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The Bullshit Artist: Mystification and Mystagogy

Abstract

This paper discusses the problem of knowledge's indeterminacy with an account of the sophists and bullshit artists. I analyze bullshit as a *default*, after which I look at the sophists and bullshit artists to subsequently discuss caring about mystery, art, and bullshit (nonsense and madness). The analysis mostly looks at Plato's account of sophistry while supplementing it with others. I use Bernard Stiegler's phenomenology to explore the different modes and applications of the term bullshit (nonsense, madness, etc.), understood existentially as a *default* of being, rather than propositional truth, to show the specific relation between bullshit, *techne* qua abstraction, and the living experience of indemonstrability, i.e., mystery. The specific relation between *aletheia* and bullshit artists and sophists will turn out to be their complex ability to appeal to emotion abstractly through concealment and disclosure. Bullshit and art inherently share an ontological unprovability. They can transform the mysterious into mystification through formulae, a lack of care for meaningful critique. We can be initiated into a practice that disregards usefulness, such as art, via mystagogy.

Keywords

Mystery, Stiegler, Proletarianization, Plato, Nonsense, Play, Individuation

One man's bullshit is another man's catechism.

Neil Postman 1969

I hate the truth. In fact, I hate the truth so much I prefer
a giant dose of bullshit any day over the truth.

Lady Gaga (Hamilton 2012, 230)

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Introduction

Does writing about bullshit, defined as not caring about the truth, endanger this article of becoming bullshit itself? Given bullshit's performativity and the play of natural language, for example, Jacques Derrida's *différance*, I leave the question open for the reader to decide. Is there any reason to write an article about "bullshit"? Certainly, one is dictated by fashion. Harry G. Frankfurt published his essay, *On Bullshit*, in 1986, and ever since, the phenomenon has received a philosophical framing and academic credibility. It has become a formal scholarly research interest and was even defined as a broad field called "taurascatics," which meaningfully differs from rhetoric (Fredal 2011, 243-245). Another reason for philosophical interest in bullshit is its apparent universality (Phillips 2019, 4-5) in human behavior and speech. Frankfurt and Phillips assert bullshit's technological condition in that bullshit has always been an ever-present phenomenon, but it is now more widely perceived—and so it is incorrectly judged to be more significant today than it was in the past. We think there is more bullshit because its presence in modern technology is amplified.

In this paper, I address bullshit's *technicality*, pursued through the *techne* of sophists (writing) and Bernard Stiegler's claim that the philosopher's knowledge, *episteme*, has been privileged over the sophist's *techne* ever since Plato. The technical condition shows that bullshit's apprehension is tied to the problem of its concealment or closure, and unconcealment and disclosure, in addition to Frankfurt's definition of bullshit as a certain disregard for the truth. Having this in mind, I think it is worthwhile to pursue the existential question of truth in terms of the phenomenological pair of unconcealment-concealment, rather than objective, logical truth. So, I analyze the phenomenon of bullshit not in terms of platonic propositional logic or rightness (*orthotes*), but rather bullshit's rapport with the pre-Platonic tradition of the Ancient Greek ontology of unconcealment, i.e., *aletheia* (Ružić 2017, 10; Stiegler & Hughes 2014, 91; Woleński 2004) as the interplay and simultaneous revelation and concealment of humanity's compound existence, where truth composes with untruth as a historical event that happens to someone (Koskela 2012). To me, this seems to reflect much of bullshit's complexity well.

One noticeable aspect necessary in human social behavior is bullshitting. Subjects such as "excellence" and getting ahead could involve turning a weakness into a strength or having an opinion on a topic we lack knowledge about, such as how to best live life. This topic is worth thinking

about because the sophists, like modern-day coaches, taught “excellence” (*arete*), know-how, self-improvement, soft skills, rhetoric, and persuasion, such as strengthening a weak case to better defend yourself before a court of law. They were public relations and marketing experts who taught what is needed to succeed in their client’s careers, and they provided a technical response, through abstraction and writing, to the great human question: how do you live the best life? The problem, I think, is that no one knows since there is no objective, testable answer. Whatever the response, it concerns something unreal, like the moment of one’s death, which existentially opens us to reach for distinct forms of untruth such as sophism, mania, nonsense, art, rhetoric. Depending on the circumstances, bullshit would be something distinct and a compositional element of various forms of untruth. A disregard for objective, propositional truth does not necessarily mean that an “unserious” life (not caring about reality or practicality) would be meaningless.

My reasoning develops as follows. I draw from Bernard Stiegler’s philosophical ideas and apply them to analyze specific modes of bullshit. Generally, with the term bullshit, I intend to argue that bullshit is produced from a *default*—a lack, guilt, forgetting, absence, or error. The default is the structural choice that appears when no deliberate decision is made, such as is in behavioral choice architecture and nudge politics. I relate the *default* to mediatization or exteriorization, which I develop as *techne*’s abstraction, a practice of the sophist’s use of writing. Moreover, the notion of *default* invokes the problem of the absence of proof and demonstrability, which raises the question of art’s ontological status concerning its empirical indemonstrability, i.e., mystery.

Stiegler advanced the notion of *the default of origin* throughout *Technics and Time* to argue that humanity lacks an essence. Humans could forget what was valued as worthy of reminiscence, repetition (*anamnesis*) and become dependent on their technological artifacts through the technical exteriorization of memory and its functions (*hypomnesis*). I take a position on language that the pair presence-absence concerns memory practices and techniques. The first would concern repeated repetition characteristic for pre-Protagoric sophists such as poet-musicians, orators, and rhapsodes, of reminding oneself through the presence of a speaker, as is the case with the *loci* method (Kelly 2017), and the other relates to reminding oneself via their absence, such as in writing. For example, *savoir-vivre* is the regularly practiced knowledge of complex polite behavior upheld and made in the presence of others, whereas cramming exact rules for an exam from a textbook

leads to temporary learning, as the Ebbinghaus forgetting curve illustrates. How many people today remember the phone number of their friends? Because of automatic storage, this simple number sequence is no longer remembered but stored on a device outside the physiological body. So, naturally, most forget.

I consider *techne* with concealment, unconcealment, or forgetting and reminding oneself. Because of the existential absence of essence, humanity must supplement itself with *techne*, which exteriorizes conscious experience, anticipations, and memory. Stiegler argues that this process of exteriorization is a universal “proletarianization,” understood as the loss of knowledge because of its delegation to *techne*. Stiegler also claims that Plato is the first thinker of proletarianization, so while addressing Plato’s views of sophists, I will supplement them with what sophists wrote, although I limit myself to Protagoras because a complete analysis is beyond the scope of this article.

Now, Heidegger maintains that *techne* is a mode of truth, called *aletheia*. The latter term signifies a revelation of that, which was forgotten. Stiegler problematizes *techne* qua memory support as a *pharmakon*, both poison to reminiscence and a remedy for forgetfulness. This question shows bullshit is like a *pharmakon* for meaning-making. The *pharmakon* invokes two *defaults*: nonsense and mania or madness, which I relate to the term bullshit interpreted as a disregard for reality. The first term reveals bullshit as impotent, not helpful, and more like child’s play, whereas the second shows that it can accidentally speak the truth and is perceived as dangerous. Art resides somewhere in this ambiguous area, and artworks are not subject to proof, we cannot objectively demonstrate that a piece is an artwork, and because of this, art (*techne*) is a mystery (like bullshit) that can either: 1) stimulate an organizing aesthetic experience through initiation and its practice, i.e., mystagogy, or 2) be reduced to exact formulae, disconnected from deliberate practice in a way that obscures meaning, i.e., mystification. The problem concerning bullshit and art is incommensurability to objective truth and its relations to mania, nonsense, and truth qua *aletheia*—being’s compositional structure of disclosure and closure, that is remembering and forgetting. The sophist’s reliance on writing becomes an abstraction as an exteriorization of knowledge, just like bullshit artist’s reliance on ignorance or a lack of care for objective truth, which can be benign and dangerous.

In other words, I employ the philosophical framing of phenomenology to explore the different modes and applications of the term bullshit, understood existentially as a disregard to being, rather than propositional truth, to show the specific relation between bullshit, *techne* qua abstraction, and the

living experience of indemonstrability. The specific relation between *aletheia* and bullshit artists and sophists will turn out to be their ability to appeal to emotion and make their object appear more “interesting” or credible without caring about reality. We could model a bullshit artist as someone who, like a sophist, flaunts their infinite expertise on Twitter, has an inflated penchant for upstaging anyone, creates an artificial semblance of authenticity, like on Instagram, with the implied self-importance of the “personal brand,” or politicians who never fail to offer their hot takes.

1. Bullshitting qua default

Bullshit depends on the suspension, or forgetting, of judgment in the audience and speaker. A bullshitter is not only indifferent to propositional truth (or falsehood) but, as Plato thinks of sophists, does not care about making “clear the nature of the things that are” (Schindler, 2019, p. 99) and is intrinsically unconcerned with what is being spoken about. However, it should be noted that the sophists, who held diverse views, did indeed attempt to individually explain the truth through ideas of relativism, subjectivism, or conventionalism. What is at stake is not meaning in terms of predication but rather pre-selection, ways of living by default, where judgment’s autonomy is conditioned by heteronomy and exteriorized technologically.

First, some characteristic, peculiar aspects of bullshit artists can be developed by framing bullshit in terms of nonsense¹ and the ancient Greek philosophical notion of mania or madness. A maniac, like an artist or a drunk, expresses the cosmic order of truths and is dangerous, whereas “nonsense” is understood as “[...] false and useless speech/behavior (or even object) which is disconnected from reality” (Kidd 2014, 51), i.e., nonsense as meaningless language, actions, or objects as inconsequential to the “real world,” and/as it cannot accomplish anything useful and is impotent. Bullshit, not caring about reality, is distinct from nonsense in that the latter is not practical in real-world situations, whereas bullshit can indeed help bring people together. When bullshit reveals itself as nonsense, it shares the properties of being powerless speech or behavior. However, when it takes the shape of madness, bullshit can be life-threatening, for instance, in applying pseudoscience and conspiracy theories in COVID-19 vaccination. So this species of bullshit, exaggerated claims of knowledge based on some form of writing (e.g., memes), inflicts *actual* harm despite it being an untruth, which means that it can do violence to being.

¹ The Greek had many different words for nonsense: *phlyarein*, *lerein*, *ouden legein*, *legein mataia*. For an in-depth review of the various term’s see: Kidd 2014.

Next, Bernard Stiegler's distinctions between mystagogy and mystification in the art world can provide a framework for the analysis of bullshit in light of his "default of origin," notion of proletarianization, which will be explained later in this article, and terms of auto-antonyms like *pharmakon*, which refers to technical artifacts predicating heteronomy and autonomy. The notion of *originary default* refers to a human's lack of origin or essence: each human being becomes one via the inheritance of accidental technical artifacts, technological prosthetics constitutive of the person themselves. I understand the *default* as what appears because of a lack, inadequacy, or deficiency. This approach reveals bullshitting as a *default*: the forgetting of critique, the languages, and behaviors that appear due to organological and operational conditions—biological, artificial, and organizational (Stiegler 2020); bullshitting also involves soft skills and technical knowledge of specific social values, however.

As Heidegger noted in *The Question Concerning Technology*, *techne* is a mode of truth, *aletheia*, which is a term that I will explain soon, and it denotes disclosure or an experience of the hidden and forgotten: "It reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us, whatever can look and turn out now one way and now another" (Heidegger 1977, 13). The sophist's dependence on rhetorical manuals as memory aids signified a lack of mnemonic reminiscence and epistemic knowledge. Plato opposed rational and theoretical knowledge, *episteme*, to the practical knowledge of the sophists' technical know-how. The prosthetic character of sophistic know-how relies on their ways of using the technology of writing, a way of using technology that Plato criticized as drug abuse, dependence on memory aids poisonous to memory. Following Derrida, Stiegler argues that such technology is pharmacological: conjunctly dangerous and therapeutic.

The archaic term *aletheia* is only intelligible in systems of symbolic representations of complex complementary relationships. *Aletheia* cannot be separated from the muses, memory, justice, praise, liturgical recitation, or functions of sovereignty. Indeed, *Protogras*, in the Platonic dialog bearing his name, argues that two universal values exist: justice and self-restraint, necessary and natural for the survival of *Homo Sapiens* (320c-328d). The term *aletheia* signifies the absence of forgetting. Truth finds its expression in ritualistic behavior and a mythical figure of speech, a performative language entangled with actions. Truth is produced in an experience. Art is the medium of the aesthetic experience of recollecting something that escapes clear demonstrations and exact proofs.

In contrast and closely related to the statesmen, Plato regards sophistic thinking as founded on technical ambiguity, trickery or *apate*, and opinion or *doxa*. He claims they viewed speech as a separable and autonomous power, devaluing and secularizing *aletheia*. For them, according to Plato, truth was the reality of the best argument or actual realization of a decision. In fact, *aletheia* has no place in the thought of sophists who rely on “contradictory” contraries; speech is an instrument rather than a way to know, that is, experience, reality.

The notion of *aletheia*, a combination of complementary contraries, raised political practices of the spiritual power of Memory (Mnemosyne) and was applied to meaning given by authority figures, spiritual leaders, diviners, bards, poets, and kings of justice or the “Masters of Truth” (Detienne 1996). The concept of *aletheia* suggests that “one must not be unmindful of whatever is true, and *such truth must be not only memorable but also absolutely unforgettable*” (Nagy 2018, para. 1). Belief and truth are entangled in pre-modern thought, so *aletheia* is performative truth paired with the muses of justice, sung speech, light, and praise that creates being. The assimilation of *aletheia* to truth was made possible by a psychological aspect of belief, which corresponds to an affective adhesion, and this assimilation has been a source of ambiguity. People believe in unproven speech because the self-imposed credibility of “the word” itself sufficed; given by sacred authority, what is said is factual, poetic, and assertive. The adherence to and valorization of what is conventionally non-debatable is a primitive and affective condition of truth congruent with *aletheia*.

The counterpart to *aletheia* is neither falsehood nor deceit, but rather concealment, oblivion, or forgetfulness. The negating prefix *a-* before *letheia* denotes the idea that *Lethe*, the goddess of oblivion and accomplice to Silence, Blame, and Obscurity was supposed to be counterbalanced by expressing and revealing something that should be known to everyone, an act of unconcealment to experience, see, and understand what is talked about genuinely. Such acts are not alien to aesthetic modes of being, even though sophists are accused of radically reducing their mode of being to the aesthetic. In other words, truth qua *aletheia* is a manner of living devotedly in favor of meaningful and conscious experiences, a mode of being which transforms the senses and perception, whereas “the manner of being, the *bios*, of the [Platonic] sophist is merely aesthetic” (Crome 2004, 76). This distinction can be verbalized as the difference between aesthetic experience, being initiated into art’s ambiguity, and drive-based aesthetic conditioning that aims to instrumentalize behaviors.

The bullshit artist is a creative agent who, in one way or another, reproduces behavioral patterns or language normatively judged to be either superfluous or meaningful but after scrutiny is revealed to be the *default* of knowledge: meaningless, pretentious, or faulty. However, as Stiegler argues in *Technics and Time*, “stupidity” (understood as an inability to transform and re-think ideas) is not external to knowledge; stupidity (the dazed mind of Epimetheus) and quick-thinking (the alert mind of Prometheus) are twin aspects of humanity’s knowledge (Turner 2017, 10). Bullshit serves aesthetic functions in which the relation of facts and fiction is epistemologically and existentially problematic and not reducible to truth or falsehood, but more an attribute of Being or its diminishment (Gajda-Krynicka 2019, 26), a matter of not forgetting or memorability, emotional labor and storytelling. Its relationship to facticity is a complex temporal composition of language: idiolects, dialects, and sociolects, including processes of unification, i.e., symbols, and particularization, i.e., diabolos (Withers 2019).

2. Sophists as Bullshit Artists

Taking the comparison of bullshit artists and sophists as a point of departure, I explicate the relation between sophistry and bullshitting as forms of non-knowledge. The sophists are commonly characterized as prototypical old-school bullshit artists who operationalize affect to make weak claims seem more desirable by appealing to feelings rather than reason (a practical art of rhetoric). In contrast, new-school bullshit artists manipulate the hard sciences like statistics and data science² (Bergstrom & West 2020).

² This context refers to qualitative and quantitative aspects of bullshit. The latter relates to the presentation of bullshit in quantitative forms like black-box technologies, “mathiness,” poor infographic design or data visualization like Edward Tufte’s “ducks,” (a term borrowed from kitsch architecture to denote a graphic dominated by decorative forms and computer debris. The data measures and structures function as design elements. In these data visualization images, style is more important than presenting information correctly and clearly), bad data as inputs in machine learning (Bergstrom & West 2020, xiv; Gotthardt 2019), or to the state of being overwhelmed by the sheer amount of bullshit generated. In this case, “Bullshit involves language, statistical figures, data graphics, and other forms of presentation intended to persuade or impress an audience by distracting, overwhelming, or intimidating them with a blatant disregard for truth, logical coherence, or what information is actually being conveyed” (Bergstrom & West 2020, 40). The ancient Greeks used a term that brings to mind the use of social media (filtration failure), where “such speech becomes mere twitters (*teretismata*), their speakers compared to birds” (Kidd 2014, 17). The qualitative could encompass the erotic and say sweet

Philosophically, the quarrel between sophists and philosophers is more fundamental than between musician-poets or artists and philosophers, who can assist one another in a *polis's* ordering and story-telling. The sophists use speech and writing “technologically” or “logographically” (Stiegler 2018). Following D.C. Schindler’s interpretation of Plato’s views on sophistical rhetoric, as opposed to philosophical rhetoric, the sophists were criticized for separating means from real ends and formalizing their reified methods abstractly for optimized efficiency and creating a relatively independent reality. This liberation can be the object of language’s commodification and the instrumentalization of speech (Schindler 2019, 92). In the quarrel between philosophers and sophists, the ancient coaches were accused of *pathologizing* knowledge, engineering speech, and behaviors to make them *reactionary*. Figures include Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus, Hippias, Thrasy-machus, Lycophron, Callicles, Antiphon, and Cratylus.

The leading historical figure, accredited by Plato with inventing professional sophistry, is Protagoras of Abdera. Diagonos Laertius wrote that Protagoras maintained that there are two *logoi* (theses, statements, arguments) on any subject (IX.51), and Aristotle said that the sophists, including poets, taught how to make the weaker or inferior *logoi* superior (*Rhetoric* 1402a 23-5). In other words, binary questions can be complicated, and something can be said either way if the appropriate distinctions are provided, such as exemplified in the anonymous work *Dissoi Logoi*, i.e., *dialexeis* or *Arguments on Either Side*. However, this is not yet a radical disregard for the truth but an application of technical arguments based on relativism or subjectivism in some matters with appropriate conditions and restrictions applied.

When it comes to bullshit, it appears whenever there is a deficiency or weakness of knowledge, and applying it could make ungrounded or unsupported claims appear stronger, as long as the audience is ignorant on the subject at hand. The relativistic or subjective slogan, “Man is the measure of all things, of things that are that they are, and of things that are not that they are not” (Plato, *Theaetetus*, 151e; Sextus, *Against the Mathematicians*, VII.60) in the work *Truth*—which could have also been titled “Overthrowing,” as in rebutting (*Kataballontes*)—summarizes the position of Protagoras, but

nothings like *legein kena*, *legein mataia*, or *mathen* or and horseplay, silly talk, and a kind of deception by artful tricks or sophistry (*morologia* and *kenologia*). Plato would say in the *Laws* (701c) one would literally *fall from an ass* (*ap’ onoy piptein*).

In any case of this kind, where it is assumed that the facts cannot be established with certainty, considerations of what is plausible may, given sufficient ingenuity, be adduced on either side, and similar arguments can be adduced in the context of political deliberation, where the future outcome cannot be certain and the decision has to turn on the balance of probabilities. It is likely, then, that this slogan was a sales pitch for Protagoras as a teacher of forensic and deliberative rhetoric (Taylor & Lee 2020, para. 9).

Protagoras made handbooks for adversarial argumentative strategies, although we do not know the detailed content. As Diogenes listed, we know strategies like making your opponent contradict themselves. Protagoras's position is debated or at least inconsistent since, according to some interpretations, Protagoras subscribed to the view that some essential virtues, i.e., justice and self-restraint, are universal objective truths without which cities would be impossible. Verbal sparring, first instituted by Protagoras according to Diogenes (IX.52), was like a sport, and in Plato's *Lesser Hippias* (363c-364a), Hippias described that he would go to the Olympic games to watch such debates as entertainment. This form of play is something that connects such sophistry, as a performance, with never-ending modern-day debates on social media that function as entertainment and cringe-content, and much of which is in itself bullshit that employs techniques in arguments and calling out opponents for logical fallacies, which in the end do not advance learning nor social well-being, but decomposes into a form of trolling.

It should be noted that there is a distinction between actual nonsense and rhetorical nonsense. We are dealing with actual nonsense when what is spoken or done is perceived as somewhat random, like the Dada movement or Surrealism of the early 20th century that intentionally provoked an emotional reaction. In the past, when someone was speaking nonsense, they were thought to be mentally incompetent, and in this regard, they had no hidden agenda. Such nonsense-speakers were viewed to be overly "simple-minded" (*euethes*), someone "good-mannered" but naïve, so their actions and claims could not be calculated (Kidd 2014, 30). When used as a rhetorical accusation, when alleging that an opponent's claims are bullshit, this accusation provides distance to them and weakens their potential to be believed. Such a rebuttal would be a calculated deflation of the danger or power of the speaker, who could be a simple-minded bullshitter.

Bullshitting can also be revealed as a form of arrogance and trickery [*alazoneia*] or an act of mystification [*phenakismos*]. Then, the figure of the *alazon* is the Bullshit Artist (Griffith & Marks 2011). As an imposter, the act of deception distinguishes bullshit from nonsense. Such bullshitting constitutes

a particular type of deceptive and useless speech or behavior similar to those with an intellectual inability, such as children or the ill (Kidd 2014, 31), i.e., they make mistakes that very few people without these noetic disabilities make. The historical sophists would certainly not qualify under such a category, especially given their focus on practical teachings, whereas bullshit artists could. Understood this way, bullshitting (a deception of the enterprise, what I am up to) is not a lie, but not nonsense either, and it is reminiscent of play. In other words, what is not actual is considered actual in nonsense. Bullshit is an active disabling of critical reason. It is the willing engagement in nonsense and being entranced by its unprovability (Kidd 2014, 43). In this regard, nonsense is an effort made without any real-life purpose, necessity, or effect.

Generally speaking, there is something pleasurable and desired in having time for games and nonsense. The use of the word "bullshit is characterized by playfulness or gamesmanship" (Eubanks & Schaeffer 2008, 373). Bullshit has invoked the category of *play* (*paidia*) since ancient times, especially when it is speech or activity divorced from reality. Kidd states: "But play's perceived uselessness (especially from the player's point of view) is its foundational myth: that is, if one felt one's play were useful, it would stop feeling like "play" (and this perceived uselessness is what imbricates play with nonsense)" (Kidd 2014, 19).

In contrast, madness or mania is meaningful and dangerous. Maniacs were believed to reveal eternal and divine truths and could behave violently. Maniacs and the intellectually disempowered were characterized as producing excessive repetitions or ramblings speech. This excess leads to a loss of force or effect through repetition, a cliché. So, bullshit is non-ordinary in that it is something said and heard of before. An example is speech or routines (like bureaucracy) that are not essential (Graeber 2018). Bullshit qua nonsense or garrulity does not help listeners follow the central thread of a speech and disables the intellect (Kidd 2014, 38).

Plato condemned the sophists in *Euthydemus* (Bergstrom & West 2020; Chrucky 2016) or the dialogue *The Sophist*, which deals with the problem of false statements. According to what Plato thinks of sophists, these early "bullshit artists," whose marketable arguments were calculated, were indifferent to the truth and only cared about winning arguments. As Plato recognizes, such sophists sell manuals, which short-circuit political and noetic life. Consequently, political debates function as profitable shows; the political is a medium of entertainment, which is unconcerned with naming reality correctly as undertaken in *The Cratylus*, i.e., the truth, like games and play.

According to what Plato thinks of them, a sophist is an expert at deception who profits from people willing to learn, but sophists do not help their clients pursue true (i.e., non-technical) knowledge (Western metaphysics began with privileging non-technical knowledge or the quarrel between the philosophers and the sophists. It should be noted that Stiegler argues *techné* and *epistémé* are not oppositional; non-technical knowledge and technical knowledge compose with each other—both are necessary). In Plato's *The Sophist*, an Eleatic visitor, a student of Parmenides, presents aporetic problems of non-being and the possibility of saying something false (Wei 2013). What is more, this dialog is somewhat dogmatic in delivery, given that the listeners rarely raise formidable objections or make good proposals of their own (Gill 2020), i.e., a lack of critique that I view as an environmental condition proper to bullshitting.

A sophist is described as a professional who teaches people to do the same thing they do, a “hunter of rich young men,” who treats knowledge as a finished product: a wholesaler of learning about the soul and retailer of the same things, and a seller of his learning—an athlete in verbal combat distinguished by their expertise in debating. A sophist is a kind of magician in copy-making or the art of likeness-making and appearance-making (268c-d). Imitation is the coming into being of copies, repeating content parrot-fashion. Bullshit would be a thoughtless, i.e., critique-less, mechanical application of the same formulae or methods to different subject matters. Someone ignorant of justice or virtue, for instance, holds some beliefs about justice and virtue. Such a person can use their ignorant convictions to make these virtuous traits appear present in themselves by using their words and actions in a formulaic or abstract way. They can be successful at appearing to be just without being just at all in their mode of being.

Likewise, in *The Republic* and *The Laws*, Plato condemns the obscuration of truth because of the mimetics of some artist-poets and other crafts workers. The primary duty of the artists in Plato's utopia was to produce narrative (*mousiké demode*), i.e., propaganda, by which the citizens of the *polis* would lead their lives and accept their roles in class hierarchies. The impulse to tell stories, send self-regarding signals and create impressions of ourselves in other people's eyes drives a lot of bullshit production. Stories do not need to be true. Instead, they need to be interesting, relatable, impressive, or engaging. “This kind of bullshit has become an art form in the so-called attention economy. Think about the stories that go viral on social media: funny things that kids say, horrible first dates, trouble that pets get into. These may or may not be true, and to most people who read them, it doesn't matter” (Bergstrom & West 2020, 11-12).

In the search for an answer to the question about the meaning of life, how to live, Socrates asks the sophist Gorgias “what is the power of the *techné*” (*he dynamis tes technes*) that he is selling to his students? The answer: rhetoric or the art of speaking (Schindler 2019, 86-87). It is a teachable and marketable skill, but Schindler points out that what is not immediately apparent is what rhetoric is a skill *of*, what object determines its function and techniques, or aims and scope. Plato comes to the conclusion that it is not about speech or reason, but precisely about *nothing*: “rhetoric is not about some determinate matter, but instead concerns the way one speaks about any given subject matter” (Schindler 2019, 88). At the same time, because it is ignorance and about nothing, it is also an absence of power, even though sophists seek unlimited power in the absolute sense.

Was Socrates a bullshitter? In trying to work out how to live life, he believed that each person should study themselves and learn from others, especially those who *know* many things about life. Nevertheless, his contemporaries convicted Socrates to death in Athens for being a bullshit artist, a sophist. More precisely, Socrates was convicted for impiety and corrupting the youth. He did not deny the charges but simply reworded the accusation, mimicry reminiscent of bullshitting. Socrates would confuse his interlocutors about what to believe by upsetting their belief systems and arriving at *aporia*. Socrates did not take what people believed for granted and had shown there is nothing clear to be said about the subject matter of their convictions. He never clarifies anything and annoys everyone.

Meanwhile, he is concerned for the truth. This care is his enterprise—he systematically refuses to claim knowledge based on his sincere admittance of ignorance. He is a figure that represents the idea that truths are not knowable without philosophical inquiry, meaning that, through his reasoning, some views are unclarifiable, the experience of the mystery of *aporia* is foundational. He personifies the realization that one knows nothing. It is the self-awareness of bullshit, which manifests itself in many modes.

To reveal a *default* of knowledge, Socrates recommends cross-examination of someone when they think they are “saying something though they are saying nothing,” i.e., the speaker is expressing inconsistent and conflicting opinions about the same thing. However, not every sentence can be seen as an intended theoretical statement (a statement about something). “Semantic speech would also account for commands, exclamations, requests, desires, etc., that is, those statements that do not bear the meaning of the theoretical apprehension of something. Semantic speech comprises a set of statements related to that which is ready-to-hand, whereas *apophantic*

speech refers to the set of statements about that which is present-at-hand, enabling something to be seen, presented something qua something” (Ružić 2017, 17).

Bullshitting is typically understood as a phenomenon of disregarding either conventionally understood truth in terms of correctness or accuracy. As previously mentioned, this study interprets truth as *alethetical* (Stiegler 2021) in terms of revelation (truth) and concealment (untruth, which is not synonymous with falsehood), which renders existence itself ambiguous (McCord 2016, 45-92). Such an existential understanding reveals bullshit artists as indifferent to being, understood phenomenologically and not in terms of propositional logic. Being with a capital “B” refers to the Heideggerian notion *Sein* from *Being and Time*, how phenomena in the world appear to people due to an opening of intelligibility and gaps in understanding. Being is an unprovable reality that grounds the possibilities of everyday human existence, the meaning of existence underlying an experienced entity’s properties like color, shape, texture, size, taste, and smell. Being reveals itself in various existential modes like Being-Toward-Death (*Sein-zum-Tode*) or Being-in-the-World (*In-der-Welt-sein*). It is an indemonstrable existential condition; it is a condition that qualifies how entities are intelligible as entities, the possibility of experiencing entities.

Bullshitting framed as a political and aesthetic economy can be defined as a lack of love for alethetical truth. Calling bullshit itself may be a symptom of a lack of feeling together or belonging to a community of people who love things together, such as art and its mysteries, or the pursuit of establishing truth. It seems likely that such a disregard for the community would motivate some of bullshit’s production, even if it is also used to bring people together. In the vocabulary of Stiegler, we may identify bullshit as “pharmacological,” which likens it to a drug; like technology, it is both harmful and helpful. Bullshitting constitutes technical knowledge that both connects and disconnects people. Bullshit, as a *default*, is a type of technical know-how. The techniques and technologies needed to bullshit successfully transmit and register the memory of how to use them in order to bullshit (old school and new school). In a positive light, bullshit artists can instruct *savoir-vivre* in terms of experiencing “the hidden as such”—art that does not immediately present itself as art. Such concealment can be an experience of inexplicable unclarity or bullshit itself, which carries within it a danger due to its technical institution (Stiegler 2021, 4). A bullshitter is indeed interested in their reception and presentation in the world, in which their existence occurs accidentally and virtually. Even so, Being still matters to bullshitters, albeit in

a different existential mode. Bullshitting, such as “faking it till you make it,” relies on a world that is still understandable and meaningful, a place of individuation (a context of coming to understand yourself and a place where you become who you are). Bullshitting is problematic when it becomes a medium of deindividuation or the loss of knowledge via its technical exteriorization.

Bullshitting as technical nonsense can be considered a knack, routine, or procedure; a lack of knowledge manifests itself as a mechanical application of formulae. Like the Platonic accusation against the sophists, it is an activity accomplished abstractly, essentially without the Platonic definition of *technē*—a form of knowledge of something real or a grasp of being, to accomplish work and clarify it, or to be able to explain its cause or reason. The sophist’s abstraction methods were mastered and employed to achieve some effect. However, this use was not regulated by the content, and it was independent of an understanding of the subject matter; as Socrates puts it, sophists do not advance a way of knowing but are producers of persuasion, the desired effect was to produce belief without actually teaching anything. According to Plato’s views of sophists, they were not concerned with illuminating the nature of some real thing, which is why bullshit can generate problems, given that it is intelligible but not intelligent. That is to say, as something understandable but separated from the power of knowing, given that nonsense is powerless non-knowledge, a particular imaginary reality defines bullshitting. It distinguishes it from other activities, it is indifferent to what is being presented, and such indifference is taken to be a form of malpractice:

It remains, even in this (admittedly not very likely) case, an abuse of language precisely to the extent that language is conceived as a mere instrument, which is in itself indifferent to reality. To think of speaking as an abstract method, and thus not as a *technē* in Plato’s sense of the term, is not neutral at all: language, in this case, is defined in itself by the absence of reality. To put it in a more directly Platonic idiom, language, in this case, has the very form of ignorance (Schindler, 2019, p. 104).

The problem with sophistic dependence on writing is an instrumentalization of speech that became a technology applicable to any substance or situation. Because this way of using writing is abstract, it is detached from any intimate experience that shapes how to speak about a particular subject matter. Judgments of correctness arise substantially from this direct acquaintance with being. Sophists use writing in a way that is independent of such experiences. Moreover, violence arises from the performative function

of language, which depends on the rightness of its use for Plato. Schindler continues, “As abstract, this power appears to be unlimited, but it is not difficult for Socrates to show that, when seen in the light of reality, such indifference to reality is indistinguishable from the absence of power. If language, detached from reality, has the form of ignorance, power detached from reality has the form of impotence” (Schindler 2019, 105). For example, an abstract formula applies to any situation or reality. Because of this independence, such a formula seems universally applicable and thus a form of absolute power. This situation is reminiscent of today’s computational technologies and so-called Artificial Intelligence. However, according to Plato, the abstract detachment from a specific reality, content, and contexts render the sophist’s language about nothing, making ignorance and impotence the same form of losing agency, either in language or actions.

In light of the interpretation of truth as *orthotes* (correctness), which depends on being right, bullshit can make the interpretation and initiation to the existential ambiguity of Being inaccessible. As a kind of language of barbarians, it makes critique difficult, if not impractical. From this perspective, the choice not to interpret something that could be interpreted would also be a mode of bullshitting, given that such an interpretation posits bullshit as empty or meaningless speech or behavior. In such a regard, bullshit is similar to the ancient Greek understanding of nonsense [*phlyrein/lerein*]. Bullshit is defined concerning reality as “not speaking true things,” not depicting reality correctly, failing to invoke the correct words and terminology that correspond with how things are and not with what is “politically correct,” or powerless behaviors and language, incapable of leading to practical or meaningful actions. In other words, Truth-value is related to its applicability or real-life effect. We could consider bullshitting as an empty performance devoid of substance or value. Bullshitting from the Platonic perspective brings no benefit to its recipients. It is a misrepresentation of a reality that is reminiscent of the speech or behaviors of a fool or maniac. In ancient medicine, saying stupid things was used as an objective criterium to diagnose insobriety or illness. Like nonsense, it could appear as the product of an ill, drunk, or naïve person, as an effect of intoxication or weakness. The form of weak speech or behavior is devoid of truth content. It is empty because it makes no claims about reality, nor is it helpful.

3. Taking Care of Mystery

Drawing on an ancient definition of art, *techne* is defined as “to the benefit of that over which it is set.” Every *techne* concerns some aspect of reality. Plato ultimately classifies the sophist’s rhetoric or bullshit as a *non-techne* or what D.C. Schindler defines as *technology* or technique (Schindler 2019, 92) in the sense that linguistic bullshitting constitutes communication that is indifferent to the truth of being. Bullshitting is sophistic in that it is an acquirable, learnable, and marketable technique that provides the power of abstraction (this brings to mind accusations against the avant-garde, which is perhaps a symptom of alienation that could be the origin of judgments of art qua bullshit). Bullshit does not do any work and does not relate to a *savoir-faire* (apprenticeship). It allows one to appear to speak well about anything, independent of the content, to those ignorant of the subject at hand. It is an attitude that abstracts from a subject or reality. It is not talking about or naming reality correctly, nor is it for the benefit of people. It is diabolic in that it goes beyond reality:

[...] a technique is, so to speak, a detachable form of operation, which, as detachable, presupposes for its use neither an in-formed subject nor an object, a reality, that would guide, and so inform, the operation. One can, for example, apply a memorized mathematical formula in physics and generate correct answers to problems without being able to explain why they are correct or, indeed, even what they mean (Schindler 2019, 91).

I characterized bullshitting as an act conducted by *default*, an inability to change Being. The accusation against the sophists is about their dependence on writing, characterized as a drug. Writing is a technology, a heteronomy, that can diminish autonomy or critical thinking if proper practices, or therapeutics, are not prescribed. Bernard Stiegler’s notion of *proletarianization*—defined as a loss of knowledge because of technical exteriorization—can be adopted to argue that viewing art as merely bullshit is a symptom of a *default* of faith and what he calls the proletarianization of sensibility—understood as a loss of knowledge like *savoir-vivre*. Proletarianization is the systemic forgetting of some knowledge or skill because of an operational and organological setup. For example, automatization tends to be a type of fixation that disengages thoughtful reflection—like rote learning, which by definition eschews comprehension. A factory-line worker forgets their know-how and techniques in making a product since the actual tool-user is the machine, not the worker. This technical condition of proletarianization is

one of non-knowledge. The factory worker's situation is one of forgetting their knowledge (and time) due to its spatialization, exteriorization, and outsourcing of gestures and thoughts to technology. Similarly, playing a song on the radio tends towards a proletarianization of musical practice (Stiegler 2013, vol. 2), and this form of heteronomy is a type of concealment, a technologically constituted and pre-selected aesthetic experience.

We should consider the aesthetically sensitive and critical mind as a temporal living organ that changes its sensitivity to stimuli given that the brain follows the guideline "use it or lose it," which means that connections that are reinforced grow, and those that are not reinforced go extinct. So, if an activity is not practiced in a repeated and disciplined way, then it is forgotten or never acquired in the first place. Such a loss can take place whenever gestures and thoughts are automatized but not practiced, such as memorization as rote-learning or via the exteriorization of responses. At the same time, however, memorization and automatization, or heteronomy, is the condition for autonomy, for practicing knowledge. For instance, a musician cannot be a good musician if they do not become automatic, practice their scales, but they are also not a good musician if they are automatic, i.e., their performance is mechanical.

4. Art and Bullshit

I view art and bullshit as analogous: both are concerned with what is felt rather than demonstrated, so the two are predicated by experiencing *mystery*, something unprovable or unclarifiable. Neither is focused on *informing*. Instead, they deal with *shaping*, e.g., opinion, beliefs, or experiences. Both can be considered instrumentally "useless" in the "real world." This impracticality does not yet qualify art as bullshit since it still is considered meaningful, given Graeber's test: the elimination of bullshit jobs should have no meaningful effect on the world; in fact, the world would probably be a better place if they were eliminated (Graeber 2018). Eliminating art would have profound consequences and would generally make the world a worse place to live in. I think that eliminating bullshit, i.e., as play, would also produce an inhumane reality. What is decisive is that the experience of indemonstrability, i.e., mystery, can be either a cause for change or not, which means that art and bullshit can be revealed as profound and denounced as meaningless depending on a particular context. If they are non-transformative, that is, they do not lead into the revelation of the hidden—what fails to appear as art, something beyond the existential mode of mere survival, a revelation of an immaterial perception—then they become sources of *mystification*.

On the other hand, Stiegler describes *mystagogy* as a meaningful repetition of the experience of indemonstrability that elevates a spectator into a higher intellectual plane via initiation into practice (Stiegler 2006). This initiation to mystery provides a prescriptive practice for taking care of gesture and thought or being. These practices provide a way for determining and singularizing a problem, which means it provides instruction on how to critique. It also provides a means for correcting a theory's inadequacy or failures, a body of knowledge's inability to comprehend some relation. Mystagogy involves an organized way of going beyond cognitive limits and involves learning cycles through initiation by a practitioner into a practice of non-cognitive sense-making. These are skills of learning through methods not reducible to empirical factual knowledge but through bodily feelings and motivational states or desires, representing how the world is desired to be, not how it is factually. Psychologists have identified several critical non-cognitive skills measured by the Big Five personality test: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, or by the HEXACO model of personality structure: Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience.

An artwork's indemonstrability (the ontological, demonstrable evidence for why it *is* art), i.e., art's mystery, can elevate into a whole profound experience or can fall into an impotent pseudo-profound confusion. Nonetheless, technics (defined as the exteriorization of gestures and thought) is an integral aspect of making art.

However, if bullshit and art remain as something "interesting," both are powerless automatizations of a proletarianized Being. Bullshitting depends on the alienization of knowledge, i.e., a care-less audience for which default non-knowledge plays out through stereotypical repetitions. Nevertheless, art is always a technological situation. For example, it depends on changing materials such as paints, musical instruments, stones, light, and so on. So, technicality itself is not a sufficient criterion for considering art to be bullshit. Likewise, technical knowledge is composed with non-technical knowledge, and the two are not oppositional. When a work fails to present itself as art, when it remains technically hidden as bullshit, art can systemically bypass critique via mystification. To surmount deliberate mystification, which is anything that baffles our cognition and halts our thinking, people can discover how to handle a system, like art and bullshit, beyond comprehension [*com-préhension*], what Stiegler calls an over-taking [*sur-préhension*] (Stiegler 2010, 2017b, 14). The mystery, i.e., empirical and factual non-provability, of bullshit qua nonsense and/or art qua mania is both positive and negative,

pharmacologically speaking, they both strengthen and weaken processes of individuation: inventing new aesthetic styles, techniques, and technologies, changing personalities, moving other people, learning and teaching the ability to find and formulate problems, ways of seeing, critiquing, and a power to change knowledge and develop meaning.

Stiegler's views on the practice of mystagogy are experiencing mystery in a way that does not halt thinking, and it includes developing settings, milieus, practices, gestures, rituals, and technologies. Reflection can reveal non-cognitive and mystagogical forms of making meaning out of an experience, even if the forms are not fully articulated or comprehended. We reach what Feng Zhu calls "operational understanding," a non-cognitive mode of action and practice (Zhu 2019, 2), which is somewhat reminiscent of operational conditioning developed by B.F. Skinner and what could be an opening of behavioral aesthetics.

So, bullshit is integral to art in that both go beyond reality and relate to that which does not empirically exist. However, art is an initiation to aporia where meaning undergoes compositional processes of symbolic semantization, de-semantization, and re-semantization; alternatively, it is a careful practice of aesthetic automatization, de-automatization, and re-automatization that cultivates taste and the ability to discern and critique artworks in light of a vision and commonly held belief in art's future.

The primacy of speed is vital for operations where heuristics, intuition, or quick judgments are privileged over slow, critical, and practiced education of the senses (Fredal 2011, 243; Friberg 2021; Kahneman 2012). Bullshit can fall into a schematic mystification, considered with a Heideggerian reading on truth qua the disclosure of being. It emerges in the conjunction of making-sense and failing to know. Bernard Stiegler's phenomenological framework can be applied to argue that bullshit art would be the variety of a loss of love and its time, one that lacks a mystagogy. Unlike bullshit artists or "cultured philistines," Stiegler argues that amateurs—the noble lovers of art—repeatedly invest their attention in reproducing and idealizing aesthetic experiences through the temporal activities of "free," slow, and singular symbolic exchange, called *otium*, which differs from the reactionary and calculated time of *neg-otium*, or activity organized by survival needs. Given Alberto Brandolini's asymmetry principle, which says, "The amount of energy needed to refute bullshit is an order of magnitude larger than to produce it," i.e., bullshit spreads faster than the truth, then bullshitting would be both productive and disruptive of both forms of exchange. On the one hand, such obscurity can impede learning and communication, whereas, on the other, it can glue and foster relationships.

Amateurs structure and grow their aesthetic competencies by copying the objects of their love by learning how to paint, play an instrument, dance, or disseminate TikTok videos on social media. This formation of the aesthetic senses stimulates individuation processes and produces different forms of knowledge like *savoir-vivre* and *savoir-faire* (Stiegler 2017b, 2017a, 2017c). It also leads to physical changes in sensitivity to stimuli and perception. In other words, it is not a question of having an acquaintance with art theory or history but of actually practicing making art in one's own time, living and reliving one's love, which is a bodily engagement that cultivates perception, memory, and expectation (Stiegler & Foucault 2010).

What is at stake shows how a sense of ridiculousness about a person's self-consciousness regarding their own death is crucial for detecting when things are being taken too seriously. While discussing the Hegelian notion of the "end of art" and the metaphysics of beauty, Hungarian philosopher Gyorgy Márkus wrote,

art is rooted in the same human need that gives rise to religion and philosophy: to find and disclose an abiding meaning in the seemingly senseless accidentality and contradictoriness of finite existence, the externality, and alienness of the world of life; to make the world ultimately man's own home. Art solves this task not through elevation in thought over the particularity and finitude of empirical reality but within this world of appearances itself, by creating sensuous or imagistic existents that display this meaning for immediate apprehension (Márkus 2012, 10).

The account is a political economy of truth not understood as a form of semiotic exactitude, but rather a community of symbolic exchange, and its axiological frameworks, that cares for the restitution of a mystery, which is an aesthetic directive insofar as it relates to what people appreciate, respect, admire and desire. There are good and bad forms of truth-telling, speaking and writing, actions taken upon other actions, practices of caring about the truth. Bullshit is behaving or speaking that obscures the creator's individuation: inadequacies, failures, and insufficiencies. It provides a compelling image of meaning despite not knowing what that meaning may be. It creates contexts, milieus, practices, gestures, rituals, and technologies that are created to cultivate a careful conduct or mystagogy, an initiation to the admiration of what exceeds cognitive comprehension—such as art—through iterative, open, and lived experience. At times, bullshit can also receive such admiration as people search for meaning in things and speech that are substantially incomprehensible or incoherent, which is practiced in Chan Buddhism

(Burdge 2020). Ed Cohen writes, “[...] the conduct that mystagogy proposes acts upon our actions to induce us to act carefully toward and with mystery” (Cohen 2017, 152).

Frankfurt stated that “as conscious beings, we exist only in response to other things, and we cannot know ourselves at all without knowing them” (Frankfurt 2005, 66). As an indifference to content, Plato’s account of sophistry qua bullshit is explicitly characterized as *a default of knowledge* in the speaker and audience (determinacy of the *technai*). It is an expertise in words that can be used to trick laypeople. After all, how could someone who does not know anything about a subject make a sound objection against an expert? It is impossible to be an expert in everything. In passing, it is worth noting that bullshit-sensitive people are more likely to be prosocial (Erlands-son et al. 2018). Bullshit is contagious when critical thinking is proletarianized (Pennycook et al. 2015, 559). So, it is a virtue not to have an opinion about a subject and to admit to a lack of knowledge, which could be applied to conspiracy theories.

In the interpretation of D.C. Schindler, Plato claims language is the accomplishment of something. It is the proto-*technē*, a *poiesis* that produces or brings the object of perception of the being of things *ex nihilo*, whereas every *technē* has some reality for which it cares, it is concerned and responsible for its particular object, from which the power of words originates (Schindler 2019, 96-97, 99). The bullshitting arts are in danger of not caring for individuation processes, which are dynamic processes that bring about improbable singularizations because of their calculated nature and tendency towards preserving individual metaphysical identities. The standard to determine whether language—which aspires to be—is bullshit or not is “[...] the being of things that come to expression (*deloumene*) in language, and governs its use (enkrates) [...]” (Schindler 2019, 99). Alternatively, “if we speak [and behave] properly, we make some reality clear, we make it manifest” (Schindler 2019, 101), and we communicate it to others as a desirable common good “as distinct from the private benefit sought in the perversion of *technē* championed by Thrasymachus [a sophist]” (Schindler 2019, 102). We produce truth by revealing Being to others who can perceive it; speaking is not indifferent to truth but is ordered and serves it. Its disregard is a disorder. In many cases, reporters and publishers behind what gets published and circulated in the mainstream media are agents of bullshit since they disregard the common good; they do not care about what anyone ends up learning or where their logography will take their readers.

Schindler argues that Plato regards the sophist, i.e., bullshit artists, as *abusing* language as an image of reality since Plato thought sophists view language as conventional, indifferent to reality, a neutral instrument, an abstract method or means disconnected from an end, liberated from any content, and applicable to any topic. Bullshit is an ontological absence of reality. Since rhetoric is “an alien *intrusion* on its [language’s] essence,” which would be a natural love for reality or a friendship with being, bullshit could *violently* and *accidentally* uproot language’s function to guide souls beyond language to the real via a responsibility for excellence (Schindler 2019, 105-106). Moreover, such detachment from a reality renders sophistry nonsense. In the form of *madness*, bullshit can reveal its negative side and become a potent threat.

Bullshit appears as a product of behavior, including language. It can be a way a person speaks about some subject matter. Plato would argue that bullshitting does violence to naming things correctly, which serves the critical performative and educational function of producing learning. The problem is the indeterminacy of knowledge and meaning, the exchange of which is a matter of social perception and recognition. Bullshit emerges when knowledge is *in default*, a double lacking: the speaker is motivated to get away with their lack of knowledge and takes for granted an absence of knowledge in the audience. Bullshit—as artifacts of exteriorizations—aims irresponsibility and proliferates in economies of generalized proletarianization. Like the abstract rhetoric of sophists, bullshit is “about nothing” in that there is an absence of specificity, and its power or work is undefined; it can be applied to anything. In the state of symbolic misery, a person’s life is meaningless, which would signal the increased dissemination of empty gestures, lifestyle models, and language or the inability to change their existential situation. As Neil Postman claims,

So you see, when it comes right down to it, crap-detection is something one does when he starts to become a certain type of person. Sensitivity to the phony uses of language requires, to some extent, knowledge of how to ask questions, how to validate answers, and certainly, how to assess meanings. [...]. What crap-detecting mostly consists of is a set of attitudes toward the function of human communication: which is to say, the function of human relationships (Postman 1969, para. 19).

In conclusion, at best, the bullshit artist engages in the form of concealment of bullshit’s double-sidedness as harmless. What complicates the matter is that speech, talk, or behavior is not in itself something laying before a recipient in unconcealment, as disclosure of presence that already lies

before us (Ružić 2017, 11). Bullshitting, like Plato's account of sophistry, is a type of absence, a mystification in which potent and contagious ignorance is concealed and reproduced, which amounts to the proliferation of overconfidence and hybris, for example. At the same time, bullshit and art share a mystery, and via a mystagogy, a repeated experience can lead to the generation of a person's and arts entangled individuation.

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