

“The Space of Pathos: Meaning, Anxiety, and Ethics in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*.”
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In this paper, I suggest that Heideggerean *Angst* poses a unique opportunity for ethics: while ordinarily, we work to prevent, ease, or make sense of human suffering, in the case of *Angst*, Heidegger asks us to respond to or care for suffering without working to alleviate it. Rather than insisting on making *Angst* meaningful (as a form of alleviation), a Heideggerean ethical relationship would involve tolerating slippages in sense and allowing the other the robustness of her experience of the contingency of meaning. We could call this allowing the other the space of pathos. To illustrate *Angst* and the difficulty and rarity of an adequate response, I refer to Todd Haynes’ 1995 film *Safe*.

Heideggerean *Angst* seems to make a unique demand on ethics, when we consider Heideggerean ethics as a form of resolute or authentic being-with. On the one hand, *Angst* radically individualizes the sufferer, sundering her relationships with others and ejecting her from the shared world of sense; in this respect, *Angst* seems to involve a kind of refusal of ethics, a refusal of relationality as such. Yet on the other hand, we as ethical subjects may feel compelled to respond to *Angst* qua suffering, to attend to or care for the one who suffers. If *Angst* both refuses and demands ethical engagement, what could an ethical relationship look like here, if one is possible at all?

The task will be to conceive of a kind of ethical responsiveness that, paradoxically, is not predicated on curing, fixing, helping, or healing the rift wrought by *Angst*. As Charles Scott asks: can we care for the suffering of others without the expectation of *meaningful alleviation*?¹ Which is to say: first, can we care for suffering

¹ Scott, Charles. *The Question of Ethics: Nietzsche, Foucault, Heidegger*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1990, p. 118.

without alleviating it, that is, without removing the pain on the other's behalf? (without "leaping in" for the other, as Heidegger puts it). And second, can we respond to *Angst* without making it *meaningful*? If *Angst* as mood reveals the insufficiency or incompleteness of our structures of meaning, then an ethical response to the other's *Angst* ought not involve explaining or making sense of it by means of those very structures; as we will see, to do this would amount to a kind of refusal of the claims or authority of the other's specific position. Rather, an ethical relation to the other's *Angst* must call upon our capacity to withstand the threat of a kind of meaninglessness, to bear the limits of our own world of sense made apparent by the other's encounter with senselessness.

Before turning to Heidegger, I want to note that this attempt to articulate an ethical response to *Angst* can be understood as part of a larger effort to reconsider the status of suffering in human life. When suffering is regarded as excessive or unjust, we consider ourselves obligated to make it better, to make it right. In these cases, it often may be imperative to turn the other's pain into a kind of element that we ought to remove from the other's life, to objectify the pain or source of the pain so that we may efficiently eradicate it. But part of what makes *Angst* interesting beyond the analytic of Dasein, or other narrowly Heideggerean concerns, is that *Angst* represents a kind of suffering—properly speaking, an undergoing, a *pathos*—the normative or ethical status of which is not clear: namely, ought we alleviate anxiety as much as possible, excise it from our world, *or* does it have a place within our world? Could or should we regard it as a salient and revelatory feature of human life? If, as Heidegger suggests, *Angst* is not some exceptional and eradicable experience but is rather a way of being (an "existential"), even a way of knowing (in his broader-than-epistemological sense), then caring for the

anxious other must be very different than caring for other kinds of suffering. Instead of lifting it, we might find that *Angst* invites a unique form of being-with-suffering, a withstanding that allows the suffering to speak, which is to say that *Angst* invites or asks for a certain kind of listening. What Heidegger helps us see is that responses to suffering must register the specific claim of that specific suffering; and as *Angst* reveals, sometimes the claim is not for help or alleviation, but acknowledgment, being-with, a space for pathos. Attempting to do justice to this kind of claim, to be able to make this kind of space, would require a re-thinking of what we think might count as care.

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“A mood assails us,” writes Heidegger, “it comes neither from ‘outside’ nor from ‘inside’ but arises out of Being-in-the-World.”² Our most primordial way of being, prior to cognition or intentionality, mood is what allows anything to *matter* at all, prior to the establishment of any particular sense: we are in a world that always already matters to us moodwise, and only on that basis are we able engage and invest in this or that specific sense. As Michel Haar writes, “*Stimmung* is the anchorage and ballast of the world.”³

Yet even as mood operates at this most fundamental level, ordinarily Dasein evades or ignores what is disclosed in mood. Mood is not typically taken seriously as a mode of knowing, unlike, for example, seeing or inferring. Instead, it is framed as a mere inner feeling or a biased distortion, something that we ought to “get over” if we are to properly or objectively understand or “make sense” of anything. While mood is in truth the condition of anything like cognition or understanding, Dasein tends to experience the

² Heidegger, Martin. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. *Being and Time*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers 1962, p. 138. All references to the *Sein und Zeit* pagination.

³ Haar, Michael. Trans. Reginald Lilly. *The Song of the Earth: Heidegger and the Grounds of the History of Being*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1993, p. 39.

world in accordance with the latter, and more precisely, in the epistemic or relational terms sanctioned by *das Man*. Here it is important to recall that the primary function of everyday being-with, the They, and public-ness, is to “disburden”⁴ Dasein, to facilitate easy engagement with an equipmental whole, a world of the ready or present to hand. To be part of a community of meaning is to have the terms of meaningfulness circumscribed in advance, or more emphatically, it is to have the direction or structure of concern already established. As an important precondition for this absorbed everyday coping, *the world as such*—the context or frame of this kind of engagement—must not obtrude into our frame of reference: “the world *must not announce itself*.”⁵ Our comfortable and meaningful being-with-others is predicated on our not taking up the *fact* of being-there or being-in-the-world: meaningfulness, sense as such, is contingent upon the conditions of possibility for meaningfulness *not* coming into view.

By contrast, as a kind of disorienting disruption of this arrangement, “*mood* brings Dasein before the ‘that-it-is’ of its ‘there,’ which, as such, stares it in the face with the inexorability of an enigma.”⁶ Mood discloses, not anything specific, but the bare fact of our being embedded in the world, a fact that does not register as some knowable or fearsome *thing*, but as bare and brutal facticity, the uncanny whole, simply there, stripped of sense. Part of the experience of *Angst*, then, is that the otherwise compelling structure of incremental involvements “collapses in on itself; the world has the character of completely lacking significance.”⁷ To be sure, the world does not collapse *überhaupt*, we do not suffer an “apocalyptic senselessness,” as Robert Pippin rightly notes, but instead

⁴ Heidegger (1962) p. 128.

⁵ Heidegger (1962) p. 75.

⁶ Heidegger (1962) p. 136.

⁷ Heidegger (1962) p. 186.

experience a “collapse in the ultimate sense of meaningfulness.”⁸ When this happens, Heidegger notes: “the world can offer nothing more... Anxiety takes away from Dasein the possibility of understanding itself in terms of the ‘world’ and the way things have been publicly interpreted.”⁹

In *Angst*, the world reveals its senselessness to such an extent that it no longer *makes sense* to understand oneself according to the terms provided by the shared, public world; friends, family, projects, work, and leisure suddenly lack their compelling character, the ready grip they once had. In this sense there is something fundamentally incompatible about mood and being-with: to heed what mood shows—the enigmatic and senseless *there*—is by definition to find oneself beyond the reach of others, beyond the reach of available meaning.

Negatively, then, *Angst* registers the limit of sense, the contingency of the capacity to make and hold sense at all. Positively, *Angst* discloses what Heidegger calls the “whole,” which is to say the very conditioning structure that everyday being-in-the-world must disavow in order to function. In both respects, in *Angst* the world of things and others fails to bind us, and instead displays an “empty mercilessness.”¹⁰ Whereas everydayness and the They *disburden* Dasein, mood and *Angst* in particular call attention to the truly “burdensome character of Dasein,”¹¹ and as so burdened or aware of this weight, Dasein is radically individualized, cut off, undone.

Because it is such an isolating phenomenon, and because its constructive or potentially “authentic” character comes from just this singularity, Heidegger nowhere discusses the idea of an ethical relationship to the *other’s Angst*. Indeed, it seems that he

⁸ Pippin, Robert. *The Persistence of Subjectivity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 69.

⁹ Heidegger (1962) p. 187.

¹⁰ Heidegger (1962) p. 343.

¹¹ Heidegger (1962) p. 134.

would only be able to consider such a relationship as a kind of “leaping in,” the kind of *Fürsorge* that “takes over for the Other that with which he is to concern himself”¹² where my effort to help the other only hinders him, insofar as I disburden him of a burden that is rightfully his to bear. Using Heidegger’s terminology, the key will be to articulate a kind of *Fürsorge* in the mode of “leaping ahead,” where I do not care *for* the other but work to create a space in which the other can authentically, existentially, care for himself.

There are two specific risks or difficulties that make an ethical relation to the anxious other such a fraught and delicate matter, and both hinge on an impulse to isolate, contain, and ultimately cure or silence the anxiety that threatens to call into question our shared world of sense.

First, there is an almost contagious element to anxiety, such that *your* individualizing *Angst* could, paradoxically, instigate an individualizing anxiety in me. Earlier in *Being and Time*, Heidegger notes that when something is broken, missing, or otherwise unavailable, it and the entire context in which it is embedded become strangely “conspicuous.”¹³ That is, if the in-order-to structure is interrupted by something’s not doing what it is there to do, that thing appears to stand out, no longer as something with which I can interact unthinkingly, but instead as something that stands in the way of my engagements¹⁴: it, as a piece of the world, announces itself in exactly the way the world must not if we are to go on functioning. As Heidegger writes, “when something ready-to-hand is found missing, ... this makes a *break* in those referential contexts... The environment announces itself afresh. What is [thereby] lit up... is the ‘there.’”¹⁵

¹² Heidegger (1962) p. 122.

¹³ Heidegger (1962) p. 73.

¹⁴ Heidegger (1962) *ibid.*

¹⁵ Heidegger (1962) p. 75.

While Heidegger is here discussing equipment and the ready-to-hand object the malfunctioning of which can initiate a mood-like unraveling, it is not too much of a stretch to suppose that likewise, if another person fails to function or engage as usual—if she *breaks down*, as we say—then my world of easy interactions is likewise interrupted. The other’s breakdown, her inability to operate at the level of everydayness, calls the security or resilience of that everydayness into question for me. There is a threatening aspect to the other’s anxiety, such that my own mood is implicated in hers. For me to truly acknowledge your experience as one that “lights up” the limits of sense, I would have to acknowledge my own sense and meaning as likewise limited, finite, fragile. Thus the other’s anxiety qua breakdown exposes the precariousness of my being-there at all.

Which brings us to the second difficulty of an ethical engagement with *Angst*: because acknowledging your anxiety necessarily involves acknowledging my own (or the possibility thereof), there is a temptation to treat *Angst* as what Alan Bass calls “exceptional weirdness”¹⁶ rather than as one of Dasein’s most basic or essential conditions. Heidegger suggests that our everyday being-in-the-world places an insistent, even defensive emphasis on persons, things, discrete items, in order to secure sense and easy understanding; for him, everyday being-in-the-world, with its intense absorption with the ready or present to hand, is a defense against or flight from an uncanny encounter with the world as such, with the bare there. This defensive structure leads Heidegger to assert that, paradoxically, anxiety and uncanniness are more primordial than everydayness and *Heimlichkeit*: it is only because Dasein is “anxious in the very depths of its being”¹⁷ that it turns away from that radical openness and contingency *towards* always-already established things in the world. In this flight, Dasein rejects uncanniness

¹⁶ Bass, Alan. *Interpretation and Difference: The Strangeness of Care*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006, p. 53.

¹⁷ Heidegger (1962) p. 190.

and *Angst* as though they were indications of sickness or abnormality, and thus treats anxiety as a pathology or oddity, and not a basic existential condition, and certainly not as authoritative or disclosive. And indeed as long as the other's anxiety is isolated as just some "exceptional weirdness," a strange momentary illness (like eating bad food or just "having a bad day"), then I am not implicated, I can remain on the near side of sense.

This regarding of anxiety as a weird experience rather than a basic condition allows us to treat anxiety as a kind of thing, in the mode of something present to hand. This, then, is the second risk for responding to *Angst*: in an attempt to remain outside the reach of the other's breakdown, we treat the other with "objectifying concern," and transform *Angst* into one objective thing alongside others. As long as *Angst* represents a deviation from the norm, or a failure to keep it together, our treatment will amount to an attempt to get the other back to the norm, or a demand for her to "get it together." To this end, we pathologize anxiety, diagnose and medicalize it, give reasons for it, explain it: all of which is to say we attempt to confine it within the very meaningful structure from which *Angst* represents a definitive break. Thus while the undergoing of *Angst* lights up the limits of sense and discloses the bare and uncanny world as world, our everyday treatment of anxiety refuses that insight; to put it in Heidegger's terms, we refuse to see what mood shows. Instead, we work to demonstrate that the anxious person is somehow mistaken or sick, and a treatment or removal of the pathological element will make things better (viz: make things normal again). This emphasis on the thingliness of *Angst*, its being a thinkable treatable object, can only give rise to objectifying concern—the concern that would leap in and fix things—and never something like authentic care, leaping ahead, a properly ethical relation.

To reiterate: the difficulty or risk of responding to *Angst* is two-fold: first, the other's *Angst* seems to threaten the coherence and security of one's own world of sense—if her grip on meaning, or meaning's grip on her, can falter, it seems that mine can too; and so second, as a defense against this possibility, we transform *Angst* into a kind of thing to be fixed, an illness to be remedied, where the anxious person is no more than a malfunctioning body, and in this way we work to reintegrate the anxious person into the meaningful or normal framework that *Angst* has ejected her from. This kind of defensive turn towards “entities within the world,” this objectifying concern, fails to be an adequate or authentic kind of care insofar as it utterly misses the force of *Angst*, utterly disavows what it discloses, namely, the fragility or contingency of the meaningful world.

I'd like to turn to Todd Haynes' 1995 film *Safe* as an instructive illustration both of *Angst*, and the tendency to respond to *Angst* by disavowing what *Angst* discloses, the tendency to treat *Angst* with objectifying concern. The film's narrative focuses entirely on Carol, a young housewife in 1980's L.A who apparently has no other commitments than aerobics class, picking up dry cleaning, and telling the furniture delivery men which door to use when they bring her new couch. Carol is in many ways the prime candidate for a life of ease: she is white, wealthy, without a job, and even in her interactions with vapid friends or her indifferent husband, she does not seem troubled or concerned. At the same time, Carol is oddly detached from her life: she is painfully mechanical, reserved, not fully immersed in her activities or relationships. Haynes frequently films Carol in the corner of the shot, dwarfed and edged out of the frame by everything else—furniture, friends, built spaces—that occupies her life. The camera is eerily immobile for the much of the film, and the patience with which Haynes observes Carol as she tentatively moves

about—an anticipatory patience, even—suggests that something must give, that her precarious balance will falter.¹⁸

Indeed it does. For no specific reason that anyone can see, Carol begins to suffer panic attacks and her health rapidly deteriorates. Haynes is resolutely ambiguous in his depiction of this breakdown: on the one hand, Carol is surrounded by various “toxins” of modern life—the chemicals for her permanent wave, the smog of traffic, the insincerity of her girlfriends and husband—suggesting that her breakdown is in fact a physiological reaction to the environment. On the other hand, Haynes’ rendering unfamiliar the most familiar settings, his refusing our identification with Carol by presenting her as an impenetrable character (often filming her from the back), and the hyperbolic nature of Carol’s panic attacks, all function to complicate and render rather ineffectual any attempt to explain Carol’s experience. Even if Haynes suggests various triggers for Carol’s breakdown, the film flouts the viewer’s instinct to locate a specific cause. By refusing this impulse, which is to say our most intuitive sense of how to understand Carol, Haynes puts the viewer in the uncomfortable and helpless position of being unable to respond to the protagonist. We want very much to know what is happening to Carol and why, not only in order to gain a sense of epistemic security regarding the film’s narrative, but also in order to know how we ought to feel about Carol, which is to say, how we ought to *care* for her. If one of cinema’s most unique capacities is to illicit from its audience care and concern for its characters, *Safe* presents itself as a profoundly difficult film insofar as it

¹⁸ M.A. Doane suggests that the precariousness of women’s hold on the world is common to many of Haynes’ film, especially *Safe* and *Far From Heaven*. She writes: “In Haynes’s cinema, it is always women who try to hold the world and its contradictions at bay with a perfection, a seamlessness, and an embrace of a faultless naïveté...however, they always fail; something goes awry, and the world comes crashing in.” Doane, Mary Anne. “Pathos and Pathology: the Cinema of Todd Haynes.” *Camera Obscura*, Volume 19, Number 3, 2004, pp. vi, 1-21. While I think that it is very fruitful to read Haynes’ cinema as addressing in particular a certain female position or perspective, I think it is equally possible, as I do here, to read his films as addressing the problem of sense-making more generally.

does not facilitate this desire to care, it does not tell us how to care. Within the narrative, precisely how those around her ought to respond to and care for Carol is one of the film's guiding questions, and while Carol does eventually find a community that does tend to her in a way that satisfies and comforts her, we as viewers are left very unsure as to whether this constitutes a truly adequate and attentive care.

One scene in particular illustrates the challenge of responding to *Angst*, wherein Carol, even without knowing it herself, calls out for care, and her husband fails to respond. In the preceding scene, Carol has had a panic attack at a friend's baby shower: for no reason, she is again she is unable to breath. Haynes centers Carol and slowly moves towards her as her breathing worsens and the music grows more ominous. Heidegger in fact refers explicitly to breath in his discussion of *Angst*, writing that in anxiety "that which threatens...is already 'there' and yet nowhere; it is so close that it is oppressive and stifles one's breath, and yet it is nowhere."¹⁹ Closing in on her and isolating her from her friends, Haynes captures the oppressive and individualizing character of anxiety, not only by cutting Carol off from others and making the world strange to her, but by making Carol radically unfamiliar and strange to them. When her friends attempt to comfort her as her panic escalates, it is striking that they hesitate to approach her and barely touch her: two friends sit next to her and put their hands gingerly on her shoulders, while another friend remains frozen and stares from a distance, slack-jawed and eyes wide in horror.

In the following scene, Carol is in bed, writing a letter to the Wrenwood health clinic, for which she has seen a flyer at her gym. In voice-over, Carol recites the letter, telling us that she has always considered herself a healthy person, but that this is "all

¹⁹ Heidegger (1962) p. 186.

beginning to change...”: no longer able to exist in the world she knows, Carol here reaches out to the reassuring presence of another potentially more sympathetic world. At this point, her husband Greg walks into the room to give her a message about car-pooling, to which she says nothing and only stares. Standing across the room, he timidly asks if she is ok, and at first she turns away and smiles with embarrassment. Then her smile fades and she says, her voice thin and shaking:

“I don’t even...Oh god...what is this? Where am I? Right now?”

The question, of course, makes no sense either to her husband or to the viewer. In light of Heidegger’s notion of anxiety, however, Carol here seems to be putting words to that experience in its very senselessness: in asking the question in the apparently nonsensical way that she does, Carol is in fact giving a most exact articulation of her experience, the most honest and precise of the entire film. Her questions are unsettling and upsetting precisely because, even though she uses familiar words, we do not understand them. When Greg responds to Carol, remaining at a kind of nervous distance, by saying helplessly “we’re in our house; Greg and Carol’s house,” it’s clear that he has “misinterpreted” her question, responding from within the context of significance out of which she has slipped, referring her to the objectively present things in the world with which she *ought* to be but is apparently no longer concerned. Greg can only experience her words in their literal significance and so he tells Carol exactly where she is, even though Carol’s question is better understood as expressive of the uncanniness and alienation of anxiety, not as a question about spatial location.

In this short exchange, we witness the collision of two “worlds:” Greg’s everyday world cannot accommodate or make room for Carol’s condition, which Greg can only see negatively, as a failure to assume an appropriately sensible position in his world. In some ways, this is correct: Carol can no longer stitch herself into the world as she knew it, and instead, finds herself, not in a new world (she is not hallucinating) but in that same world grown unfamiliar, showing itself in “empty mercilessness.”²⁰ The problem is that Greg is unable to recognize any validity to her experience. Meaning and the knowable world have, presumably, never faltered for Greg, and the collapse of meaning for Carol is for him both incomprehensible and threatening, her inability to carry on indicating the limits of the meaning structures he so trusts, her incapacity an affront to his commitment to those structures. And so he cannot go to her, her senselessness now like a contagion from which he must keep himself safe. Instead he can only point out the coordinates of his familiar and known world—the things and people—demanding that she make sense of herself strictly in accordance with them.

Carol’s request for care—nonsensically articulated in a call that even she does not understand—is thus denied. She soon leaves L.A for an isolated clinic for people “like her,” where she is treated as suffering from “environmental illness,” a kind of immune deficiency syndrome. The Wrenwood center attempts to treat Carol’s condition by means of mental and physical therapies, before finally quarantining her in an isolated “safe house” removed from the rest of the residents. While Wrenwood functions under the auspices of attending to Carol’s situation when no one else would, in fact it covers over the experience of *Angst*, refusing the moment of senselessness by recourse to a circumscribed discourse of pathology. The question, then, is what it would mean to

²⁰ Heidegger (1962) p. 343.

properly attend to anxiety and its revelation of “utter insignificance”²¹ in such a way that did not immediately make that insignificance significant, that did not cover over with objectifying concern. What would it mean to take *Angst* seriously, without making it immediately meaningful or sensible? What would be adequately anxious care?

If mood reveals a kind of radical openness to the world, a being-with or being-in irreducible to a subject/object dichotomy, then anxious care would have to facilitate a being-with that did not set itself up in terms of or *as* subjects and objects, as things in the world standing over against one another. That is, this kind of care would have to avoid thinking in terms of the “theoretical problematic of understanding the ‘psychic life of Others,’”²² treating the anxious person as a malfunctioning thing requiring conceptual understanding or management/diagnosis. Instead care would involve working against the defensive temptation to split from the other, and would instead maintain a proximate intimacy, a kind of attunement. Equally, this intimacy would have to avoid a straightforwardly empathetic response (which Heidegger is explicitly critical of) wherein I project myself into “their shoes,” at once reiterating the subject/object split, and yet eradicating the irreducible separateness and difference of Dasein (what Derrida calls the “irreducible singularity or solitude in *Mitsein*”²³).

Avoiding this bridging empathetic position would therefore involve an *intimacy in or as separateness*. Just as being-with as a relation to otherness is irreducible to the atomization of discrete subjects and objects, it is also irreducible to unity or total togetherness. *Angst* as individualizing registers this separateness not as if the world were at a radically objectified distance from me as a unique individual, but rather as if the

²¹ Heidegger (1962) p. 186.

²² Heidegger (1962) p. 124.

²³ Derrida, Jacques. “‘Eating Well’ or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida” in *Who Comes After the Subject?* Eds. Cadava, Connor, & Nancy. New York: Routledge, 1991, p. 107.

coordinates of our lived distance and proximity (that is, Being-in-the-world) conceived in terms of subjects and objects failed to any longer be adequate, to make sense. Care of *Angst* would need to work within a new non-objectal understanding of being-in-the-world or being-with, affirming intimacy as separateness, being-with as radical openness, as mood.

So at one and the same time, both proximity and distance are affirmed, being-with and radical individuation. In this indeterminate space, what is offered is not a diagnosis or theoretical explanation, not an affirmation of shared sense or indication of shared world, but instead an occasion to articulate a kind of nonsense—as in Carol’s question, “what is this?,” which has nothing to do with objective truth or present things. Care would in this case involve a special attentiveness to the force of disavowal and our immediate impulse to explain or “cover up”²⁴ what mood shows; rather than encourage this fleeing towards entities within the world (like Greg’s reference to “Greg and Carol’s house”), authentic care would withstand an *expressive or disclosive senselessness*, which is to say it would attempt to heed mood, to take in what mood discloses without demanding that disclosure conform to those terms set by everydayness or understanding. Care would not be an answer, but, thinking of Carol, might simply be an acknowledgment of the question *as* a question, which is to say an acknowledgment of the authority of mood, of its force and sway as a primordial way of being in the world. Presumably this acknowledgment irreducible to answer is part of what Heidegger means by “listening:” he writes, “listening to... is Dasein’s existential way of Being-open as Being-with for Others.”²⁵ If a response or explanation potentially closes the exchange,

²⁴ Heidegger (1962) p. 169.

²⁵ Heidegger (1962) p. 163.

attentive, acknowledging listening would be the mode in which Dasein can be-with in such a way that is adequate to the singularity of anxiety.

To my mind, this begins to sound like the psychoanalytic setting: a care-ful being-with that does not seek ordinary cure so much as attuned understanding, an acknowledgment of suffering, and of the strange coordination of mood, otherness, indeterminacy, and openness. Heidegger even suggests that authentic care involves, not taking care *of* the Other, but “giving [care] back to the Other;”²⁶ we can conceive of this as the crucial difference between diagnosis and interpretation, with the latter involving a registration of the other’s *Angst* that relays it back to her, gives it back to her anew: a caring-with rather than a caring-for. This relay, again, would involve not the solution to the problem or the alleviation of suffering but a relationality that could withstand the simultaneity of distance and proximity, strangeness and intimacy.

Safe does not hold out hope for this kind of attuned care; instead, all efforts to respond to Carol’s expressions of anxiety and calls for caring-with effectively refuse her by demanding that she make sense of an experience the profundity and painfulness of which derives from its rejection of sense-making. Carol’s asking “what is this?” is the only moment in *Safe* when she truly yields to the eruption of nonmeaning, without recourse to either repression (such that anxiety surfaces in the form of bodily symptoms) or interpretation. Yet this moment was too horrific to sustain and was quickly rejected by her husband and covered over by the wellness discourse of Wrenwood. For Haynes, the fate of a break in sense wrought by *Angst* is not authenticity, as Heidegger had hoped, but its swift reassimilation and domestication through meaning’s self-suturing, which both isolates the break as exceptional pathology and makes it easily meaningful through this

²⁶ Heidegger (1962) p. 122.

very diagnosis. Any meaning, no matter how disturbing, would be better than none. This totalizing if never fully secured movement of meaning-making masquerading as care is nowhere better epitomized than in the final moment of the film, when Carol—in her sterile white chamber, alone but for her oxygen tank—looks at her pale and broken face in the mirror, and says, with a weak smile, “I love you. I really love you.”

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