned or bastard children (*hijos de la chingada*). Paz uses this metaphor of children of a violated mother and an uncaring, exploitative father to describe the cultural experience of Mexican nationality:
Who is the *chingada*? Above all, she is the Mother. Not a Mother of flesh and blood but a mythical figure. The *chingada* is one of the Mexican representations of maternity, like *La Llorona* or the “long-suffering Mexican mother” we celebrate on the tenth of May. The *chingada* is the mother who has suffered – metaphorically or actually – the corrosive and defaming action implicit in the verb that gives her her name… (75)

As a people of mixed race whose “mother” (the indigenous nations) was violated if not totally destroyed, and whose “father” (the Spaniards) has only exploited and enslaved his children, the Mexican people in the time of Orozco (although Paz would remark since the Conquest) are rootless. Neither Spanish nor indigenous, the Mexican people for Paz live in a sort of liminal space, both ashamed and proud, unable to embrace either side of their heritage and uncertain of how to create something new. The cultural and geographical disorientation of the Conquest has left them metaphorically homeless.

**Homelessness vs. Dwelling**

This issue of homelessness, while finding a unique and significant expression in Mexico, is not unique to it. Many post-modern and post-colonial thinkers, including Heidegger, have embraced the term to describe the conditions of modernity. And again, it is a condition primarily defined by anxiety. Thiele finds these nuances when he traces the etymology of the German word for anxiety: “Heidegger describes anxiety as ‘unheimlich’.” Translators have generally rendered this as ‘uncanny.’ The connotation of uneasy strangeness is also present in the German. Literally, however, *unheimlich* means ‘un-home-like’” (500). The principle quality of homelessness then is this uneasy strangeness, this uncanny sense of displacement, this anxiety. The anxiety of homelessness is, further, what Heidegger judges to be the “plight” of modern humanity (“Building Dwelling Thinking”
In discussing the distress of homelessness, Heidegger makes much the same point as Paz, on a pan-modern scale. The rootlessness and the solitude of modern experience, which include for Heidegger especially the unhealthy evasion of suffering, reflects the experience of a parentless child. This experience is neither entirely good nor entirely bad—there is a freedom to homelessness in the lack of the burden of or responsibility to the past. The freedom of modernity incorporates a focus on the future, and a positive versatility and adaptability. However there is also a destructiveness and a sense of disorientation and meaninglessness that accompany such a separation. The negative side of this freedom by default entails a carelessness for places, people, and things—by definition the opposite of dwelling. Homelessness, as a part of modernity, leads to anxiety. The evasion of this anxiety in turn leads to boredom with life and being, as Thiele writes. This boredom isolates, and thus fundamentally, etymologically, homelessness precludes dwelling.

For Orozco and Paz, the roots of this homelessness in Mexico lie in the Conquest. This homelessness that lies so heavily in the Mexican mind (according to Paz) can be traced back to the very act of geographical separation of the Spanish from Spain. However, the assumptions that made such a separation possible and even desirable were already ingrained in Spanish culture. The Conquest took place in the early years of the Renaissance in Europe, and its roots lie heavily there. While Renaissance modernity was different from the later Enlightenment modernity discussed by Giddens, the two are closely related. Giddens’ positing of the modern assumption “of the world as open to transformation by human intervention” plays strongly here. The Conquest was waged under the assumption of the possibility (and virtue) of expansion and geographical mobility in the name of expanding humanist values. And like the theory of correlation discussed in the previous chapter that
underlies the scientific method, the colonial attitude of the Conquest was also based on the assumption that words and things have a direct correspondence. This was present in the mentality of Columbus, for example, and his belief in the unity of the word and the world. The Conquest represents the violence of that will to unify at the same time that it is the moment of rupture for both (Paz 96 - 98).

And according to these values, the transition from Spain to Mexico ought not to have been very significant for a Spaniard. There was no question of the habitability of the terrain—the fertility of New Spain was unquestionable, and its value saved the Spanish throne from bankruptcy. However the effects of the trans-Atlantic move of a whole culture were not as simple as economic gain. The cultural symptoms of the trauma of the loss of environment, of displacement, of homelessness, surface throughout the history of European descendents in American lands. Appropriately, the land itself functions as metaphor of this displacement, as a canvas which could not, as those early moderns might have assumed, be painted any way the painter chose.

This paper does not wish to focus undue attention on the experience of the Spaniards at the expense of acknowledgement of the trauma and violence that was visited upon the indigenous peoples. Certainly, natives whose cultures were changed, suppressed, and in some cases utterly destroyed would have felt the greatest contextual dissociation in the Conquest. However, the arguable trauma of the Europeans better proves the point: the Europeans could (and did) explain the misery of the natives by their (perceived) failure to effectively integrate into the modern system. However the experience of the Spanish, fully able and willing to describe themselves as successful within the system they brought, better makes the point of this essay. In these terms, and certainly not in any way that demands comparison with the experience of the native peoples, the experience of the Spanish was
traumatic itself, even if this trauma went unacknowledged. Young explains why:

To be at home in, to belong to a place, as we know, is for it to show up as a holy, a ‘poetic’ place. In particular, it is for the ‘gods’ of that place, the ethos of its people, to show up as holy, as, that is, authoritative. To belong to a place is to be committed to its ethos. Different places, however, house at least marginally different ‘gods’. Hence the idea of being equally and fully at home everywhere threatens the unity of a person. This is why, though not impossible…successful emigration is a slow and difficult process. What makes it difficult is that, though the change may be no more than a nuance, it entails and demands a change in personality. Changing places is changing people (Young 101—102).

For Young, the “unity of a person” is fundamentally related to their environment. And different environments, if only because of climatic differences, represent unique challenges and advantages and thus shape cultures, including the experience of the holy, differently. Leaving a land that participated in the shaping of a culture, as they inevitably do, threatens that unity, both individual and cultural.

Young’s discussion can be applied to the difficult experience of a Spanish emigrant. A product of a cultural horizon, to use Heidegger’s terminology, which would have been intimately connected to Spanish history and geography, the emigrant would eventually either have to change his horizon, or return to Spain. Emigration is possible, certainly, but if it is to be achieved in an authentic way, in a way that permits dwelling, it requires a sense of respect for the new land (not only the land, but the ‘gods’ and ‘ethos’ that are a part of it) and deep flexibility in the emigrants. However, the emigrating/invading Spanish generally possessed neither quality. Sports, architecture, courting rituals, laws, religion, gardens,
animals, flowers, fruits, were all brought into the New World to support a European lifestyle on Mexican soil. To an equal degree, native culture, even if it provided a more practical, sustainable living in the American environment, was suppressed.

However, these actions did not keep the Spanish emigrants from undergoing the inevitable changes Young predicts, even if they fought it. Benedict Anderson discusses the results of this kind of trauma in the settlement of American lands. Like Paz, he uses the homeless/orphan metaphor directly as he considers the experience of the Creole descendents of Europeans. While he frames his discussion in terms of the experience of the Creole of European descent, the trauma he is discussing could certainly be applied to the displaced native peoples and mixed-race children that populated the majority of Mexico in Orozco’s day.

Anderson discusses the unsettling sense of rootlessness for a possible Creole, which comes about because the individual is torn between his cultural heritage and his geographical presence. For the second generation emigrant, for the European Creole on American soil, history still stems from a specific culture—one which evolved in a Spanish climate and geography, which developed a certain language (including influences from Latin and Arabic) within a history specific to the Iberian Peninsula. These European influences would shape him in many ways. However his individual experience would be quite different. Edward Kamau Brathwaite discusses this sense of dissonance. He talks about the experience of a young girl, given an English education but born in the Caribbean, writing an essay about snow falling on the cane fields of Barbados (264). While Brathwaite was largely a proponent of such creolization as a source of creativity, he also acknowledged that this dissonance could be a cause of great anxiety and struggle (239 – 240). Anderson discusses a similarly disconcerting experience for a hypothetical Creole living in Guatemala, but reading a
newspaper from Madrid. He would be perfectly capable of reading the paper, but it would have no meaning for him (Anderson 62). It would be a dissociative experience.

Beyond this sense of estrangement from heritage, Anderson describes more practical and possibly more frustrating effects of the experience of displacement, and the rebelliousness that might have ensued in the life of the Creole:

Even if he was born within one week of his father's migration, the accident of birth in the Americas consigned him to subordination—even though in terms of language, religion, ancestry, or manners he was largely indistinguishable from the Spain-born Spaniard. There was nothing to be done about it: he was irremediably a creole. Yet how irrational his exclusion must have seemed (59)!

Anderson places this sense of displacement, and the ensuing difficulties both practical and psychological, at the center of the New World experience.

However these problems, particularly with the Spanish, have gone unacknowledged for so long partially because the problem of displacement is not one traditional, Enlightenment-style modernity recognizes (although appropriately the question is a focal point of post-modern thought). Edward Gibbon, in his treatise “Of Empires and Savages,” discusses the necessity of emigration for modern, enlightened peoples—in terms reminiscent of Deely’s discussion of the unexplored field of semiotics—to explore and conquer the globe in order to spread civilization (Gibbon 649). Anderson discusses the rationalization of displacement, describing how to the modern mindset rarely even recognizes its psychological discomfort, except perhaps as a vague sense of unease or an undue amount of racial pride (58). Significantly perhaps, only those existing outside of the mainstream of modernity have traditionally been those afflicted with the weakness of homesickness: women, children, and
slaves. The attachment to place does not fit in with the aspirations of modernity—explorers and conquerors do not feel homesick.

Hybridity and Fertility

However, as was hinted at in brief reference to Brathwaite, the results of the displacement and mixture of peoples during the Conquest did not have strictly negative results. No doubt the very violence of the Conquest, both to native and Spaniard, created a great incentive to search for a solution to modernity, a deeper awareness that a problem existed, than in the United States. The revolution in Mexico was therefore, in contrast to the Creole led, Enlightenment-influenced revolution in the United States, an attempt by a colonized, hybridized native people to throw off those chains, and to reestablish some of the shattered traditions of its own past. While perhaps misguided, even the willingness of the Mexicans of Orozco’s day to buy into the nationalist ideas that inspired Orozco’s Indianists suggests the desire to return to the semblance of roots, to re-establish a sense of place, to throw off their homelessness. Rochfort confirms that the Mexican Revolution of 1910 was in many ways an anti-modernist Revolution:

At a popular level, the nationalists of the Revolution appealed to ‘tradition’ and invoked myths and ideas already formulated during the wars of Independence. Here was the origin of the prevalent “Indigenismo” and the exaltation of the insurgent heroes. In this instance the Revolution represented a revival and a revaluation of fading traditions and repudiation of the liberal positive epoch (Rochfort 15).

This repudiation he mentions is significant—it was a (more-or-less) conscious effort to turn away from the system of modernity that had driven the Conquest and Colonial periods in Mexico. This effort at questioning the “liberal
positive epoch” would not be matched in Europe, at least not on such a large scale, until the World Wars, and take even longer in the United States where indeed, it still struggles.

Of course it would be a mistake to assume that Orozco’s Revolutionary-era Mexico, because of these factors, suggests a pre-modern perspective. By the time Orozco was painting, himself of mixed heritage, most serious Mexican artists studied art in Europe and painted in a Mexico City culturally and architecturally nearer to Paris than Tenochtitlán. However, no matter how inaccessible the past, because of its history Mexico was a fertile center of thought on alternatives to modernity. And in these terms, beyond serving as an apt metaphor for the displacement and homelessness, in other words, the inability to dwell, of modernity, Mexico also holds a unique place in exploring solutions to these problems—particularly through the embrace of hybridity.

This cultural hybridity was both symbolic and literal. Unlike in the United States, Mexico saw relatively little organized attempt to stamp out the indigenous peoples; at least not on a national scale. Spanish rule was certainly not kind or gentle—quite the opposite. Throughout the Conquest and Colonial eras, Indians were often enslaved and nearly always oppressed as a people. Class divisions existed that were almost insurmountable, often divided along racial lines. However, Paz suggests that while the life of the Indian was difficult in Mexico, it was easier than in the United States because at least the Mexican Indian was allowed a place in society, albeit at the bottom of the ladder (101 – 102). Where the United States enacted programs of segregation and expulsion, and sometimes outright extermination, Cortez urged his men to take Indian wives and to blend the cultures as quickly as possible (Spain being dominant of course) (Diaz 85, 125). Again, this is not to be mistaken for friendliness—this approach by Cortez was meant to function as a sort of
genetic Conquest which would be more permanent and more difficult to root out than one built solely on military dominance. Nevertheless, this approach incorporated the natives into the new society.

Orozco considers the complexities and sensitivities of the issue of racial hybridity in his “Cortez and Malinche” fresco, further exploring the Mexican perspective on this result of the Conquest. Rochfort writes:

The “Cortez and Malinche” fresco was the first direct reference by the Mexican muralists to one of the most significant results of Spanish colonialism in Mexico, that of the miscegenation or mestizaje of the indigenous population. The union between the male Spanish European conquistador and his female Indian mistress was an incontestable historical fact…In Orozco’s portrayal, the couple are joined hand in hand in an act of union. This union, however, is seemingly contingent upon Cortez’ subjugation of the Indian, represented in the fresco by a prone and naked figure under the Spaniard’s right foot. Cortez’s left arm both prevents an act of supplication for the Indian on Malinche’s part and acts as a final separation from her former life. The image of Cortez and Malinche symbolizes synthesis, subjugation and the ambivalence of her position in the story of the nation’s history of colonial intervention (Rochfort 46).

There is little to add to Rochfort’s analysis, except what may already be clear: in this image Malinche represents the hybridized Mexican peoples. And while she is undeniably Indian, because of the Conquest represented by Cortez, she is forever cut off by Cortez’s unflinching arm from her people and her past. Their union symbolizes both the violence of the Conquest and the birth of the modern Mexico
Orozco and his contemporaries wanted to define. Her perceived betrayal of her people also resulted in the birth of the country as it now stood. This complex relationship is almost mythological, with whiffs of tragedy and fate, sin and painful rebirth. At times both Paz and Orozco refer to her as the Mexican Eve (Paz 80, 87).

However, while unquestionably traumatic, the mestizaje or hybridization of Mexico paved the way to the development of a unique solution to the homelessness of modernity: hybridity necessarily implies openness to the ‘other,’ or in other terms, a sort of relational existence. And it was not only the native peoples who underwent mestizaje, both literal and cultural. The change could never be one-sided if Young’s discussion of place and the difficulties of emigration are taken seriously, and the Spaniards too were forced to change. However undesirable it may have seemed to the Spanish emigrants, the cultural and physical transformation of Mexico into Spain was always a futile attempt. For one thing, there were already people living there whose very presence refuted the effort. As there were no Indians in Spain, their very existence in New Spain created the need for change and evolution in the emigrants—hybridization. One unfortunately common response to this was slaughter. But this was not, thankfully, a practical arrangement, and the indigenous and mestizo peoples continued to influence the Spanish, culturally and racially. Even resistance necessitates a change. Thus, even in the stiffly hierarchical society of Colonial Mexico a kind of hybridization commenced, not only of people but of ideas, cultures, and landscapes.

The hybridity of the victimized Indians and the orphaned Creoles provides a unique perspective on modernity, coming not from directly within it but as outsiders brought to it, late and unwilling. Perhaps again it was this distance that led Mexican thinkers of the early twentieth century to question its tenets, in art, literature, and philosophy. The Indians’ attempts to survive with whatever pieces of their cultures that could be preserved, combined
with the Spaniards’ desire to re-create the culture and landscape of their homeland, created fertile ground for the birth of something altogether new.

Certainly this fertility comprehends philosophical issues. Significantly, in Mexico these questions were asked not only by its oppressed, colonized class, who could be expected to subvert the dominant order, but eventually by its educated class as well, including José Clemente Orozco. Mexico has contributed many artists and thinkers looking to solve the problems created by modernity arguably because they are born into a world that is by its history more relational and open to ‘others’ than countries more homogeneously defined by modernity, such as the United States. Young writes:

What, in pre-modern times, kept ‘the danger’ threatened by all technology at bay was something lying within the ‘embracing’ structure of pre-modern culture. The reason, then, for the world-historical takeover by Gestell and by metaphysics is that we have lost something that pre-modern culture had, some antidote to the metaphysical misinterpretation of the technological disclosure of b/Being (Young 55 – 56).

This ‘embracing structure’ of a pre-modern culture could be understood as a relational ontological structure, one where an individual touches and is touched by the lives and forces around her. Orozco’s Mexico was actively seeking such a structure, actively searching for such an ‘embracing’ alternative to the solitary individualism of Gestell.

Environment

Finally, this paper returns to the art works in question, “Human Sacrifice in Ancient Times” and “Human Sacrifice in Modern Times.” Having posed and hopefully answered the question of why the second figure is unable to suffer a ‘good death,’ this paper now asks
why the first figure is, or at least, is able to approach it more closely. The idea of hybridity certainly offers a partial solution—as described in the first chapter, associations and relations are much easier to find in the earlier panel, and the earlier victim himself is a sort of hybrid between a human and divine figure. Where the figure in the later panel is utterly isolated, even deprived of eyes and mouth, those organs for interaction with the outside world, the first figure is under the influence of priests and gods. He is in relation with the world. So the question remains: where can such a sense of context, manifest in healthy, reciprocal relationships where value and respect are mutually exchanged, truly be found in the modern world?

One answer offered by Heidegger and Young has to do with nature. This idea is not absent from the murals, although understated. The connection between nature and the gods of Aztec theology was discussed briefly in the first chapter, and here that connection deserves a bit more thought. The act of sacrifice in the first panel is overseen by the god Huitzilopochtli, a god of war and death. However he is also known as a hummingbird god and a sun god. These associations with nature suggest a certain connectivity in Aztec thought between human lives and the natural world, a symbolic relationship between the two that functions on many levels. In the later portrait, that sense of connectivity is lost, as the gods that dominate the second sacrifice are academics and militarists, defined by human goals and agendas.

While Orozco was painting long before global warming or environmental devastation had generally become pressing concerns, there is evidence that nature for him was aligned with a simpler and wiser way of life. Nature appears directly only little in the mural, but where it does appear is significant. Nature is most visible in the panel of the “Pre-Columbian Golden Age,” in the form of a field of corn being respectfully grown and
harvested by the enlightened and civilized Indians. Other references seem to align nature with the divine, depicting it in the attributes given the panel of gods that presides over the Golden Age behind Quetzalcoatl (one stands near a volcano, another a lightning flash, one is composed of snakes, another’s leg curls into a tree root, and another’s limbs seem to dissolve into flowing water). And nature appears at the beginning and end of the age, in the waves of the sea that calmly bring the first Aztecs, and again in those which more violently carry away the departing Quetzalcoatl. The colors of the pre-Columbian section tend to be more nature-based as well, browns and muted reds, sky blues and sea greens.

However more telling perhaps than where nature does appear in the mural is where it does not. Its direct references in the first half of the mural are perhaps fleeting, however there are no references at all to nature after the “Conquest” panel, and even the colors turn unnatural, either garish or monotone. The backgrounds and division of the panels, rather than portraying gods or humans, are filled with mechanical imagery, twisting and folding over itself. It sometimes bears direct reference to technological violence, appearing in the form of weapons and gas masks. But more often it consists of fields of unidentifiable, sprawling mechanical wreck. Neither nature, nor the divine that associates with it, can be found. The only possible reference is in the panel “Gods of the Modern World,” where the background is consumed by fire. Fire is a natural phenomenon, yes, but one that is purely destructive. It also serves as an example of a technology that is not evil in itself, but too often misused by human hands.

This gesture toward nature’s association with divinity and civilization in the first half of Orozco’s mural underlines the connection between nature and the sense of dwelling needed to neutralize the horror of suffering and death. And not surprisingly, for Young
nature and Heidegger’s discussion of dwelling are intimately connected. He discusses Heidegger as a sort of pre-cursor to the ecological movement, writing:

In my view, in our world, [Heidegger is] an active participant and partisan in current debates. Partisan for what? For, in a word, ‘ecological’ thinking, though not in the usual sense in which ‘ecology’ means concern for non-human nature to the exclusion of everything else. ‘Ecology’ derives from the Greek ‘oikos’ which means ‘house’ and ‘housekeeping’. It is in this authentic sense of the word that Heidegger is, in my view, an ‘ecological’ thinker. He thinks, that is, towards care-taking the ‘house,’ the house in which human beings—but human beings in inseparable company with the creatures of earth, sky, and the holy ‘aether’—dwell. ‘Ethics,’ to repeat, ponders the dwelling place [the house] of human being (Young 121).

Here Young is careful to point out that a Heidegerrian ecology would be synonymous with a Heidegerrian ethics. Neither he nor Heidegger is interested in excising the human from the natural world. Rather it seems that the health of one ought to be regarded as the health of the other, and vice versa. Further, interaction with nature becomes essential if it can be accepted that, as Heidegger posits, the very nature of being is relational. Indeed, the more distant the ‘other’, the more authentic the interaction. And, as will be shortly explored, few things offer a better instance of an identifiable ‘other’ than silent nature and the environment.

David Abram takes this discussion of the role of nature in human development and health further in his work *The Spell of the Sensuous*. He uses the term “animism” to describe the expansion of Heidegger’s ontological focus toward the natural world, endowing natural creatures and objects with significance and meaning beyond their scientific descriptions.
 Appropriately, he includes humanity within that nature—just as objectifying the world has led humans to objectify themselves, honoring the world necessarily also honors humans.

Here Abram discusses the significance of the earth to human beings, not only in terms of resource (although certainly that is included), but in terms of relationships and the importance of context in human dwelling:

   From an animistic perspective, the clearest source of all this distress, both physical and psychological, lies in the aforementioned violence needlessly perpetrated by our civilization on the ecology of the planet; only by alleviating the latter will we be able to heal the former. While this may sound at first like a simple statement of faith, it makes eminent and obvious sense as soon as we acknowledge our thorough dependence upon the countless other organisms with whom we have evolved. Caught up in a mass of abstractions, our attention hypnotized by a host of human-made technologies that only reflect us back to ourselves, it is all too easy for us to forget our carnal inherence in a more-than-human matrix of sensations and sensibilities. Our bodies have formed themselves in delicate reciprocity with the manifold textures, sounds, and shapes of an animate earth—our eyes have evolved in subtle interaction with other eyes, as our ears are attuned by their very structure to the howling of wolves and the honking of geese. To shut ourselves off from these other voices, to continue by our lifestyles to condemn these other sensibilities to the oblivion of extinction, is to rob our own senses of their integrity, and to rob our minds of their coherence. We are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human (22).
According to Abram the destruction of nature risks not only the environment and physical food supply, but the integrity of the senses and the very coherence of the mind. He echoes Heidegger in the assertion that only through an understanding of others and acceptance of their ‘ownness,’ and the human relationship with them, can humans understand themselves. Through this relational understanding humans can overcome the anxiety of suffering and perhaps obtain a good death. Where anxiety comes about as a result of fear in the face of suffering and death, peace comes about because of a sense of safety from it. Young writes that this concept of peace, as opposed to anxiety, is at the center of dwelling:

[To dwell is] to be at peace, to be brought to peace, to remain in peace. The word for peace, friede, means the free, das frey (in old German), and frey means: preserved from harm and danger, preserved from something, that is, taken-care-of [geschont]. To free really means to care-for (sibonen). The caring-for itself consists not only in the fact that we do no harm to that which is cared-for. Real caring-for is something positive and happens when we leave something beforehand in its nature (wesen), [or] when we gather (bergen) something back into its nature, when we ‘free’ it in the real sense of the word into a preserve of peace. To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free sphere that cares-for each thing in its own nature. The fundamental character of dwelling is this caring-for (Young 63-64).

This is not to say that dwelling provides safety altogether from undergoing death and suffering. It provides rather a safety from the horror of the solitude and the “infinite nothing” death can represent. This “infinite nothing” is transcended when an individual interacts with others. The figure in the first panel is in a state of caring-for and being-cared-
for. He is interacting with the holy in the world, nature suggested by the intertwining of ideas about nature and the divine in Aztec cosmology. Nature exists as something specifically outside of Gestell, outside of Heidegger’s metaphor for modernity as a house of mirrors wherein man encounters only himself. In nature the fourfold that is considered in the idea of dwelling can manifest itself outside of the realm of resource.

Indeed, it is not a coincidence that the terms “contextual” and “environmental” are in a sense interchangeable. Nature alone offers a distant enough “other” which humans can identify with in order to experience themselves authentically. While it may seem contradictory to imply that humans must identify themselves with something that is nevertheless irremediably “other,” in order to overcome the terror of suffering, this is precisely Heidegger’s point: this identification with difference, and awareness of the self among a larger context of things (not merely inanimate objects but nature, other humans, as well as objects and divinities), permits humans to comprehend and find meaning in suffering and death itself.

However for this to happen requires not only an appreciation of nature. The use of the term ‘holy’ above, with all its religious nuance, is not accidental. In the quote below Heidegger’s use of the term Being is interchangeable with an idea of the divine. As a side note, it is important to distinguish that Heidegger’s conception of Being is complex, and very different from the Christian God. However it carries nuances of holiness and of sacred authority, and for the sake of this discussion, understanding Being as a divine authority should be sufficient:

−since poeisis is the Greek sense of the manifest world as ‘brought forth’, ‘granted’ to us in Being’s self-disclosing act, the sense of ‘nature’, in the broadest sense, as the self-disclosure of Being, absolutization renders us
oblivious to the ‘Es gibt’, to the sense of our world as given to us by the ‘it.’

Oblivion to disclosure is, a fortiori, oblivion to Beings’ self-disclosure (29).

In short, the absolutization of modernity renders humans incapable of understanding the world as a gift, as something holy in itself that is presented to humans by a grand, holy other, the ‘it’ as Young says. Michel Serres writes: “Dirty species, monkeys and motorists, drop their filth fast, because they don’t live in the space they pass through and thus let themselves foul it” (28). If humans truly lived, or dwelt, in the space they pass through, they would necessarily care for it. Understanding being as relational, particularly relational with nature, and the connection between nature and the holy, are steps toward re-endowing the world with meaning and ‘enchantment.’ In dwelling, nature becomes something with which humanity must identify itself to escape Gestell. If dwelling can be achieved, then so can, indeed must, a balanced ecology. However, a closer alignment between the work of Orozco and Heideggerian thought can be found in a deeper discussion of the role of the divine in dwelling, which falls under the next heading.

Religion

There have been many references to religion in this thesis, subtle and not-so-subtle. Concepts of spirituality certainly play a strong role in Heideggerian thought. The writings especially of his later years have been described (sometimes pejoratively) as “mystical.” This cynicism toward spiritual answers to the practical problems of modernity has a long history. Quite understandably, religion was and has been one of several targets of modernity from the beginning, although the movement was complicated and far from united. Alfonso X served as a good example to many Enlightenment thinkers, who began to ally questioning the authority of religious institutions with the search for real truth. These writers were usually not against spirituality in itself—in the eighteenth century Atheism was becoming
somewhat fashionable for the very bold, but many thinkers still attempted to justify the
Christian god through reinterpretation, or turned to Deism. Nevertheless, even among
thinkers that remained theists, there was an almost uniform turn against organized religion
and its traditions, and particularly the Catholic Church. Many thinkers saw the Church, as
the dominant contributor to the culture of the Middle Ages, as guilty of a sort of sanctified
complacency that had obverted so much potential good and human progress. Condorcet
condemns religion as ‘irrational’ and ‘superstitious,’ as an embodiment of the things which
he perceived his movement as struggling against. He saw religion (as many still do) as
standing opposite modern science and progress (Condorcet 26). In his writings, organized
religion becomes the new demon of the misguided human mind.

However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the reduction of experience to
scientific data too often results in a perceived ‘loss of wonder’ in the world. For Heidegger
this loss has religious significance—the loss of wonder is the loss of the holy. Nietzsche
seems to support this idea in his famous passage about the death of God. No Christian
himself and a confirmed cynic about organized religion, this loss of a guiding spirituality is
nevertheless a lamentable passing, the implications of which the world has yet to fully
understand:

‘Where has God gone?’ he cried. ‘I shall tell you. We have killed him -
you and I. We are his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we
able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire
horizon? What did we do when we unchained the earth from its sun?
Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns?
Are we not perpetually falling? Backward, sideward, forward, in all
directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an
infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is it not more and more night coming on all the time? Must not lanterns be lit in the morning? Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? Gods too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, murderers of all murderers, console ourselves? That which was the holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet possessed has bled to death under our knives. Who will wipe this blood off us? With what water could we purify ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we need to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we not ourselves become gods simply to be worthy of it? (The Gay Science 108)

This impassioned line of questioning is one of the most poetic discussions of the implications for a sense of the sacred in a world dominated by the modern, largely materialistic perspective. Young further explores this death of God, this loss of wonder, and extends the discussion into matters of nature:

Gods are, by definition, holy. They appear ‘out of the holy sway’, are radiantly charismatic. Living gods are figures which inspire us to live according to the fundamental ethos of our community. This is why they must be radiant...Christ, for example, must ‘shine’ to inspire one to the Christian life...but modernity has lost its sense of the holy in general, Heidegger claims...But loss of radiance, or dis-enchantment...is a necessary consequence of [modern culture]. If, that is to say, we absolutize our horizon of disclosure then we become oblivious to the unfathomable depth
of Being, oblivious to our world as the self-disclosing gift of the infinitely self-concealing. Instead of the mystery of the ‘globe of Being’, reality is reduced to (in every sense of the word) a flat, illuminated disk. Instead of something awesome and astonishing, an object of ‘wonder’, the world ‘obtrudes…in a dry, monotonous and therefore oppressive way’. It loses its magic, becomes dis-enchanted. That (unlike ancient Greek, Polynesian, Aboriginal or Mbuti culture) our culture no longer responds to nature as a sacred place, that it no longer responds to it as, in the words of Being and Time, that ‘which stirs and strives,’ which ‘assaults us and enchalls us as landscape’, is another sign of the same phenomenon. Whereas pre-Socratic Greece was an ecstatic culture, modernity is bored (Young 35—36).

For Heidegger then, the boredom of modernity Thiele so castigated in the earlier chapter comes from an essentially religious problem. There is no god or sense of the divine to provide the world with wonder and human life with meaning. This is not, for Heidegger, entirely a moral failing on the part of modern peoples, although it is partially. He regarded the Christian god as failed, or at least faded. He no longer shone because his story was no longer charismatic enough to explain the world. However, regardless of where blame is assigned, the loss of the gods (and the subsequent neglect and ‘mundanization’ of nature, to coin a term) is, for Heidegger, the source of the disenchantment of the world. A new relationship with nature must be constructed, one that allows for the radiant ‘ownness’ of the non-human to shine and be cared-for.

Conversion
The importance of a relationship with living nature to dwelling has been discussed already. However the solution runs deeper than a mere increase of time spent in nature—more parks, more camping, etc (although these things may be beneficial). The role of nature in dwelling is not only aesthetic or recreational, but ethical and even religious. The question must now be asked: what, then, is the nature of the change that is required to do away with Gestell? Letting something be free in its ‘owness’ is, to be sure, crucial for Heidegerrian dwelling. This becomes quite complicated as it constitutes a simultaneous acknowledgement of and identification with otherness, however, it can be done. In order to transcend the terror of death, the human being must identify with something other than itself, something greater that will either never die, or at least be reborn, as nature renews itself every year.

It is not difficult to see the religious undertones in such an endeavor, and Young, as mentioned in the earlier discussion of the displacement of the Spanish, further explores the religious connection between dwelling and nature, explaining that nature actually determines, or at least seriously influences, local religions. To be in a place, to dwell in it, because of the differences in climate and geography, will necessarily create religious differences:

What needs to be emphasized is that a dwelling space is not just a region of physical space. It is, rather, an interconnected complex of natural and cultural features which adds up to the notion of *place*... In cooler climates, to take just one example, one grows grain not grapes. But this entails that festive practices associated with the harvesting and processing of grapes cannot be part of a culture that belongs to such a climate. Different
customs, different ‘gods’, in Heidegger’s language, those associated with beer
rather than wine, will belong to Northern places, to Northern ‘earths’ and
‘skies’ (Young 101).

Again, some of the difficulties for the emigrating Spanish can be explained by this quote, as,
due to the physical displacement, even their gods underwent a change. Despite
Catholicism’s ubiquity in South and Central America, there are great differences between, for
example, the Catholicism of the Yucatán Peninsula and the Roman or Spanish variety. More
than this specific example of a changing religion, and keeping in mind Heidegger’s much
looser definition of ‘gods’ as something more akin to a horizontal ‘ethos’ of a people, if
ecology is to be a function of dwelling and not another facet of Gestell, it must be considered
in religious terms.

However again Heidegger’s sense of religion must not be taken as a traditional
Christian theology. Michel Serres writes on the religious deficiencies of modernity, and
provides a clarified notion of the term ‘religion’ which would seem to adhere more closely to
Heidegger’s purposes:

The learned say that the word religion could have two sources or
origins. According to the first, it would come from the Latin verb religare, to
attach. Does religion bind us together, does it assure the bond of this world
to another? According to the second origin, which is more probable, though
not certain, and related to the first one, it would mean to assemble, gather,
lift up, traverse, or reread. But they never say what sublime word our
language opposes to the religious, in order to deny it: negligence. Whoever
has no religion should not be called an atheist or unbeliever, but negligent.
The notion of negligence makes it possible to understand our time and our
weather…modernity neglects, speaking in absolute terms. It cannot and will not think or act toward the global, whether temporal or spatial (48).

In this passage Serres purposefully avoids traditional ideas about religion in order to consider it sociologically: as that which binds—people to one another, to their gods, to nature. It unifies. However modernity has lost this binding power, and in its place has grown negligence. Religious negligence, for Serres, is the ultimate cause of, or even synonymous with, environmental negligence.

Lynn White, in his influential essay “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis” also suggests the link between ecology, religion, and dwelling. White argues that the exploitation of nature in modern times is not the result of a technical flaw, but a moral failing. White argues that the solution to the problem must be something fundamental, something cultural. Something like a conversion: “Since the roots of our [ecological] trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not. We must rethink and refeel our nature and destiny” (193).

This divine aspect of reverence and caring-for resurfaces in Orozco’s paintings. While, once again, Orozco is not condoning human sacrifice, it is significant that the violent scene in “Human Sacrifice in the Ancient World” is being presided over by a god and priests. These religious elements add a sense of unity to the image. All are either physically touching or visually connected, flesh to flesh, with each other, with the victim, and with the god. One may still take issue with the action depicted (Orozco did), but the truthfulness of the religion is not the point. The question is whether the presence of the god and the priests within a unified purpose allows the victim to experience death with ‘equanimity.’ And that seems to be the case.
The solution to *Gestell* and the ability to dwell can, then, be framed in terms of a conversion. Heidegger calls it a ‘turning,’ a term that in German carries these same religious nuances. The solution cannot be technological, either positively or negatively (as in luddism). It will be instead a cultural—indeed a religious—change, a turning away from the purposes of exploitation and violation to which technology has been put (Young 81). The turning, because of the reverence and respect for nature that is entailed in dwelling, must be religious indeed: “Since the fundamental order of things is divine—the divinity’s—order, one’s stance to it is one, not of violence, but of, rather, respect and reverence; ‘sparing and preserving’” (Young 42). The change is that simple.
Conclusion

Yet the change described above is not so simple. Finally, this paper must take a moment to consider its stance. The majority of this essay has been devoted to explaining the problems with what Heidegger names *Gestell*, that is, an attitude toward the world (which translates into an attitude toward humans) which ‘enframes’ it as resource, or more accurately, as ‘nothing but’ resource. This *Gestell* has become dominant because humanity (at least in the West) has forgotten how to dwell, how to exist relationally between earth, sky, gods, and mortals. This dwelling is defined by the fundamental characteristic of ‘caring-for,’ which in many ways manifests in a relationship with nature that overlaps with the divine.

However, it may seem as though modernity has been painted here with an overly broad, bleak brush. However Heidegger’s attitude toward modernity was not an uncommon one, although his philosophy presented some novel answers. Young writes of the popularity of this possible pessimism in Heidegger:

Many thinkers, both lay and professional—perhaps even most of us now that the relative optimism of ‘modernism’ has given way to the end-of-history nihilism of so-called ‘postmodernism’—have sensed that there is something radically amiss with the spiritual condition of the present age. Heidegger possesses this sense to a preeminent degree. Modernity, he holds, taking over both the language and sentiment from the early Romantic poet, Friedrich Hölderlin, is the age of the ‘world’s night’, the age, as we have already seen, of ‘destitution’ (32).
Of course the commonality of certain attitudes among thinkers cannot quite constitute proof of their truthfulness. And indeed, to some, these accusations of isolation and homelessness in modernity may seem a bit too general. After all, people remain (ideally) surrounded by families, friends, and co-workers. Many in modern countries have had the opportunity to travel widely, much more so than past generations. Despite the invasion and possible isolation of digital culture, people are not forcibly cut off from other people—indeed digital media often allow increased communication, albeit without physical proximity. Even animals and variations on the theme of nature are available, in parks and preserves, zoos and campgrounds. Concepts of religion and the spiritual, while less unified, are still accessible in numerous churches, as well as New Age stores, books, and meditative getaways.

However, Young suggests that these examples do not discount Heidegger’s theory but are in fact hopeful signs of the possible ‘turning.’ Heidegger has been accused of fatalism because of his famous and sometimes shocking phrase “Only a God can save us” (Der Spiegel Interview 107). Yet Young suggests that the phrase should not be interpreted as a fatalistic discount of human endeavor. It is rather a counsel toward patience, and humility. It should not be taken as an excuse to neglect one’s part. In Young’s cautiously optimistic conclusion, he discusses some of these very phenomena as “cells of resistance” toward Gestell:

Though we live in the age of ‘the default of God’ this ‘does not deny that the Christian relationship with God lives on in individuals and in churches; still less does it assess this relationship negatively.’ Examples of the former might be tramping clubs, ‘Forest and Bird’ societies, European ashrams, ‘eco-villages,’ Celtic spiritualists, ‘New Ageists,’ in general (though there is, of course, a great deal of the sham and sentimental in the new Age
To make the personal turn to dwelling is, in modernity, to become ‘untimely,’ voluntarily marginalized. Hence, though it should by now be clear that the personal turning is no ‘inner’ emigration, it is an ‘emigration’. To make the turn is to become, as I should like to put it, a ‘cell of resistance’, resistance to *Gestell* (126).

This ‘emigration’ he describes seems to appear in Orozco’s conclusion as well, where the final panel is titled “The Modern Migration of the Spirit” (see fig. 8). It depicts a Christ figure, bleeding yet powerful, standing triumphant over his own cross. Significantly, in terms of Heidegger’s discussion of the importance of the radiance and charisma of the gods, and the loss of such charisma in modern gods, this figure of Christ shines, painted in some of the brightest colors in the mural. He draws the eye, dynamic and engaging, suggesting a rebirth after the monotone of the modern age. He is a reference to Quetzalcoatl’s promise to return and even the potential for a new golden age.

In his hand is an axe and at his feet lie ruins of statues and architecture, Buddhist, Greek, and Roman, as well as his own cross. Behind him, as in the other modern panels, are tools of war, gas masks, tanks, guns, and machinery—but they are now defunct, smashed and broken. Like Quetzalcoatl, he stands above and beyond the gods that had reigned; however this Christ is even more violent, perhaps because the offenses of modernity represent a still lower degradation of humanity than the human sacrifice of the Aztecs before the arrival of Quetzalcoatl. After all Quetzalcoatl did not actually smash Huitzilopochtli so much as put him, and the other Aztec gods, in his place. They still exist in the “Pre-Columbian Golden Age,” intact, but floating behind Quetzalcoatl. Where Quetzalcoatl brought civilization to an otherwise more-or-less innocent people, this Christ smashes down
the gods that ruled before him. And he has no more tolerance for traditional Christianity than Heidegger or Nietzsche, as at his feet lies his own cross, presumably hacked down to protest all the suffering and pain that has been caused in its (his) name (Rochfort 111). The figure is surrounded by the remnants of the disasters of the past, but it stands above them, suggesting hope for a wiser future and a renewed sense of spirituality. He stands in the position earlier occupied by Quetzalcoatl, poised to commence a new period of civilization.

In this sense, while it may not be possible to fully achieve the sense of ‘dwelling’ Heidegger offers as a solution to the violence and exploitation inherent in Gestell, Young suggests that resistance is worthwhile, that relations between the fourfold can be restored. Orozco seems to support this optimism, painting the potential for a future golden age, a visual equivalent of Heidegger’s ‘turning’ (although one wonders whether Orozco would have trusted a new golden age as any more permanent than the others he has painted). This ‘turning’ cannot happen immediately, and does not of course predict the imminent establishment of a ‘true’ religion. But it does suggest the possibility of the end of Gestell.
Figure 1. Diego Rivera: Revolution – Germination. Fresco, 1926. Chapel, west wall, Autonomous University of Chapingo, Mexico.
Figure 2. José Clemente Orozco: *American Civilization – Human Sacrifice in Ancient Times*. Fresco, 1932. Detail, pre-Cortesian section, Baker Library, Dartmouth College, New Hampshire.

Figure 4. José Clemente Orozco: *American Civilization – Pre-Columbian Golden Age*. Fresco, 1932. Detail, pre-Cortesian section, Baker Library, Dartmouth College, New Hampshire.
Figure 5. José Clemente Orozco: *American Civilization – The Departure of Quetzalcoatl*. Fresco, 1932. Detail, pre-Cortesian section, Baker Library, Dartmouth College, New Hampshire.
We refute the artistic calling toward the art of ‘ultraintellectual’ circles, because it is aristocratic, and we glorify the expression of MONUMENTAL ART, because it is public property. We proclaim that the present social moment is a transition between a decrepit order and a new one, and the creators of beauty must use their greatest power to make their works of ideological value for the people, and that the ideal goal of art, which is now an expression of individualistic masturbation, should be art for everybody, for education and for war.

Zygmunt Bauman, Modernity and the Holocaust. In this book Bauman describes the holocaust as not the fluke event it is often considered, but as the logical end of the mechanization of modernity. Concepts of ‘rule-following’ acting as a moral good, combined with the efficiencies of specialized labor and bureaucratization of authority led to a new, and all the more terrifying, method of waging war against the ‘other’.

Immanuel Wallerstein, The Modern World System. Wallerstein refutes the idea of first, second, and third world countries. He argues that all countries are part of what has become a globalized economic system, with Eurocentric structures at its core. Often considered post-colonial, Wallerstein describes what he sees as the inevitable commodification of people, things, nature, and relationships in a globalized, Capitalistic world.
Works Cited


